

“Living Bread”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
August 15, 2021

Psalm 111:1-10 and John 6:35, 51-58

by Rev. Patrick D. Heery

1. Communion: something we do every month but what is it?
2. Experiences of Communion
 - online
 - an unnecessary ritual that’s lost its meaning
 - have no clue what this is about
 - ancients thought it meant we were cannibals
 - wasn’t really important to me growing up
 - in prison and contexts of division/reconciliation and in the meal shared after worship at Lawrenceville and Maundy Thursday and Easter sunrise.
3. In the parish of Ars there was once a peasant who used to pass hours in church, immobile, locating at the altar, and when the priest asked him what he was doing there every day like that, he replied, “Nothing, I look at him and he looks at me!” This is what it means in the Bible: an experience of intimacy with God.
4. In the Bible: Jesus feeds the hungry, eats with Zacchaeus and others, Last Supper, Emmaus
5. Passover
 - Exodus; the blood of the Passover lamb was painted above their doors, causing the plague of the firstborn to pass over their houses. God says, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.”
 - In Jesus’ time, Passover was about interventions of God, on the four most important nights of the year: the night of creation when the light shone in the darkness, the night of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, the night of the Exodus, and the night, still to come, of the coming Messiah.
 - Included unleavened bread because they didn’t have time to let their bread rise (no yeast); included wine representing redemption.
6. This subtext is all going on for Jesus and his disciples.
 - Remember Jesus speaks poetically.
 - Jesus becomes the Passover Lamb of God, saving us from death too, and liberating us from slavery; God sees the blood of Christ. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians, but in Gospel of John, Jesus is being crucified at the same time as the lambs were being slaughtered for Passover.
7. Jesus says: Remember this. The Latin word for “remember”, *recordari*, literally means to bring back again (re-) to the heart (cor-). In the liturgy of the Passover night, the Jews of

Jesus' time said: "In every generation, let each one see himself as the one that came out of Egypt that night." Applied to us Christians, each of us must see himself as one that stood beneath the cross that day. The sense that God is here. Like when, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to someone. Like when he appeared to Mary and asked her why she was crying.

8. At the heart of the early church. Before church governments were devised, before creeds were formalized, even before the first word of the New Testament was written, the Lord's Supper was firmly fixed at the heart of Christian faith and life.
 - Worship in the early church: the reading and preaching of Scripture (the Word) and the Lord's Supper (the Sacrament); we see this combined emphasis in Luke in the story of the resurrected Jesus meeting the disciples on the road to Emmaus, where he explains the Scriptures and breaks bread with them
 - In early centuries, Christians brought gifts of bread and wine from their own tables; represented the people's offering of their own lives in service of Jesus Christ; at the end of the service the church distributed the remaining bread and wine to the poor in the community.
9. Became a sacrament. Catholics (seven), Protestants (two). Commanded and practiced by Jesus, intended for all his disciples. How we relate to God. Make the promises of God visible and concrete (just as the incarnation did).
10. Meanings
 - God's forgiveness
 - reconciliation to God and each other (one with Christ and all who belong to body of Christ)
 - participating in the suffering and death of Christ
 - a feast that enables us to recognize the risen Lord and celebrate his presence (in Luke: their eyes were opened and they recognized him)
 - a foreshadowing of the heavenly meal: Jesus says he will eat with us again in the kingdom of God; a glorious reunion meal for the whole human race
 - equality: all come as sinners and all leave forgiven; each has a little, and all have the same; the gap between the menus of the rich and the poor vanishes; reorients us to the hungry
11. Not the Last Supper? This is the Lord's Supper. Also the First Supper. It is not only about his death; it is about his life and resurrection. Should be joyful, whereas many churches historically have made it like a funeral for Jesus. In the early church, they expected in Communion to meet their friend, the risen Savior; it was a celebratory banquet, a wedding feast.
12. Why these particular elements?
 - Passover and Bible
 - Bread (staple food), wine (joy)
 - Bread and wine were part of everyone's diet. There are enough grapes and bread for everyone to receive the grace of God every day. There is enough for all. This wasn't caviar.

- Why juice instead of wine? Every individual can receive this gift of God, even children, recovering alcoholics, and those who consider alcohol consumption sinful.
13. Disagreement: Christians killed other Christians when they explained the mystery of Communion differently.
 14. Catholic: truly (not an image), really (not just subjectively through faith), and substantially (in his profound reality, which cannot be discerned by the senses, and not in the appearances of bread and wine)
 15. Protestants: symbolic. All believe that Communion is about participating in God; we simply disagree about where that mystery takes place, in the person or in the elements.
 16. Still central in Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, and other traditions. Protestants focus on the Word. The Word was considered more accessible to all people, than the mystery of the sacrament. The Enlightenment; emphasis on understanding and moral conduct, rationality. Sunday service became a teaching event. Sermon with no Eucharist became the norm in American Protestant worship.
 17. A call for weekly Communion
 - a goal of the Reformation but people weren't used to it and so most churches did it monthly or quarterly
 - reunite Word and Sacrament. They reinforce each other. We need both the mystery/the experience/the grace and the opportunity to reflect and internalize its meaning. Reflection is how we take what we receive in Communion, understand it, and then put it into practice in our daily lives. We must receive Christ both with our bodies and our minds.
 - Will help correct rationalism; strengthen our profession of the resurrection; gives joy; emphasizes equality; renews; lets us receive Christ's love; reestablishes mystery.
 - Churches grow when they do this
 18. "Whoever eats me will live because of me."
 - We are what we eat: the Jewish practice of kosher prohibits eating animals that are scavengers such as pigs; fast food; slow food and local food and organic food movement; Christ (grace, love); we eat the body of Christ and become the body of Christ
 - We live due to the life he gives
 - And we live for him, for his glory and love, for the new world he created