

HAVING A COVENANT MEAL WITH JESUS

John 6:25-27, 35-58

August 1, 2021

As a child growing up the word that I always loved to hear was “*DINNER.*” Regardless of where I was or what I was doing, I would come running for one of my favorite times of the day. Mealtime was not only a time to eat, but also family time. A time for the entire family to sit together and spent time together enjoying good food and good company. It was at the dinner table, that we talked about our day, the things that happened at school or whatever other activities we were involved in at the time, a special time to share our lives with those we loved. Dinnertime was vital to the life of our family while I was growing up, and Laurie and I continued that tradition with our family as well. It’s unfortunate to see in today’s generation that mealtime is not as important as it once was. When I was growing up, I was expected at the dinner table, and if you weren’t there you missed out, because there usually weren’t any leftovers, and there was no snacking later. Today, family members are busy running off here and there and only rarely come together for a leisurely meal together to share their lives with their loved ones. Or what is even worse, they are distracted by their cell phones or head off to eat in front of the TV or computer, and then some just seem to graze all day and rarely come together for a full course meal.

This morning I am going to speak on the subject of the Communion meal – the importance of this sacrament for the church. I believe this is an important topic because we need to know what we believe and why we believe it, and why we practice certain sacraments as Christians. Knowledge is important, especially when someone asks you why we do the things we do as Christians. Like the FMC denomination, the EMCC denomination only celebrates two sacraments, Holy Communion, and water Baptism. The church believes that God works through these public channels in the life of a believer. We call these God’s means of grace in which God pours out His grace (pours out Himself) into us as we routinely practice them. We believe that as God transforms and changes us on the inside, we need to celebrate that change on the outside in community with our church family, and that is why both Communion and Baptism are important public demonstrations of our faith.

At the Last Supper Jesus tells us – that Holy Communion is essential to our faith, and we need to celebrate it as often as we can, some celebrate it every day. And

because it's a sacred sacrament of the church, we also need to be on guard so as to avoid communion becoming just a meaningless religious ritual done out of routine. Instead, the sacrament of communion must be a meaningful channel of God's grace by which Christians are renewed, strengthened, empowered, and confirmed in their faith. We are told in **Acts 2:42** that the early church, *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* So, communion has been a vital part of church gatherings for 2000 years, along with prayer, fellowship, and the teaching of God's Word. As the church celebrates communion, we use ordinary things like bread and grape juice (wine), but this is no ordinary act that we do together. This is no ordinary meal, it won't fill up your stomach, but it will satisfy the deep spiritual longing within each one of us. We also need to be aware that the host at the communion table is no ordinary host. YES, the pastor of the church and the elders usually serve the elements, but our host is Christ Himself, He is present serving this Holy meal to His followers, like He did to His disciples 2000 years ago in the Upper Room!

Holy Communion – is not only an outward symbol of our faith, but is clearly commanded by Christ, *"do this in remembrance of me."* Christ works within us to confirm our faith and let us know that we are deeply loved, and not one of us here are worthy to come to the Communion table, but Christ is worthy, and He invites those He loves to dine with Him. It's Christ's love that welcomes us to the communion table. He says, *"you are welcome because you are my friend and I desire to fellowship with you."* And the table doesn't belong to us alone, we are called by our host Jesus to come dine with Him as He reminds us, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you. I called you to my table, and I am making room for you, making a place for you."* Another interesting feature of this communion table is that it is unlimited in size, it keeps growing larger-and-larger as Jesus keeps inviting more and more of His followers to dine with Him. There is no limit to the size of Christ's table, this table expands with the love of our host Jesus as He reaches out to everyone from every tribe, nation and language. In love Jesus reached out to the thief on the cross, the woman caught in adultery, a sinful tax collector, and everyone else that desperately needed a Saviour. So, we need to see that communion is an important sign of God's gracious ministry among us, calling us to repent. God is present with us, Jesus is present with us, the Holy Spirit is present with us. They are actively working in our lives and within His church.

