- Iconoclasm

January 7

One of the consistent themes in the Christian faith is some form of iconoclasm. Somewhere within the church there is a group of people who are devoted to the idea that they need to smash statues, burn pictures, tear down buildings and otherwise delete images of all sorts so as to provide purity in the worship of Christ. They accuse their opponents of being idolaters, hypocrites or worse. They go about their chores with great zeal and absolutely unswerving conviction.

It is interesting, therefore, to note that in 2000 years of Christian history there seems to be no mention of iconoclasts attacking the Lord's Supper. They are usually in blithe and sweet agreement with their foes that communion is most necessary and is not subject to whatever rules of iconoclasm they have promulgated. Indeed, often after having removed all the images from the church they are willing to kneel with their conservative opponents at the altar to receive communion. It is an aspect of worship which seems never to have suffered the iconoclastic challenge.

Why the exception? Perhaps the reason is simply this: communion is so simple and yet the same time so profound that it slips past the iconoclast. He sees no picture to be worshiped but rather a command to be followed. "Do this," said our Lord. The iconoclast sees himself as an obedient Christian, as does his conservative opponent. The command is imperative; it is also simple.

Both sides see this in a similar way. In the bread we see the body of Christ, hung on the cross for the salvation of the world. He is our atonement sacrifice in the physical body — and that we are to remember with the

bread. In the cup we see his blood, shed for our salvation. Taken together they remind us of the great love the Father has for us, that he would give his only Son. It is the ceremony of deep spiritual meaning. We should prepare for appropriately, by examining ourselves to see if there is something that needs to change in our behavior. So, as we proceed to communion this morning, examine yourself. Ask the Lord for his help in so doing, so that you might see what repentance is required. Then partake, as befits a true believing Christian.

- Exemption

JANUARY 14

Americans love a good story about government bumbling inefficiency, especially when it concerns the Army. One such tale made the rounds during the Vietnam War. The story goes that a young man had lost both of his legs in a traffic accident. As this was a disability which hardly needs medical verification — I mean, he is missing his legs — he saw no reason to inform his draft board by submitting a medical record from a doctor. It should be sufficient, he reasoned, just to show them the fact that his legs were missing.

According to the story, it was not sufficient. He was duly ordered to report to be shipped to an induction center. Even getting on the bus with the drill sergeant present made no difference. The story says that he finally was caught up by the system when he asked for shorts instead of G.I. pants when being issued his uniforms. Someone then thought to send him over to the hospital where it was discovered that he was unfit for service. Imagine that!

I bring the story to your attention after having discovered that the Hebrew word we usually translate as "Passover" literally means *exemption*. If you look at the end original instructions for Passover you will see that Moses was quite strict about where the blood was to be placed on the door posts, what was to be eaten is the Passover meal and how it was to be handled. It was not sufficient just to be Jewish; you had to apply for the exemption in the way God prescribed. This is a distinct imperative as well in the New Testament. We are told that those whose names are written in the "Book of Life" are those who are to be saved. God insists that you go through the formalities so that he knows that you really mean to be saved. There is a definite difference between someone who has been baptized in someone

who has not. If you don't follow the directions, you don't get the exemption.

> In a small way this also applies to communion. He told you exactly how he wants it done. You are to take the bread — adapted from the Passover feast — and eat it. As you do, you are to see his body and remember his bodily sacrifice. Likewise with the cup; you are to see his blood. You are to remember that he bled and died for your sins. The entire ceremony is to be done in remembrance of his sacrifice.
>
> So as you partake today, remember that he gave you directions on what you are supposed to do. Follow them carefully and respectfully. Examine yourself, repent and partake with his sacrifice and atonement in mind. As one old man put it, "do it God's way the first time — it works."

- Open Sesame

JANUARY 21

An enduring type of fairytale was given to us by Omer Khayyam in his *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves*. It is, of course, the discovery of the vast riches of the cave and the secret passage word which opens up everything to him. The appeal of sudden riches seems to be universal.

One common variation on this is the appearance of someone who will grant you three wishes. The science fiction writer Isaac Asimov had one of his characters explain why there are three wishes instead of just one. The first wish is to prove that it works. The second wish is for a large amount of money. The third wish is for what the character really wants. In Asimov's story the last sentence reads, "there was a soft, sexy knock at the door."

