

*Blessed are You by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High who has delivered you from your enemies!*

At Seminary, on Halloween there was a Costume Party and typical of Ministers there were those dressed as Moses, the Shepherd David and King David, as Mr & Mrs Noah, and one would-be-minister attended the Party wearing a plaid shirt and jeans. When asked about his lack of costume/what he was supposed to be? In his best Brooklyn accent, he introduced himself as Mel Chizedek who owns the bar down the street. Ministers humor is so bad, they even make Dad Jokes seem funny.

There are only three references to Melchizedek in all of Scripture, yet he is one of the only people who appears in Genesis, the Psalms, and in the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews!

Long before King David, before Moses, even before Pharaoh in Egypt, Abram and Sarah followed where God led through the land of Canaan, promising a Land, a Name, a Son. Before destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by God, the 4 neighboring Canaanite Kings invaded Sodom taking the people as prisoners and all their belongings as plunder. Among the captives was Abram's nephew Lot. SO Abram mounts this battle with bloody military strategy, destroying the 4 Kings' armies. On Abram's way home from battle, Abram is greeted by Melchizedek who brought out bread and wine and offered a blessing for Abram:

*Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!*

Psalm 110 includes the sentence:

The Lord will not change his mind, *"You are a Priest forever in the Order of Melchizedek."*

And in the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is identified as

"God made Jesus our Eternal High Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek."

So who was Melchizedek, and what is the Bible attempting to state about Jesus by this comparison?

At the writing of the Letter to the Hebrews, many were writing about the "Heavenly Temple" because the Temple at Jerusalem had just been destroyed by the Roman Legion; but no one else connected Melchizedek to it... In the days of the Early Church, many discussed Jesus being the Messiah, but no one else connected the Messiah to the Priesthood. What the writers of the Psalms and the Letter to the Hebrews were stating was that the cultic religion of the Temple at Jerusalem had been inadequate, because it was temporary, mortal and could be destroyed.

BUT Now we have an Eternal High Priest who provides the ultimate sacrifice for us, in bread and wine.

Even more, the name Melchizedek in Hebrew literally means KING (MELEK) of RIGHTEOUSNESS (ZEDEK) and Melchizedek is the KING of SALEM, which in Hebrew SALEM would have been Shalom meaning PEACE. What is more, in years to come David took the ancient city of SALEM for his Capitol naming it Jerusalem. How incredible that Four thousand years before Jesus, in the Book of Genesis (in the time when Abram lived on The Covenant Promise, before the birth of Isaac) there is this foreshadowing of the PRINCE of PEACE and PRIEST of RIGHTEOUSNESS, who of all things offers Bread & Wine!

We know from Scripture that Jesus did not so much create the Sacrament of Communion out of Nothing, as reinterpret and apply elements of the Jewish Seder: the Bread at the beginning and Cup of Wine at the end of the Passover Meal. Previously, that Bread had represented the Bread from Heaven, the Manna they received daily as sustenance in the Wilderness; and the Final Cup is the Cup of Elijah representative of the end of Days when all things will be redeemed by God.

The Story of Melchizedek takes the Bread and Wine back generations before Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, before Slavery in Egypt, before the Passover Seder of The Exodus!

The Book of Genesis does not emphasize what these elements mean. Instead, Melchizedek who is A Priest of God Most High, not of Aaron's Priesthood or any religion or Temple, brings these as gifts as a Greeting to Abraham to welcome those returning from a significant Life experience. And the response of Abram is significant, because in thanksgiving to God Most High, Abram makes an Offering of 10% of all he has. However, what to do with the spoils of war, the slaves, prisoners of war and booty taken in battle? We know from reading further the corruptions of Sodom and Gomorrah... so how should Abram respond to the King of Sodom who offers, "As King of Sodom I will take all the people, you take all the profit?" Abram replies, I have sworn an oath to God Most High to take nothing from you, so that you may never say I owe you anything! Abram follows God and God is the only one that Abram owes his life!

The point of all of this is to question: What is our intent in sharing the Sacrament of Communion?

Throughout the first 1500 years of Christianity, the purpose of Worship was not Confession, or Prayer, the reading of Scripture or listening to a Sermon. All of those were done as elements of Worship, but the purpose of Worship was to receive the Mass, the Bread and Wine of Communion. The Mass was celebrated every Morning, and every Week, as well as every time when people requested, such as at Weddings, in Hospital, or on your Deathbed. Yet for a time, The Sacrament of Baptism could be officiated by anyone, but Confirmation and Communion required an Ordained Priest.

At Valley Presbyterian Church we are extremely Ecumenical. How many of us grew up Presbyterian? How many grew up Catholic? Episcopal? Lutheran? Reformed? Disciples? Methodist? Congregationalist? Baptist? How many are new to all of this? 500 years ago, Martin Luther had been a Catholic Priest, but as a believer he questioned and challenged 95 of the Church's teachings, among which were 1) who has authority to read the Bible (Only Priests of the Church or Common people); 2) who has authority to forgive sins and represent you to God (Only Jesus or Priests); and 3) do the elements of Bread and Wine transform into something else?

After being excommunicated from the Church, Luther instructed his followers which became the Lutheran Church that the elements do not change. Instead, that the role of the Priest is to call for the Real Presence of Jesus to come down from Heaven to be seated at the Table.

In the last 500 years, we have amalgamated all the different movements together as The Reformation, but in the Switzerland: Ulrich Zwingli believed there was importance in our REMEMBRANCE of what Jesus did for us. We routinely forget responsibilities and past events, and the act of REMEMBRANCE reaffirms our Vows to one another and God, as well as our Identity as believers.

The Presbyterian Church descends from the Theology of John Calvin, a French Lawyer serving as City Manager and Pastor at Geneva. Calvin wrote that the point of Communion is not as much about the elements, or Calling Jesus and more than about REMEMBRANCE, this Sacrament is about FORGIVENESS/RELATIONSHIP.

Have you and those you love ever disagreed or had an argument? And afterward, when you forgave one another the bond was stronger than ever before. In Communion, we forgive one another and are forgiven by God, we even forgive ourselves, all of which instead of transforming elements or bringing Jesus to us, transforms us bringing us closer to God through Jesus.

So in layers of belief, this Sacrament: Communion, is a Claim of FORGIVENESS and RELATIONSHIP. We remember what Jesus has done for us, needing no one else, because Jesus is the Perfect Intermediary, our Eternal High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek. This is the Last Meal Jesus shared with his disciples, where he identified the broken bread with his own body and the cup as our redemption in his blood;

USING the elements of the Passover which had also described the BREAD as our daily Manna from Heaven and the CUP as a foretaste of our REDEMPTION, the roots of this stretch all the way back to ABRAM.

Calvin had intended that we would share Communion every time we worship God, but his congregation said "NO." So instead of the emphasis being upon EVERY TIME WE WORSHIP GOD, or upon WHEN THE PRIEST OFFERS, our receiving Communion places responsibility on the RECEIVER.

Have there been occasions in our relationships which have torn us apart, circumstances of brokenness? Times in which we are at odds with one another, hiding from God, even broken from our true selves?

In this Sacrament, we come seeking to be forgiven, to be transformed to be in full relationship with GOD MOST HIGH.