Article # 125 of the FMC gives us a good definition of Communion:

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. To

those who rightly, worthily, and with faith receive it, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise, the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. The supper is also a sign of the love and unity that Christians have among themselves.

Christ, according to His promise, is really present in the sacrament. But His body is given, taken, and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. No change is effected in the element; the bread and wine are not literally the body and blood of Christ. Nor is the body and blood of Christ literally present with the elements. The elements are never to be considered objects of worship. The body of Christ is received and eaten in faith.

The Gospel of John – gives us the greatest amount of detail of what happened during that historic Passover meal before Christ went to the cross. John devotes 5 chapters to that important event (**13 through 17**), and John also records for us another earlier event that is linked to the meaning of that Passover meal. In the beginning of **John 6**, Jesus is teaching a large crowd in a remote area by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus miraculously feeds 5000+, and because of this miracle, the crowd believing Jesus to be a prophet sent by God, intended to make Him their King by force, but Jesus slips away from them to a mountain to pray, while sending His disciples off in a boat to the other side of the lake. Later that night, a violent storm develops, and the disciples' boat is in danger of sinking, so Jesus walks on water out to them, calms the storm, and they all end up on the shore near a town called Capernaum.

The next day – yesterday's large crowd followed them to Capernaum, and again they were looking for Jesus' miracles and for a meal. However, this time Jesus wasn't going to give them physical food, but something much better, Jesus wanted to give them spiritual food, which would feed their spiritual hunger and satisfy their thirst for not only one day, but every day. Jesus wanted to give the crowd Himself, the bread of life, and that is why He makes some challenging statements like **John 6:35**, ***"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty."*** And, then Jesus makes this very shocking statement that drove most of those in the crowd away in **John 6:51-56**, ***"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world...Very truly I tell you, 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 them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”

What in the world is Jesus talking about here, “eat my flesh and drink my blood?” How do you explain this to someone who is not a believer? Of course, like today, the crowd would have been puzzled by Jesus’ strange statements, as we read in **John 6:60**, *“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’”* Hearing Jesus’ Words, the crowd starts to disperse. The large crowd is leaving, and I imagine the disciples were getting very nervous as well. Jesus sensed their uneasiness and asks them, *“Does this offend you...You do not want to leave me too, do you?”* This incident was the beginning of the end of Jesus popularity with the large crowds, and things were going to start getting more difficult for Jesus and His remaining followers as they get closer to the time of Jesus’ arrest and death. Jesus was about to fulfill His divine destiny. Jesus was heading for the cross and His sacrificial death would be the end result of His ministry and the beginning of a new ministry, the ministry of His church.

A highly significant final event in Jesus’ journey to the cross takes place in the Upper Room, where Jesus celebrates the very first communion service with those He loves, His disciples. This is where Jesus explains the meaning of the words He had spoken earlier in **John 6:56**, *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”* At the Lord’s Supper in the Upper Room, Jesus’ final Passover Meal with His friends, Jesus took very ordinary bread and said this in **Luke 22:19-20**, *“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”* And then, Jesus took very ordinary wine and said, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”* And, over the last 2000 years, the church continues to celebrate this historic meal, the Lord’s Supper, with those identical words in remembrance of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross.

The Christian church holds a number of different positions in regard to Communion. I will briefly describe 3 of them:

Transubstantiation – is the official Roman Catholic Church’s position, referring to the change that takes place to these ordinary elements during mass. This change involves the substance of ordinary things like bread and wine being turned miraculously into the substance of Christ Himself – His body and His blood. At the consecration by the priest, they believe that the essence of these elements is

miraculously changed into the actual physical body and physical blood of Christ. The elements only retain the appearance, taste, and texture of ordinary bread and wine, but something supernatural has taken place in which the person taking communion understands that they are eating Christ's body and drinking Christ's blood. It is a very sacred and holy moment for the RC believer, and every trace of any left-over consecrated elements must be consumed by the priest at that service because they are now holy. I appreciate the high regard Roman Catholic have for the Communion elements, something we can learn from them!

