



As a pastor I get the great privilege of performing lots of wedding ceremonies. One of the things I do during a wedding ceremony is take the wedding rings in my hands and I say something like this: "The wedding ring is an outward and visible symbol of an inward and spiritual grace. It symbolizes that you have made a covenant with one another and with God. There are two unique characteristics which make the wedding ring a suitable symbol of marriage. First, the wedding ring is a circle and circles have no ending. In the same way marriage should never end. Second, rings are made of precious metals and costly stones that have the unusual quality of increasing in value as they age. Instead of ending or deteriorating, my prayer is that your love and marriage will grow, improve and increase in value every year."

In every culture people have developed ways of saying things by doing things. Think about a world without gestures and symbols, no handshakes, hugs, kisses, wedding rings, special songs, flags, dances, salutes, or flowers at Valentine's Day. Symbols point to something deeper, something more. So, if you are married, your wedding ring says, "I love my spouse and I'm committed until death do us part." The wedding ring is a symbol that hopefully explains all that in a single glance.

The Bible is full of symbols, signs and gestures. God often used physical things and symbolic actions to communicate his love and truth to us. For example, God gave Noah a rainbow to express his love and care for him and all creation. When God wanted to show us how awful sin is and how much forgiveness cost, he told his people to take their best sheep to the tabernacle and kill it as an offering. Now, that may sound crazy and archaic to us today, but I bet you didn't leave the worship service and say, "You know, I just don't understand why God hates sin so much and what forgiveness means." You participated in it. You watched it. You felt it. You even smelled it.

God gives us symbols and signs because he loves us and wants us to know him. He wants us to trust and follow him with our whole heart. One of the most important symbolic things God told his people to do in the Old Testament was celebrate the Passover Supper. Every year, even today, Jewish people gather and remember the story of how they were slaves in Egypt but God, in his love and power, came down and set them free. And ever since the first Passover, Jews have celebrated it by eating,

drinking and telling stories. Today, the Christian church celebrates a radically new Passover meal called The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist. The Lord's Supper, like baptism, are two ordinances or sacraments that point to a deeper inward spiritual reality. They are symbols. And this morning we are going to think about the Lord's Supper and then we're going to experience the Lord's Supper. So what I want us to do is look briefly at six themes we can see from the Lord's Supper, six ways God uses the Lord's Supper to bless his church.

Six Themes from the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a meal of Thanksgiving

The Gospel of Matthew says this, "*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you'*" (Matt. 26:26-27). Jesus and the disciples are celebrating the Passover meal together in the upper room and suddenly Jesus takes bread and the cup and gave thanks for them both. The Greek word for "give thanks" is *eucharisto*, where we get the word Eucharist. Jesus himself gave thanks for the meal and blessed it. Ann Voskamp, in her great book, *One Thousand Gifts* talks a lot about this very word. She writes, "The practice of giving thanks...eucharisteo...is the way we practice the presence of God, stay present to His presence, and it is always a practice of the eyes. We don't have to change what we see. Only the way we see." When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we are practicing giving thanks. We are thankful for who God is and what he did for us in Jesus Christ. So, one of the way to see the Lord's Supper is to see it as a meal of thanksgiving.

This makes sense because just think about what most of you will do on November 24. Thanksgiving is right around the corner. Everyone loves Thanksgiving and it all culminates in a feast. And believe me, we enjoy ourselves at those feasts! There is an atmosphere of joy and fellowship. You don't sit there and silently look down at your plate. You celebrate. You laugh. You have joy. You count your blessings. One of the things we try to do at our home is take time for everyone to share what they are thankful for that year. It's important to do that. In the same way, the Lord's Supper is meant to be joyful because it's a meal of thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is a meal of Remembrance

The church in Corinth was having some serious issues when it came to having church and celebrating the Lord's Supper together. Some were even getting drunk off the communion wine. It got so bad that Apostle Paul had to write a letter to them and explain the significance of the meal and how to properly eat the meal together. Paul writes, "...and when he (Jesus) had given thanks, he broke it and said, *"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me"* (1 Cor. 11:24).

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are told to remember Jesus Christ. It's actually a command from Jesus. He says "do this in remembrance of me." More than mere memory, we recall God's redemptive acts in Jesus Christ. We remember his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Why is this important? Because we all suffer from spiritual amnesia. As I like to say, "We tend to forget the things we need to remember and remember the things we should forget." So, every time we take communion, we believe in Jesus and embrace him again. We remember. One of my mentors often said at communion, "The world drinks to forget; the Christian drinks to remember." The Lord's Supper is a meal of remembrance.