It brings us to the question: what are true riches? For many people, the answer is found not in money but in "the right person." This might be a love interest; perhaps a caretaker or a person with the right connections to make you successful. If I just had the right person, I would be happy. Others go directly to the question of money. Many quickly tumble to the idea that what they really want is not so much wealth but power and the pride that goes with it.

For the Christian, however, there is a simpler answer. We remember that, as the Spanish say, "there are no pockets in a shroud." Real riches our eternal.

Do we seek the right person? He holds the key to heaven and hell. Riches? The streets are paved with gold. Power? Those who live for him shall reign with him. The package is neat and concise and answers all our needs.

All this comes about because our creator was incarnate as a man and made himself to be the atonement sacrifice for our sins. He who will give us the

new Heaven and new Earth first gave us himself. He asks that we remember this sacrifice on a regular basis. We are to look at this and see in the bread his body, broken and hanging on the cross for us. We are to partake from the cup, remembering his blood which was shed for the remission of our sins. All this requires self-examination beforehand and repentance. So then, examine yourself and see if there be any need for repentance; then partake. Remember who gives you true riches, for eternity.

- Collective Noun

JANUARY 28

If you happen to have a vague fascination with the oddities of the English language, you are undoubtedly familiar with the concept of a collective noun. It's a noun used to label a collection of the same sort of things, for example:

- There are some ordinary ones, such as a flock of sheep or herd of cows or flotilla of boats.
- Some are more unusual. It is proper to speak of a pride of lions, and also a murder of crows.
- There are a few humorous ones to. Kangaroos are said to be in a mob, and we have the medieval usage of a gossip of women.

Curiously, there appears to be no agreed-upon word as the collective noun of for a group of saints. I don't mean plaster saints with halos; I mean saints as in those who gather on Sunday morning. I suggest, therefore, we remedy this lack by designating such a group as a communion of saints.

- The word itself is a translation of the Greek word which means "fellowship."
- It's also fitting in that we have fellowship with each other and also fellowship with God when we meet.
- The ritual of communion is the most recognizable sign that a person is a Christian.
- When you are taking communion, you are at your most saintly.

That last deserve some explanation. Most saintly? Yes indeed. Look at it this way:

- You begin by examining yourself, to see if there is something that needs to be fixed in your spiritual life. Only real saint would do that.

- You follow that by making plans for repentance — you actually plan to change your spiritual life to make it more like what God wants. Now that is saintly!
- After that, you take the bread and the cup, symbolizing his body and blood, in the most recognizable proclamation of the central doctrine of the faith. That central doctrine is the atonement, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the remission of our sins. It is your way of proclaiming his death, burial and resurrection until He comes again.

So, put on your most saintly attitude. Examine yourself and plan your repentance and then prayerfully take the bread and the cup so that you show the memory of his death, burial and resurrection. Be a part of this communion of saints.

- Poverty of Expectations

February 4

So much of life depends not on what you have, but on what you expect to have. It's one thing to owe money when you have a check coming at the end of the week; entirely another when your money and have no way to pay it. Consider someone in this situation:

- No money coming in, and no possible expectation that it will come in.
- No place to live, except pitching your tent a little further down the same dirty street.
- No one to tell you that you are worthwhile human being, and no such encouragement within sight.

Do you see? It's not just poverty, it's poverty of expectations. You don't expect things to get any better. This is often called humility, and referred to as "humble circumstances."

But the poverty of expectations is not limited to those who have little in the way of worldly wealth. You can have a poverty of expectations for exactly the opposite reason. You can be poor in expectations because you have everything you need. This is particularly true when you consider the fact that when you were born it was quite certain you would also die. If you are a Christian consider the poverty of your expectations:

- The Lord has provided for all of your physical needs ("give us this day our daily bread.")
- Our possessions often exceed our desires; indeed, some of us are trying to hold a garage sale to get rid of some of that stuff.

- And when it comes to the important things — eternal life — we are followers of the one man who has conquered death. We will spend eternity in heaven with him.

It is humility to do this; it is a complete poverty of expectations. It's not because you don't have something; it's because we have everything we need. The proper response in both cases is humility.