Emblematic – most Protestant Evangelical denominations fall into this category including the FMC and EMCC. We see the Lord's Table, as the symbolic presence of Christ; Christ is not literally or physically present in the elements, but He is spiritually present with us. Those who receive the elements, receive them in faith. Communion is a time of celebration of the crucifixion of Jesus. It is a time of self-examination, repentance, and recommitment, but the elements have no significance or power in themselves, they are still ordinary bread and wine. For us, participation in the Lord's Supper is *"the proclamation of Christ's death,"* we remember His death on the cross to defeat sin and death, bringing us salvation, the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life. And that's why Communion is practiced only by believers, who have examined themselves, making things right with God by confessing their sins and have made peace with all those around them. Communion is not for the unbeliever!

Non-practice – position held predominately by the Salvation Army. They don't practice the Lord's Supper, because they believe that it is possible to live a holy life and receive the grace of God without the use of any physical sacraments. They believe the sacrament of Holy Communion is not an essential part of becoming or being a Christian. To them, the inward experience is the most important part, and that Christ is the one-and-only, the ultimate one-time sacrament; therefore, the Lord's Supper is not required or necessary. It should also be noted that The Salvation Army decided to discontinue communion because many of their converts had previously been alcoholics; therefore, it was considered unwise and un-Christian to tempt them with the wine used in Holy Communion (using grape juice is a fairly new thing that came about for those denominations that frowned on alcohol consumption by their members).

Believing that the Lord's Supper – is the partaking of the death and resurrection of Jesus, means this sacrament is not to be taken lightly, because there are

significant spiritual things happening during communion. Much more is taking place in the spiritual realm than we can experience with our physical senses. Even though the ordinary physical materials of bread and wine don't change, spiritual relationships with the unseen world can and do change. As we live in both a physical and spiritual dimension, unseen spiritual relationships can and do happen, both for good and for evil. That is why the Apostle Paul needed to warn the church in Corinth, Paul didn't want the Corinthians to take communion in an unworthy manner, and possibly be united with anything demonic or come under God's judgement.

The Communion elements must be received rightly, worthily, and with faith – it's a serious matter to Christ. Communion is not to be taken frivolously and without deep reflection of what is within our heart! The bread is seen as a spiritual, life giving nourishment for the soul, and likewise, the cup of wine is a participation in the blood of Christ, as we remember that Jesus paid God's required death penalty for our sins by shedding every drop of His precious blood. To correct the abuse that was taking place in the Corinthian church with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Apostle Paul writes these words of warning in **1 Corinthians 11:27-31** which also apply to us: ***"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. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regards to ourselves, we would not come under such judgement."*** So, every believer needs to discern and understand the meaning of communion to avoid coming under God's judgment. Communion is a serious matter to Christ our Lord!

The bread and wine are important symbols of God's loving grace toward His people. – whenever we partake of communion together as His body, the church, we are both professing our faith in Christ, and recognizing God's continuous ongoing work in our lives. God is working in us, we are a work in progress, so we don't come to Communion thinking we are perfect, or worthy, or have everything in our lives in order; instead, we come to the Communion Table with humility and brokenness, realizing that we need Christ in our lives to help us to become the people of God that we need to be. Declaring, we can't live a holy life on our own, we need His ongoing help!

Jesus declares to the gathering crowd that day and to us today as well **John 6:44**, *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.”* That’s what we call prevenient grace (God’s continuous calling and reaching out to us, trying to get our attention). Jesus also declares in **John 6:39**, *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”* That’s what we call God’s saving grace (eliminating the curse of sin and setting us back in a right relationship with God our Heavenly Father). And then Jesus declares in **John 6:45**, *“It is written in the Prophets. Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me,”* and that’s what we call His sanctifying grace (His ongoing transforming work within us as we grow and mature in Christlikeness day-by-day-by-day). So, this Christian walk is a process, it’s a lifelong journey, and that’s why we need to come together as His church and partake in Communion on a regular basis, knowing that we can’t live this life without Christ or without our brothers/sister in Christ. Thanking Him for never giving up on us, but continues to call us to Him, forgiving our sins and transforming us to maturity.

