

**Sacrament Sunday**  
**Matthew 26:26-29, 28:18-20**  
**May 3, 2015**

Do you have something you do in your family that is normal for your family, but if someone outside your family sees it, they think it is kind of strange?

An example: Before I came here, I lived in New Jersey for 6 years. One time, my parents and brother came out to visit. At that time, I had a woman named Betty living with me who was waiting for her HUD housing to come through. I had a finished attic, so she lived upstairs.

Now for those of you who have lived on the east coast, people there have a tendency to speak their mind. Betty joined in on some of the things I did with my family. After my family left, Betty said to me, "You guys are so polite to one another. It's kind of disgusting." I told her it's called "Minnesota Nice." East coast people are not known for being polite to one another. To them, it is kind of agonizing.

For those of us who have grown up in the church, there are some things we do here that if someone who never grew up in the church came in and saw them, they would think these things are kind of strange or weird. Like putting water on a person's head, or in some churches, it looks they are drowning people.

Or, we take these little cups of juice or wine and little pieces of bread, and we eat them together. We call them the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ. No wonder the early Christians were accused of cannibalism.

When we do baptism and Communion, do we really understand what it is that we are doing? We are going to look at baptism and Communion with hopefully new eyes so we can understand why and what we are doing. Then, we are going to participate in Baptism and The Lord's Supper.

Turn with me to our scripture passage today in your bulletin. These passages are where Jesus introduces Baptism and The Lord's Supper.

Pray: Holy God, quicken our minds, heighten our senses, tune our hearts that we might hear you speak as the Scripture is read and preached. Then, having heard, may we receive it, apply it, incarnate it and obey it. For the sake of Christ we pray, Amen.

Read Matthew 26:26-29 and 28:8-20.

Baptism and Communion are called sacraments. What makes them a sacrament is Jesus told us to do them. Communion: Do this in remembrance of me.

Baptism: Go and make disciples, baptizing them.

A sacrament is a symbolic act God has given us that communicates God's grace. Let's take them one at a time.

Baptism.

We do baptism because Jesus told us to do it. That is the easy part. But, what is it? Why water? Does baptism save us? Do I have to be baptized?

When someone wishes to be baptized, they are expressing their desire to follow Jesus, and it is expressed in a very public way in front of the church. It marks the end of an old life and the beginning of a new life lived in God's grace and forgiveness

When someone wishes to be baptized, they are expressing their faith – whether it is the faith of the person being baptized, or the faith of the parents who bring their child to be baptized.

Baptism shows our faith, but it does not save us. Our faith unites us with Christ, and baptism symbolizes the union. Take this analogy: In a wedding, when the bride or groom gives the ring to their partner, you hear the phrase "With this ring I thee wed." The ring or the putting on of the ring does not marry the couple. The vows said to each other before the giving of rings make the marriage. The ring symbolizes the vows that the bride and groom made to each other.

Our faith is the vows: "Jesus, I receive you as my Lord and Savior. I will follow you the rest of my life." We say that in faith. Baptism is like the wedding ring symbolizing the vow of faith made to follow Jesus. Just like the wedding ring is a mark or symbol of marriage, baptism is the mark or symbol of faith.

Baptism uses water. Water cleanses us. The water in baptism symbolically cleanses us of our sins because of what Jesus did on the cross. It is something we do not do ourselves, this cleansing, we receive it as a gift. And that is why you do not baptize yourself. It is done for you by someone else to symbolize God's gift to you.

I keep saying that baptism is symbolic. But it is more. Baptism is a way to express the reality of the forgiveness of sins, the receiving of God's grace. It is something to look at, to feel, to experience. When that water hits us, whether a few sprinkles or a full dunk, it is a visual of God marking you with the water saying, "I love you. You are mine. I have marked you." And you are set apart as God's child to share in Christ's ministry.

The last question: do I have to get baptized? No, you do not have to. But if you wish to follow Jesus and Jesus tells us to do this, then why not? Baptism is a beautiful gift. It marks the beginning of a whole new life for someone who wishes to follow Christ.

Have you been baptized? If not, I encourage you to do so. It is a gift from God to you. Please come, and speak with Larry or Paul or me.

The next sacrament: Communion or The Last Supper

Again, communion is a sacrament because Jesus told us to do this. It has been practiced by Christians for over 2000 years...just like baptism.

I want you to remember communion in this way: it points in two directions - backwards and forwards.

It points backwards because it points to the death of Jesus on the cross, and we remember it. "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus says. The body and blood of Jesus was given for us for the forgiveness of sins.

The body and blood of Jesus is explained in this way: Jesus' last meal that night with his disciples was a Passover meal. In the Passover meal, the Jews tell the story of how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Because the Egyptian Pharaoh refused to let the people go, God had to send 10 plagues to convince Pharaoh to let the people go. The last plague was the worst - death of the first born son in every family.

However, God provided a way of salvation. A family could be saved by the eating of a lamb and placing the blood of that lamb over the doorframe of the house. So when the angel of death came and saw the blood, it passed over that house. Passover.

Now, in the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus reenacts that story, but he changes it (which astonished the disciples) by pointing to himself and saying, I am now that Lamb. It is my body and my blood that will save you. My blood covers your sin.

Today, when we partake in that last supper, just like baptism, that meal does not save us. We've already been forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross. When we partake in communion, we look back and trust in the promise that we are already forgiven through the body and blood of Christ.

So we come to the table not because we deserve it or earn it, we come because, just like baptism, it is freely given to us as a gift of God' grace.

Communion not only looks backwards, it also points forward. Look at the words of Jesus in the Matthew 26 passage (the last sentence): "I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now until that day when I drink it new *with you* in my Father's kingdom."

A pastor was teaching a confirmation class. He asked the class the meaning of Communion. One student replied it was a snack to starve off hunger pangs until the congregation could go home and eat lunch.

In a way, this student was right. The Lord's Supper is a provisional snack for a people on a journey; giving us strength and sustenance to reach our final destination. We are spiritually fed in a mysterious way in these elements.

As we are spiritually fed, the elements of communion prepare us, give us a taste, an inkling, a yearning, a longing for that future day, when we shall be with Christ, see him face-to-face, and share with him a far more wonderful banquet feast – the likes of which even surpass our greatest expectations.

Communion is a beautiful gift given to us by Jesus. Just as in Baptism, we encounter God. We touch, taste, feel, smell God when we partake in communion. It communicates God's love. At the heart of it is God's grace extended to us.

Shall we partake in our sacraments?

I invite John and Alicia Wood (and family) to bring forward their children, Emma and Noah, to receive baptism.