

As you know if you have attended BCF recently, we are currently preaching through John’s gospel, and last week Dan Mock led us in a study of Jesus, the Bread of Life, from John 6:22-40. He reminded us of man’s incorrigibility and of God’s irresistibility, and shared the first of the great “I am” sayings of Jesus: John 6:35 “Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Later in this chapter John 6:53-54 “Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Jesus’ teaching that He is the bread of life and that we receive eternal life by eating his flesh and drinking his blood were hard sayings, and many of His disciples left him because they did not understand that he was speaking metaphorically. Jesus Himself explained this by His earlier statement in John 6:47 “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.”

But to understand the full truth of our Lord’s sayings, we need to go ahead two or so years to the time when Jesus was sitting with his disciples around a table sharing the Passover meal. The apostle Paul records that evening for us in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11.

1 Cor 11:23-29...

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

As the elders considered these teachings, it seemed good to us to use them to share publicly in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as instructed by Paul. For any visitors with us, I need to explain that we do celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week at 9:00 am in the chapel, and all Christian believers are welcome to join us then. This service today is thus an unusual one, and I want to take a few minutes to look together at the reasons for celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

1. It is a table of remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 11:23-29 The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this **in remembrance of me.**" In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you **drink it, in remembrance of me.**"

Why did Jesus place such importance on remembering his death? Very simply because it is only through his death and resurrection that we have been freed from our sin and our guilt, and if we

forget this we forget the very basis of our faith. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross is central to our faith as Christians.

a. It reminds us of the foulness of sin.

2 Cor 5:20-21 God made him who had no sin **to be sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Did you catch the weight of these simple words? Jesus Christ, the sinless and perfect Lamb of God who had no sin of his own, **became sin for us**. In those six awful hours on the cross Jesus became the sin of Adolf Hitler, condemning millions of innocent Jews to the gas ovens of Auschwitz and other death camps. He became the sin of Saddam Hussein, of Joseph Stalin, of Pontius Pilate, of Ghenghis Khan, of David Kingston, and of you.

“There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin
He only could unlock the gate
Of Heaven and let us in”

So the cross reminds us that our sin is foul beyond words. If there were no way for our sins to be cleansed and forgiven but that the Son of God should die for them, then our sins must be sinful indeed.

b. It reminds us that God’s love is great beyond understanding.

He could have abandoned us to our just fate and left us to perish in our sins. But he didn’t. He loved us, and he pursued us even to the desolate agony of the cross. When God gave his only Son (John 3:16) he gave HIMSELF. So God satisfied himself by substituting himself!

c. It reminds us that salvation is a free gift.

I do not deserve it. I cannot earn it. I do not need to attempt to procure it by my own merit or effort. Jesus Christ on the cross has done everything that is necessary for us to be forgiven. He has borne our sin and our curse. What, then, must we do? Nothing! Nothing but fall on our knees in penitence and faith, and stretch out an open, empty hand to receive salvation as a gift that is entirely free. (John Stott, quoted in “Authentic Christianity” by Tim Dudley-Smith, IVP, 1995)

2. It is a table of obedient remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not give many commands to specific actions to his disciples; most of his teaching consisted of general commands; follow me, love one another, and so on. So when he gives a specific command we had better pay close attention. And the command to remember him is pretty specific:

1 Cor 11:23-29 *The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; **do this** in remembrance of me." "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; **do this**, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

And yet we are often slow and hard of hearing when it comes to obeying Christ, so let me illustrate by telling you the story of one man who did remember the man who saved his life.

Maximilian Kolbe was a Roman Catholic priest in Poland who had a ministry of printing a monthly magazine and a daily newspaper teaching the catholic faith. He continued to print in 1939 after Poland was invaded by the Nazis, and his printing operation became a target of hatred from the Germans. He was eventually arrested by the Gestapo, and after time in prison in Warsaw he was sent to the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz in May 1941. He was informed by the camp commandant on arrival that the average life expectancy of Catholic priests in the camp was one month. He was given the registration number 16670.

In late July 1941, a prisoner escaped from Father Kolbe's barracks. In retaliation, the Nazis selected ten prisoners to starve to death. One of the ten, Polish Sergeant Francis Gajowniczek (pronounced Gay-ov-nichek) cried out in agony over the fate of his family without a father. To the astonishment of prisoners and captors, Maximilian stepped forward from the ranks and stood before the Commandant, Karl Fritzsich.