We all need Christ in our lives, we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and we need our Christian brothers and sisters to help us, and that’s why we celebrate Communion together, in community as a church family. The Lord’s Supper is an important sign for the church that God is not absent, that God is continually working His grace in this body of believers. Through Communion God calls, equips, and empowers His people to not only a deeper walk and a deeper identification with Christ, but also to a deeper fellowship with each other in this body of Christ!

The Communion elements – the body and blood of Christ (bread and wine) must always be received and eaten in faith. The real powerful and spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is reinforced by the Apostle Paul as he calls us to flee from sinful immorality and idolatry in **1 Corinthians 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?”* That’s why it’s important for us to realize that these everyday familiar elements during communion cause something deep within us to change. During communion, spiritual things that we can’t even begin to grasp, or explain, or understand are happening in our lives and the lives of those around us, all because Christ is alive and His spiritual presence is here with us, and that’s why we come to this Holy meal with great expectation. That God would move among us in miraculous ways!

I love what the Free Methodist Manual says about Communion: *The central act in Christian worship is the Lord's Supper because it is the one thing Jesus told his followers to do in remembrance of him. In Communion we look **IN** at ourselves and confess the things that have gone wrong. We look **BACK** to Calvary and praise Jesus for his death for us. We look **UP** to his risen presence, longing to nourish us through the bread and cup which he said were his body and blood. We look **AROUND** in love and fellowship with other guests at God's table. We look **FORWARD** to his return at the end of all history, the marriage supper of the Lamb, of which every Communion is a foretaste. And then we look **OUT** to a needy world. Communion is battle rations for Christian soldiers! Communion strengthens us to fight against the evil forces around us and win every time!*

The Lord's Supper accomplishes three things in the life of the church:

- 1. Reflection** – looking back and remembering the past. On the night before Jesus died, Jesus celebrated the Jewish feast of Passover with His disciples. Passover was celebrated every year by the Jews as they remembered how God miraculously delivered them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Today, the church looks back at the cross, reflecting on Jesus' bruised and broken body, and on His shed blood – remembering that Jesus' atoning sacrifice set us free from the bondage of sin and death – setting us free from Satan's power and influence!
- 2. Proclamation** – we proclaim in the present that we are His witnesses. Every time we eat the bread and drink from the cup we proclaim to the world, our Lord and Saviour's death, how He paid the penalty for our sins – past-present-future. We proclaim to the world that we follow Christ! We are citizens of another Kingdom, and have been given the authority to bring Heaven to this earth!
- 3. Expectation** – we look forward to our Lord's return and the promise of eternal life, and as we wait we proclaim the Good News of the Gospel until He returns. We are expectant, because the night before Jesus died, after taking the cup, He told His disciples that someday He will return. **Luke 22:18, “For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”** We look with expectation and longing for Christ's return to make all things right, saying, “Come Lord Jesus!”

When we come to the Communion Table – we come together in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ, where we are received with grace, hearing Jesus tell us: *“You are my friends, each one of you. As my Father in heaven has loved me, so have I loved you.”* We are no longer ordinary people, because during Communion something deeply spiritual happens to us. The sinful worst in us is crucified with Christ, our sins are nailed to the cross, and the sinful worst in us is replaced by the very best of Christ, His righteousness. So, we need to remember that this is no ordinary meal, and Jesus is no ordinary host, and those who eat here are no longer ordinary people, but transformed by the love of Christ into extraordinary people that are called to turn this world upside-down. Being an influence for Christ wherever He sends us!

I titled this message, *“Having a Covenant Meal with Jesus,”* because God makes covenants with His people, and communion is a covenant meal. We not only have to believe in God, but we also must live in a covenant relationship with Him. There is a difference between believing in God and being in covenant with God because you can believe in God without being in a covenant with Him. For example, demons believe in God according to **James 2:19**, ***“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder,”*** but they are not in a covenant relationship with God. The difference is that when you are in a covenant with someone, then you bring your entire life in alignment with them. So, if you are in a covenant relationship with God, you bring your entire life into alignment with Him. You trust His entire being – the goodness, the power, and the might of God Almighty, trusting Him completely with everything. To be in covenant with God means that we have fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is our help, our comforter, our King, Our Lord, our friend, our lawyer in the courts of Heaven, and much more!