We come now to the portion of our service where we remember how we got that way. We remember the Lord and Savior who, dying on the cross, gave to us the entrance keys of heaven and eternal life. He commands us in return to remember is sacrifice. You and I did nothing to deserve it; all we did was accept it. So this morning, as you partake, remember that the bread represents his body broken for you on the cross. The cup represents his blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins. Partake — and do so in a humble manner of one whose poverty of expectations says, with King David,

> The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
> (Psalms 34:10 ESV)

- Be Still

February 11

The actual act of taking communion occupies very little time. But in the time it takes to pass the trays or come to the front of the church we are instructed to "examine ourselves." The instruction is repeated often, and often repeated with no explanation. Just how am I to get ready to examine myself? In Psalm 131, David gives us a very good outline.

> A Song of Ascents, of David. O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.
> (Psalms 131:1-3 NASB)

Let's take it piece by piece. First, the injunction is to examine yourself. This is how to prepare for it by yourself. The Psalm is quite short, only three verses, so we will take it in the simplest way possible. But do note that this was written by a king; not just any king, but the greatest king Israel would ever have before the coming of the Christ. It is therefore fitting for the least of us and the greatest of us.

He begins by warning us of things we should not do:

- Pride is the first thing. Would you approach the altar of God with a look of pride on your face, to let the Almighty know that you are one of the favored ones? The question answers itself.
- Nor are you to lift your eyes so that you would compare yourself with others around you. As CH Spurgeon once put it, this is a solitary colloquy between you and God.
- Do not bother yourself with the high points of theology as you approach the throne of grace. This is not a time of study, but of

devotion.

These are the things you should not do.

What should you do?

- Begin by calming your soul. The moment is serious but not emotional. Face the facts as if you're looking to God eye to eye.
- Be quiet. This is not a time for long public prayer demonstrating your personal piety. Rather, it is a time a private conversation between you and your Lord.
- Finally, put your hope in the Lord. The hope of the Christian is the great resurrection to come at our Lord's return. The word for "hope" used to actually means "to wait." Let him know that you are looking forward to his return.

Thus may your heart be prepared.

- Thorns

February 18

There is such a thing is a thorn-proof gardener's glove — if you use it properly. How do you use it properly? Stay away from plants that have large thorns, of course. It might be possible to make a truly thorn-proof glove, but the armor plate would be rather heavy.

It is this characteristic which led our Lord to use the thorn as a metaphor. In Mark chapter 4 He says this:

> And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.
> (Mark 4:18-19 ESV)

Note one characteristic of the thorn: it works by you reaching for something. It doesn't jump out and grab you, you go looking for something within it. The energy in the sting comes from your own arm.

Christ identifies three such reaches:

- The cares and worries of this world.
- The deceitfulness of riches.
- Our desires for other things — the new car, the bigger boat, a trophy wife.

It seems that thorns are a perfect metaphor for evil. But there are at least three known uses in which thorns have done some good.

- The Arabs gather the thorns of Palestine and burn them to heat their coffee.

- Br’er Rabbit escaped Br’er Fox by way of a briar patch.
- And of course, a Roman soldier plaited a crown of thorns and jammed it down on the head of Jesus of Nazareth. Blood flowed.

It is that blood which flowed but consumes us in communion. By his blood our sins are forgiven and we are allowed eternal life. As you take the cup this morning, remember that it is representative of the blood that flowed when Christ was crowned with thorns. He endured the humiliation of that fraudulent justice so that you and I might be saved. Think on this as you partake this morning.

- Leper

February 18

It is a very short incident in the New Testament. Luke devotes only three verses to it:

> While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." (Luke 5:12-14 ESV)

It is interesting what Jesus did not tell the man to do. There is no sense here of giving all you have to the poor. Nor does Jesus send him out as a missionary to preach the Good News to a different area. He does not even invite him to follow him on his journey to the Crucifixion. In a very real sense he is like the typical Christian today; not called the great things or public service, only called to the ordinary Christian life.

What does Jesus tell him to do? First, he tells him to shut up! He does tell him, however, to perform the ritual required by the Law of Moses to certify the fact that he has been cleansed of leprosy. This ritual will of course be performed at the temple in plain public sight. It requires no speaking ability of the man, nor any sense of standing in front of an audience. It is a silent testimony to what Jesus has done.
Interestingly, the phrase which is translated "to them" at the end of the 14th verse does not necessarily refer to the priests. The Greek actually implies people in general are the target audience. In other words, performing this ritual tells anyone who will listen what Jesus has done.

