

Please stand with me for the reading of today's Bible verses from Acts 2:38 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

This morning, we are going to look at a couple of items from our statement of faith, the two ordinances of the church – Baptism and communion, or “the Lord's supper”. Being as today is the first Sunday of the month, we will be celebrating the Lord's supper at the end of our service today. Today we will be looking at the meaning and symbolism behind the ordinances of the church.

God uses symbols to help us understand and remember important truths and important things that He has done for us. In the Old Testament, God gave Moses a staff, and God chose to use it as the symbol of His own power and authority through Moses. With this dead stick Moses opened and closed the Red Sea and Israel realized a miraculous victory over Egypt's military might. With this dead stick, Moses brought forth water from a rock. With this dead stick, Moses led Israel to great victory in the battle with the Amalekites. This stick symbolized the power of God so much that it is referred to twice as THE STAFF OF GOD.

Looking at the stick from an elemental view it was nothing more than a piece of wood, but behind it was the force of God's own authority and power. To God it was His symbol, the message, the symbol and sign of His glory and power.

There were other symbols that God gave, like the bronze serpent on a pole, the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle and all of its trappings, a pile of stones from the middle of the Jordan River. And, just like God gave symbols to the Israelites in the Old Testament, He has given two highly visible and very powerful symbols of Christ for the church in the New Testament. The first is Baptism. The second is Communion (the Lord's table).

1 First: Baptism. We believe in believer's baptism by immersion.

Believer's baptism because the Bible is clear that in all cases people "believed and were baptized". When we come to Christ we become children of God, but God doesn't have any grandchildren. No matter how much I would like it, I can't accept Christ for my kids. So, if I choose to baptize my

baby, it really has no meaning in the eyes of God. In this church we do baby dedications – the parents and the church committing to raise the child in the truth of God and make every effort to ensure that they will grow up to follow God and become men and women of God. Nothing magical about it. Nothing that says this baby is holy or saved or anything like that – Just that we are dedicating the child to God and committing to do our best to lead them on the right path.

We believe in baptism by immersion because the word used in the Bible for baptize, baptizo, means to dip or plunge – to completely immerse. The word used in the bible for sprinkle (as in sprinkling blood on the altar) is rhantizo, and it is not used anywhere in the Bible in the context of baptism.

Baptism is important because it reminds us of the Lord's love for us. Whenever anyone believes in Jesus, a miraculous transformation takes place. The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ comes to live in our heart. We go from death to everlasting life, from darkness to light, and from eternal shame to eternal salvation.

So, baptism symbolizes what Jesus has already done in our lives, when we believe in Him. Going under the water symbolizes that that my old life is dead. That's my life without Jesus. But coming out of the water says that "I'm no longer dead – separated from God. I'm alive with the new life God gave me when I received Jesus as Savior and Lord."

Baptism is a first step in obedience. As I said earlier, the Bible says to “believe and be baptized”. It’s a first step on the road to the new life that God has laid out in front of us.

Baptism is important not only to the person being baptized, but also to the people witnessing the baptism, because it serves as a reminder of what God has done for each of us as well.

The second ordinance we are going to look at today is communion.

Once, after a church service, a woman’s son had complained to her that the adults had all been given a snack, but none had been given to the little children. At first, she was unsure of what he was thinking or talking about, but when she

asked, she discovered that he had seen the adults being served communion - taking bread and wine - and simply assumed it was a snack.

All too often the church loses sight of the importance and meaning of communion. It becomes just something to do because we've always done it. We skip over the "spiritual meat" that is a part of the meal that Christ gave us the recipe for, and settle for a meaningless "snack" that doesn't fill us up spiritually or physically.

Jesus wants desperately to be remembered by His children. He wants us never to forget what He did for us. Sometimes Christians do forget, and this breaks Jesus' heart. He doesn't want to be forgotten or taken for granted. For that reason, He gave us a special way to remember Him and especially to remember that He died on the cross for us. Each time we come to the communion service, we should be reminded of His death for our sins.

There are four different names used in the New Testament to identify the communion and if we examine each of them separately, we can learn what the communion means.

I. It is called the Lord's Supper: I Cor. 11:20

- Not because we do it at supper time, but because it was instituted at the last supper. The Lord was eating the Passover supper with His disciples. This was a very special feast of the Jews. Facing death, He wanted to give them a simple easily available way to remind them of Him. He wanted them to remember every time they ate a meal. Bread and wine were staples in His day.