Commandant Fritzsich asked, "What does this Polish pig want?"

Father Kolbe pointed to the Polish sergeant, saying, "I am a Catholic priest. I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children."

The commandant stood silent for a moment, and then allowed Gajowniczek to return to the other men while Father Kolbe took his place. His assistant Palitsch drew a line through #5659 on his list and put down Kolbe's number, 16670.

Maximilian then entered the starvation chamber with nine other men. He spent the last two weeks of his life encouraging his nine companions by praying and singing hymns with them in the block 13 starvation bunker.

On August 14, 1941, Maximilian was one of four prisoners still alive. His impatient captors executed him by means of a lethal injection of carbolic acid and burned his body in the crematorium.

And what you might ask became of the Polish sergeant, Francis Gajowniczek?

He lived another 53 years, dying on 13th March 1995 at the age of 95.

But he never forgot Kolbe. After his release from Auschwitz, Gajowniczek spent the next five decades honoring the man who died on his behalf. Just before he died he said that "as long as he . . . has breath in his lungs, he would consider it his duty to tell people about the heroic act of love by Maximilian Kolbe." Francis Gajowniczek remembered the man who saved his life to his dying day, and took pains that the world would remember him too.

3. It is a table of thanksgiving.

We have so much to be thankful for, and especially at this time of Thanksgiving we give thanks for God's provisions of our physical needs. But the Lord's Supper provides an opportunity to give thanks to God for His love and mercy.

2 Cor 9:15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Rom 11:33-36

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!*

*For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

4. It is a table of self-examination.

Paul gives a serious warning to those who come casually or flippantly to the Lord's Table:

1 Cor 11:23-29... Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

So we need to examine ourselves before we share in the bread and the wine, confessing any known sins to the Lord and seeking His forgiveness.

And I need to add here that because of this the Lord's Supper is for believers only. If you are not yet a believer in our Lord Jesus, we are glad that you are here and we invite you to stay to the end of the service, but we ask that you do not take the bread and the wine when they are passed. Even better, I invite you to commit your life to Jesus today; you can do it in the quietness of your heart when we pray in a few minutes, and then you can share in the Lord's supper with your fellow believers.

5. It is a table of fellowship.

In the previous chapter in 1 Corinthians Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth, who had their problems with divisions and with sexual immorality and other things, that they were one body; and he does so by pointing to the Lord's Supper:

1 Cor 10:16-17... Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

So the Lord's Supper is a visible reminder that we are all part of the body of Christ; young and old, male and female, Americans and internationals, rich and poor, town and gown; we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. As Paul says to the Galatians: Gal 3:28-29

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

So look around you; the people sitting next to you and behind you and in front of you are your Christian family members, for you to love and to serve and to be loved by and served by. What a privilege!

6. It is a table of expectation.

1 Cor 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

One of the great things about the Lord's Supper is that it also points forward to Christ's return. Paul tells us that by sharing in the remembrance we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

So the Lord's table is like a great bridge, spanning the entire interval of the Church's history on earth. One end of it rests on the shame of the cross, the other is planted in the glory of the kingdom, and as we share it together we can look with eager anticipation to that day when the trumpet will sound and the Lord will return and establish his kingdom of righteousness and justice and love.

7. How should we approach the Lord's Table?

1. It is a Table of Obedient Remembrance; we **Look Back** in love and gratitude to the cross, where our Lord became sin for us that we might be freed from the penalty and the power of sin.
2. It is a Table of Thanksgiving. We **Look Up** in praise and thanksgiving to God for his amazing gift.
3. It is a Table of Self-examination We **Look Within** to confess any unforgiven sin to God, and to ask His forgiveness.
4. It is a Table of Fellowship. We **Look Around** to recognize that we are all members of the body of Christ.
5. It is a Table of Expectation. We **Look Ahead** to the joy of Christ's return

May the Lord bless each one of us as we prepare our hearts to share in the Lord's Supper.

Father, we thank you for this remembrance of the death of your son and of your great love for us. Go with us now, we pray, that we may show worthily forth his death to the hurting world around us. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.