Entering a covenant implies that we separate ourselves from everything that could break or breach that covenant. Marriage is a great example of a covenant relationship. Marriage is meant to be a covenant for life, *“until death do us part.”* When you enter the marriage covenant, you align your life and daily routine with your covenant partner, by being selfless and completely committed to that other person. During the wedding ceremony you put a ring on your finger to demonstrate to the rest of the world that you are now in a covenant relationship and not available to other possible offers or relationships. You promise to be faithful to your covenant partner. Our enemy, the accuser, the devil and his demons are constantly trying to get us out of covenant relationship with God, by sowing doubt,

lies, bitterness and temptations in our path. This is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden, the snake successfully broke their covenant with God. The Bible is filled with covenants, God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and with the nation of Israel. Some of these covenants are unconditional like Noah's rainbow, promising that God will never send another flood to destroy the earth, and then other are conditional, where action on our part is required to activate it. For example God's covenant of blessing towards His chosen people Israel required obedience, according to **Deuteronomy 11:26-28**, ***"See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods."***

At the Last Supper Jesus establishes a New Covenant with His believers, a meal covenant. **John 6:53-54**, ***"Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, 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 them up in the last day.'"*** Here, Jesus gives us His Word of promise, and then latter, at the Last Supper, Jesus confirms it with a covenant meal. This is a conditional covenant between us and Jesus, dependent of us taking communion. We have to do something, eat and drink to receive His covenant promise of eternal life. In the taking of communion, we are making a powerful proclamation and confirmation of our covenant with Jesus. We are declaring that we will not submit to any other ungodly covenant. That is why this covenant Jesus established is not just a simple symbol but is a powerful act. We can take a lesson from the Corinthian church underestimated its holiness and suffered the consequences. Some of them ate the bread and drank the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner; thereby releasing a curse rather than a blessing, and as a result, many became sick and some even died. Within the Corinthian church communion released the judgment of God because they didn't take it seriously. Communion is battle rations for Christian soldiers!

Jesus is calling out, "DINNER!" So, I urge you to drop everything and come in joy, come in confidence, come in gratitude, and come in anticipation to this covenant meal. Don't neglect this wonderful gift that Christ has given us. And come even if you still have struggles and challenges and questions. If we have to be perfect to take communion, then none of us here would qualify. So come, even if everything is not yet what it should be in your life, but when you come, come in

expectation of meeting Jesus, and come with a heart willing to receive all that Jesus has waiting for you!

John Wesley's Covenant Prayer & Prayer of Approach to Communion:

In the quiet of this moment, we accept your gift of covenant relationship with you, God of Heaven and Earth. The benefits of this covenant relationship come as we trust and obey. We offer ourselves as disciples of your Son, Jesus – the one who came and lived out your perfect law of love. We ask for the empowerment of your Holy Spirit to be true to your ways. We cannot obey unless Jesus lives in us. We come to you through the work of your Son, Jesus, who opened the way to your holy presence through his life, death, and resurrection. Heavenly Father, let the power of Your Holy Spirit fill us, so that we can feel and know what the life, death and resurrection of Jesus truly means. May Your Spirit help us to know, as we eat this bread and drink this juice that Jesus is here with us. Jesus would never turn away anyone who wanted to know Him. Father God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, connect us to You, so we can love each other, and serve You by loving the world you created.

Amen.

The Lord's Supper

Benediction:

And now receive glory, O God, from your children. Thank you for the privilege of calling you Father. And glory be to the Son, who has loved us and washed our sins in his own blood and has now become our Savior and Redeemer. And glory to the Spirit, who by his mighty power has turned our hearts from sin to God. You, God, have become our covenant King, and through your unlimited grace we are your covenant people. And now may the covenant we have made on earth be sealed in Heaven. And may God enable you to live faithfully before him. The peace of the Christ be with you all.

Amen.