

More Than the Lord's Supper  
1 Corinthians 10:16 KJV

A young woman came to me recently and said, "When I was growing up, we always called it 'the Lord's Supper.' I notice in your bulletin you always call it 'the Sacrament of Communion.' Is there a difference between the two?"

Actually, yes, there is. It's the same service. Those who call it the Lord's Supper and those who call it the Sacrament of Communion both remember the Last Supper that Jesus shared with the disciples in the Upper Room. We both use the bread and the grape juice or wine. The difference is the understanding of what it means.

The Lord's Supper is basically a service of remembrance. It looks back to that night that Christ instituted the New Covenant and sealed it with the broken bread and the wine, which symbolized his broken body and his blood which he would shed the next morning on the cross.

Remembering this great event is vitally important. We must never forget what a wonderful gift we have in the new covenant, with the forgiveness of our sins through the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

The Sacrament of Communion also includes this remembrance. But it goes further. The Sacrament of Communion is not just remembering an event that happened 2,000 years ago. In the Sacrament of Communion something powerful, something wonderful is happening right here and right now.

A sacrament is an act of God. Yes, God uses ordinary human beings. Yes, God uses ordinary elements: water, bread, grape juice. But God reaches through these ordinary human beings and ordinary elements to be present with us and to speak to us right here and right now.

When we receive the Sacrament of Communion, we are united with Christ. In unity with Christ, he leads us into the very presence of our Holy and Heavenly Father. The Sacrament of Communion is a doorway between heaven and earth.

That's why we usually have a time of repentance and forgiveness before we offer people communion. Because, when we enter into the presence of the Holy God, we feel unworthy. We know instinctively that only those who are perfectly pure and holy should be allowed into the presence of God. And we are not perfectly pure and holy.

When we read the stories in the Bible of people who suddenly found themselves in the presence of God, their reaction is always the same: They fall on their faces, overcome by their sense of guilt and unworthiness.

But the prayers of confession and the absolution remind us that we are under the new covenant. God has forgiven us for Christ's sake. We are allowed in the Holy of Holies. We are not only allowed into God's holy presence. We are welcomed.

When we were baptized, we were united with Christ in his baptism. You will recall that when Christ was baptized, his Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." When you were baptized, God spoke through the water to say, "This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."

God is well pleased with you.

Most likely you are saying, “Wait a minute. It’s one thing for God to be well pleased with Jesus. He was perfect and sinless. It’s an entirely different matter for God to be well pleased with me. I am far from perfect and sinless. I am not worthy for God to be well pleased with me.”

No, you’re not. That’s why it’s called grace.

Grace goes further than mercy.

Those of you who hear me give one of the talks on grace will hear me tell my favorite story about grace. I always tell it. Many years ago I was listening to a sports talk show on the radio. Sparky Anderson was being interviewed. Sparky Anderson was the great manager of the Cincinnati Reds in the ‘70’s and ‘80’s, when they won several World Series championships. At some point in this interview the talk turned to theological things. I don’t know how or why that happened. But it did, and I’m glad it did. Sparky Anderson made a statement so profound that it has remained with me all these years. He said, “Mercy is when you don’t get what you do deserve. Grace is when you do get what you don’t deserve.”

Isn’t that good? Too many Christians are willing to stop at mercy. “Oh, you mean I don’t have to go to hell for my sins? That’s great news, because I deserve to go to hell. Thank God for grace.”

No, no, no. That’s not grace. That’s mercy. When you don’t get what you deserve, that’s mercy. But God goes further than that. God doesn’t just say, “Okay, I’ll forgive you for Christ’s sake.” No. God’s grace goes further than that. God says, “I am well pleased with you.” And our response is, “That can’t be. I don’t deserve God being well pleased with me.” Well, congratulations, you just experienced grace.

When you receive the Sacrament of Communion, God will speak to you through these ordinary elements. God will say to you, “When you were baptized, I told the world that you are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased. You are still my beloved child, and I am still well pleased with you. And I always will be.”

And when that voice of protest begins to rise up within you saying, “Wait a minute, I don’t deserve...” you say, “Hush. It’s God’s gift of grace for Christ’s sake. Father, thank you, thank you, thank you.”

Amen.

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