

July 2008

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ. Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread. (1 Cor. 10:17-18)

Dear North Shore Fellowship,

This month we are considering *why and how we worship God together*. Encountering the living God elicits exuberance and reverence while allowing His Spirit to do soul surgery on our brokenness. A worship service must be purposefully structured to accomplish this in a community of believers.

The sacraments of baptism and communion are instituted by Christ to lead us into the wonder and mystery of the gospel. The sacraments are a tangible expression of the most profound spiritual reality – *the union of Christ with us, His church*. The intent of the sacraments is for the water, the bread, the wine to engage our senses and nurture the spiritual reality in us who have been united with Christ.

We long to enjoy worship of Christ through communion more frequently and meaningfully in order to nurture our union with Christ and with one another. That is why we are taking two Sundays to teach on the purpose of this sacrament. That is why we will celebrate the Lord's table again this Sunday and three Sundays in July. For most of church history, the sacrament of communion served as the climax of every worship service.

One church tradition believed that the elements were the very body and blood of Christ. This view risked turning the elements into something magical rather than a means of confirming and nurturing our union with Christ. Another group after the Reformation reacted against this view claiming that the elements were only symbolic to help us remember Christ's death. This "memorial" view emphasized internal realities but minimized the spiritual effect of eating the bread and wine. This view led to sitting silently as the elements were passed out and to less frequent communion.

We believe Christ is mysteriously, spiritually active in our taking the bread and wine to make our union with Christ more fully realized in us. Because of this, John Calvin encouraged a frequent and active celebration saying, "The Lord's table should be spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians, and the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually." He also emphasized the practice of coming forward to receive the elements and during this time invited the congregations to sing. The Lord's table is more than a memorial or funeral! Jesus was raised! And He raises us from death to life! So communion should be a reverent celebration!

Also, we believe that the communion is not only individual contemplation but a family celebration. The early church practiced communion in house church gatherings along with a full meal. Believers sat around a table looking at one another as they took the elements. So, we too want to practice communion in a manner that encourages community celebration of our union in Christ.

Would you flex and grow together with us as we practice communion more frequently this summer? I pray that it will nurture our union with Christ and with one another.

Grateful for you,

Gary

P.S. Remember we are having one service at 10:45, Northside location through August 10!