It's called the Lord's supper because the Lord is always here when we participate. We can't see Him, but He is here in His Spirit. It's important we come with the right attitude because Jesus is here. So, we need to examine ourselves. It is a time to reflect on our own lives as they compare to the teaching of Jesus. It is a time to think about what He did for us.

II. A second name for communion is "The Lord's table." I Cor. 10:21

- This relates to our behavior. God is telling us He does not want His children to serve the devil. If we come to the Lord's table on Sunday, we should live for Him all week. It's a little like coming to the table at home with dirty hands or face if we come to the Lord's table with sin in our heart. God doesn't like that any more than parents do.

- 1 Cor. 11:27 says that we must not partake in an unworthy manner. Some people don't understand what this means. They think it means no one should take communion who is not completely free of sin, or they think that children should not partake, but this speaks about HOW we should partake, not WHO should partake. I believe any Christian who wants to remember Jesus in the way He commanded is welcomed by God if they come with a sincere heart. That's why we have an open communion for all believers here. But note that it is supposed to be for believers. If someone has no relationship with Jesus, they have no right to be eating at

His table. To do so has no real meaning for them and dishonors the meaning of the communion.

III. Communion is also (obviously) called "Communion." I Cor. 10:16

- This relates to the unity of the Church. We are all part of the Body of Christ, the Church. The word "communion" means sharing... Having something in common. So, the communion service is something we share with one another. It is also something we share with Christians all over the world. It is something that makes us all one. We share in the body and blood of Jesus.

- We are part of the family of God. A family eats together at the same table. Christians may not be able to all be at the same physical table at the same time, but we can still share in the same meal whenever we do this. This is one reason it's important to be in the worship service when Communion is observed. We need to think about our place in God's family.

IV. Communion is also called "The breaking of bread." Acts 2:42

- This was the common way the early Church spoke of it. partly because they often had a meal together before the communion. Partly because they literally broke the bread. In the New Testament times, it was a time of fellowship. It is a very important part of the Church's life today. That's why we do it regularly.

Communion is the gospel, the whole story of salvation, in one symbolic act.

Our practice of the Lord's Supper goes back to the night before Jesus was crucified, as he ate his final meal with his disciples. The things he said and did in that meal are the basis for what we do in Communion.

HOWEVER... what Jesus did in that meal was based on something that had happened another night hundreds of years earlier... in Egypt. On that night the Israelites also had a supper. On that night the Israelites were slaves living in bondage for 400 years, (Just like all men are slaves to sin,

living in bondage.) God decided to set His people free from bondage to Egypt (Just like He decided to set us free from our sin... to save us). The Pharaoh refused to set God's people free, so God did some extraordinary things... He sent a series of plagues to convince Pharoah to free the Israelites, and this would be the final plague... that night the firstborn male in every family would die. They were doomed... with no hope. (Just like all men are helpless and hopeless because of their sin).

God offered a way of escape... a lamb could die and its blood would be placed on the doorposts. (Just like Jesus, the Lamb of God died for our sins and shed His blood). When the death angel came, if he saw the blood, he would pass over the house and the people inside would be saved... because of the blood. (Just like we will stand before God to be judged one day and if God sees the blood of Jesus covering our sins, our sins will be forgiven).

Inside the house the people ate a meal called Passover. Every year, Jews observe the Passover holiday to remember what God did for them. (Just like we observe the Lord's

Supper to remember what Jesus did for us... he died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose from the dead to give us the victory over sin and death.)

When Jesus was with His disciples in the upper room, he used two of the elements of the supper to give new meaning to the meal.

First, He took the bread... not just any bread... UNLEAVENED bread. This bread had no yeast... no leaven. For that ceremony, yeast represented SIN. Jesus held the bread which had no yeast and said, "This is my body."

His body was sinless. Then He broke it. It symbolized how His body would be broken by the whip and by the nails, and the thorns. He prayed, and shared the bread with his disciples (Just like he offers himself... his forgiveness... to all)

Then Jesus took the cup of wine. Wine is red liquid from the crushed grapes. (It symbolized the red blood that flowed from the crushed and beaten body of Jesus). He took the

cup and said, “This is my blood”. It symbolized the blood He would shed the next day on the cross.

So, you see, when we observe the Lord’s Supper, we are really preaching an object lesson... we are proclaiming the gospel.

1 Cor. 11:26 says, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

As the worship team comes, think about all that Jesus has done for you. Think about where your heart and mind are in relation to God and others, and spend a few minutes praying and preparing to receive communion.