The Lord's Supper is a meal for the Body of Christ

Earlier in the same letter to the church in Corinth, Apostle Paul says, *"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 share the one loaf"* (1 Cor. 10:16-17). We gather as a family at this table. There is room for every single one of us. We celebrate as brothers and sisters united in Christ. It's doesn't matter if you are young or old, rich or poor, black or white. The only thing that matters is our common faith—our common union—in Jesus Christ. This is one of the reasons why we ask not-yet-Christians to not partake in the meal. This is for those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior. This is also why we don't take communion alone, by ourselves. The Lord's Supper is a meal for the entire Body of Christ, the church, the community of faith.

The Lord's Supper is a meal for Sinners

There are some churches that build a kind of wall around the Lord's table. It's like they want to protect people from getting hurt. It's not enough to just trust in the Lord Jesus as Savior to take communion. They say that you also have to be a member of the church. Or they say that you can't be divorced or guilty of some other mortal sin and still come to the table. Some pastors tell people to search their hearts during a time of prolonged

silence so they can be sure to get every sin confessed. So, who's the table for? It's for broken messed up sinners like you and me.

In the Gospel of Mark we read, "While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, *"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me. They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"*" (Mark 14:18-19). Can you imagine someone at your thanksgiving meal standing up and saying, "One of you will hurt me very deeply this week."? That would be awkward. But, that's what Jesus said—one of them would betray him. We all know Judas is the culprit. But, truth is, when all was said and done and Jesus was hanging from a cross, every single disciple would betray Jesus and deny him. The same is true for us. Like the disciples, we are the ones who constantly turn our back on Jesus and say, "Surely you don't mean me?" Yes, he does mean you. We are sinners in desperate need of grace. And Jesus not only loves us, but offers us a meal. Not only a meal, but gave his life for us. If you don't feel worthy to come to the table today, you're not worthy! As the Scripture says, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" Jesus doesn't love us because we are worthy. We are worthy because he loves us and invites us to come. Thankfully, this meal is not for perfect people, but for sinners.

The Lord's Supper is a meal with Jesus

I'm an extrovert so I hate eating in public alone. Some of you probably love it. The Lord's Supper is a meal with no ordinary host. We don't eat this meal alone. In the Gospel of Mark we read, *"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them"* (Mark 14:22-24). You probably know there is lots of debate between Catholics and Protestants about the word "is." Is this the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ or is it merely symbolic? Jesus spoke Aramaic, not English, and at that time the NT was recorded mostly in Greek. So literally Jesus' Aramaic phrase went like this: "This—my body." The verb "is" doesn't appear in the verse. But, some people have interpreted "This is my body" as a literal statement. So, then, quite literally, this piece of bread becomes the flesh of Jesus. But then other Christians have said, "No, no, it's just a symbol." But like I've been saying, symbols are important.

What did Jesus mean then? When Jesus said, "This—my body" he meant something like, "This is my person; this is myself; this is my life offered to you." Jesus was asking his disciples to feed on him, to draw life from him, to somehow get him into us, or to

get us into him and his life. At first, the early church didn't debate the theological nuances of this ordinance; they simply affirmed, celebrated, and enjoyed the presence of Christ in the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the cup. The Lord's Supper is a meal with Jesus. He stands at the table with us. And he calls you to the table by name.

The Lord's Supper is a meal of the Kingdom of God

Whenever I hear of a restaurant in San Francisco that I've never heard of, I open my Yelp app and bookmark the place. I like to look at the pictures of the food and I get excited for the night my wife and I will hopefully go eat at that place. As followers of Jesus, there is a meal coming that will blow any Michelin-rated restaurant out of the water! Jesus put it this way, ***"For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God"*** (Luke 22:16). In communion, we anticipate the day when believers from every age will gather at God's table, celebrating the final triumph of Jesus Christ and his holy bride, the church. Jesus is coming again and when he does, we'll eat a meal with him! Listen to what Revelation 19:9 says, ***"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"***

Just think about that. In the New Heavens and the New Earth, we will sit down with Jesus and enjoy a meal together. Jesus is promising that he is unconditionally committed to us, that what was done at that last supper makes the ultimate feast in the kingdom of God a future reality. So, as we rise from our seats and eat at this table today, we are also eagerly looking forward to the day when you and I will drink and eat again with Jesus in his Father's Kingdom. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

I hope you see that the Lord's Supper is no ordinary meal. It won't fill us, but it will satisfy us deep within. It's a meal of thanksgiving. A meal of remembrance. A meal for the Body of Christ. A meal for sinners. A meal with Jesus. A meal of the kingdom of God. As you come to the Lord's Table this morning, come to receive. Jesus Christ is here. Where do you need his grace, his forgiveness, his new life and power in your life? Let him feed you in those places.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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