

Christmas Communion

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Luke 2:21-38

CHILDREN'S TIME

This morning I brought one of my family photo albums. I love to look through this photo album and remember all of the important people in my life from when I was little and think about all of the good times we had. I want to share a few of those memories with you this morning.

* Look through and share the pictures.*

Looking at these pictures sure brings back a lot of wonderful memories.

Just before Jesus finished his work on earth, he left behind a picture for us to remember him. It isn't a picture in an album like the one I showed you, but he gave us something to do to help us remember what Jesus did for us. We call it The Lord's Supper or Communion. The first Sunday of each month, we celebrate Communion in our worship service while you are downstairs, but

today, I want to share it with you now.

Just before Jesus was crucified, he called his disciples together for a meal. He took a piece of bread and he told the disciples that the bread was to remind them of his body that would be hung on a cross for them. Then he took a glass of wine (we have juice) and told them it was to remind them of his blood because he was going to bleed for them on the cross. He told them that whenever they ate the bread and drank the wine, it could remind them of how much Jesus loved them. We still do this now 2000 years later to help us remember how much God loves us.

SERMON

The passage here says that Simeon came to the temple looking for consolation for God's people. Further down it says that Anna lived in the temple waiting for the redemption of God's earthly world. Both of them found these things in the birth of a baby, the Christ child.

Do you know what you came here looking for in this worship service today? Why did you go through all of the trouble getting up out of your cozy warm bed on a cold winter day, getting ready, then getting in

your car and driving all the way to this building for worship in this building this morning?

Is it possible that you seek the same thing as Anna and Simeon? Is it possible that somewhere inside each of us is a universal spiritual hunger, whether we can label it with words or not? Could there be an inner emptiness that human beings experience that can be satisfied at the table of our Lord Jesus Christ with the bread and juice of Communion?

Is this human spiritual hunger what gave church leaders in the fourth century the idea to create the celebration of Jesus' birth and institute it into the yearly church calendar?

What is it that you look for as you participate in Communion today? I can't answer that question for you and neither can the person sitting on either side of you. My job is to ask the question and focus it for you. But it is your job to take the question in — to consider it — to ponder it — and answer it for yourself.

In the still moments, when you can be completely honest and in tune with your deepest self, do you feel an inner hunger, an inner sense of thirst?

When you consider Jesus, the holy child of God, born on Christmas as a gift to all of humanity — a gift that promises a new and vibrant life

...a gift that means we are forgiven and whole

...a gift that means that we are enough just as we are

...a gift that fills in the gaps of our deficiencies

...a gift that covers over our failings and doubts

...a gift that doesn't answer all of our questions, but allows us to stand with them in the mystery that is the love of God.

When you consider this gift, freely given to you, is there a deep part of you that longs for it inwardly?

Are you willing to be nurtured and fed with the consolation and redemption found at this table?

Think about what consolation means. It is the calming of all the disturbances in our lives, which are then replaced by a tranquility in our spirit. God designed people to experience this calming tranquility.

Consolation has to do with the experience of comfort and sense of

security and safety needed to face life, death, and eternity.

My mentor Dr. Harold Ellens had something to say about redemption. He studied and wrote on the topics of spirituality and psychology while reflecting on and studying the inner world of human beings.

Dr. Ellens said that redemption is the removal of all dangers from our inner world. From the inside, we experience no more threat, fear, guilt, or shame.

Who here couldn't use a bit more redemption?

Consolation and redemption are found in this meal we celebrate every month.

This table is full of mystery. It is like a crystal hanging from the ceiling that catches light and refracts that light in a multitude of directions. The theology and depth of meaning in this practice cannot be contained in only one interpretation, but continues to grow as we grow.

Have you ever had that experience after which every part of life seems new, different, transformed? You see your life now through new eyes. Communion can be like that.

It we grow, new dimensions and nuances are found in Communion:

...as you fall and get back up

...as you hurt a loved one and are forgiven

...as you experience the traumatic blow of divorce and then are loved once more

...as you celebrate the marriage of a child, or grandchild

...as you explore the limits of your own skills and abilities and watch God do something well beyond them

...as you find a moment of inspiration walking in the woods when the sunlight breaks through the branches illuminating the path before you

...as you celebrate the 100th birthday of a grandmother

...as you face the heart-wrenching challenges of a relative with Alzheimer's or cancer

...as you wake up one morning that feels in every way like a brand new day

...as life's experiences mature you and mold you, you can encounter this communion table afresh,

pregnant with yet more depth,
more meaning, more wealth of
grace that reaches right into the
particulars of our every day lives.

This is the table set before us that
not one of us can comprehend
fully, and perhaps together we can
get close.

This is a Christmas Communion
that that is set for each of us and
for all of us today with the
awareness of God's gift of love to
us in the person of Jesus.

This gift is offered to us freely by
God despite any emotions or past
actions that have hindered our
relationship with God. This table
reminds us that God's love for us is
greater than any of our personal or
community shortcomings or
failings.

God's great mercy recognizes that
we are broken people and we are
loved anyway.

You are urgently invited by God to
this Christmas Communion that
you might leave here: fulfilled,
satisfied, forgiven, loved, nurtured,
consoled, redeemed, and whole!

As Paul wrote in his second letter
to the Corinthians, "Thanks be to
God for his indescribable gift!"