Perhaps you never thought that a ritual could communicate something of

deep importance to someone else. Communion is just such a ritual. It brings three messages to the world:

- First, it tells the world of the sacrificial love of Christ, who went to the cross for mankind.
- Second, it tells of the atonement —his sacrifice on the cross which paid for the sins of the entire world.
- Third, it tells anyone who will look and listen that Christ has paid for my forgiveness; I personally gained salvation because of what Christ did on the cross.

Note, please, that this is a regular ritual; we do it on a scheduled basis. It is an ordinary part of Christian worship, something that can be seen "all the time." We should encourage those who are looking into Christianity to ask what this means.

Communion, with its cup representing the blood of Christ and its bread representing his body, is a great starting point for personal testimony. It's also an outstanding way to begin a formal defense of the faith.

You do it because he commanded it. He commanded it because he wants you to remember. He wants you to remember because it is so, so important-a matter of eternal life and death. It is also your testimony without words.

- Worthy

FEBRUARY 25

saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."
(Revelation 5:12 NASB)

The book of Revelation is undoubtedly the most difficult book in the Bible to interpret correctly. This is as true today as it was in the time it was written. The apostle John, the author of the book of Revelation, was overwhelmed by what he saw and recorded. But we can take from it various pieces which tell us of the greatness of Christ. This is one of those verses.

Communion is, at its roots, an act of worship. It is intuitively obvious to the casual observer that whatever it is that you worship, it must be worthy of that worship. But what does it mean, "to worship?" I submit that it depends upon what you're worshiping. In this verse John gives us another set of seven items — note how many "sevens" there are in the book of Revelation — which may define for us what it means to worship Christ.

- Power— the word in the original Greek is the root of our word, "dynamite." It would be a rather rare occurrence that you would use dynamite for the benefit of the kingdom of God. However, what power you might have in this world and how you use it says an awful lot about what you think is most important. If you worship Christ, you will use whatever power you have for his kingdom.
- Wealth— there is no getting around this one. The word means wealth in the sense as the world uses it. One measure of your worship of Christ can be found in your checkbook.
- Wisdom— particularly for those of us who are older, is our wisdom tempered by the Holy Spirit and freely offered to those who need it? It is tempting to allow a young person to fall on their face and learn. It is often much better to share your wisdom and experience, even if that was you falling on your face and learning.
- Might — the word in the original carries with it the implication of having a particular talent to be able to do something. This might be something just as simple as singing in the choir; somebody has to make a joyful noise. If you have the voice for it, use it.
- Honor—do you honor him in word and deed? Is his name sacred to you, or is it part of every other obscenity? To those around you understand how highly esteemed is the name of Christ? Do you call on him in times of trouble, and honor him for his aid?

- Glory— "glory is to God as style is to an artist" said one writer. Do you look for the glory of God in your world? When you walk out in an isolated spot do you see the glory of God portrayed in the heavens, or are you too busy with your cell phone?
- Blessing —do you proclaim his name to others when you speak? As the old hymn has it, do you "take the name of Jesus with you?" Do you bless his name for the good things he's done for you?

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain. His worthiness is beyond that of anyone else, superior to all others. John tells us why:

- He is the Lamb of God. The perfect human being was prepared by God to deal with the problem of our sin. He is spotless, something none of us can claim.
- He is the Lamb who was *slain*. He was not just the perfect man, he was the perfect sacrifice who went willingly to the Cross. Out of his great love for us he sacrificed himself so that we might be saved.

As you partake this morning, remember that you are handling the emblems of the body and blood of the man who was perfectly man and perfectly God. He went willingly to his crucifixion so that you might be saved. He asks that you remember this and worship him, for He is worthy of your worship.

- Temple Prayer

MARCH 3

Most of us come to communion feeling a little bit uncomfortable when we get to the point where we are told that we must examine ourselves. There are two extremes of this.

- There are some of us who think this is just a formality. We are basically the good guys and we shouldn't be too perturbed by this.
- There are a few others who think exactly the opposite. "Maybe I shouldn't take communion; I've done a lot of wrong things."

Take a look at how Jesus handles this dichotomy.

> And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."
> (Luke 18:9-14 NASB)

The Pharisee

It is quite true that the Pharisee's actions exceed the requirements of the Law of Moses. He fasts more often; he tithes more stuff. But he accompanies this with a judgmental attitude towards others. Perhaps the problem is that, when you're perfect in every way, it's hard to find friends

just like you. Indeed, the bulk of his prayer is about the other guy and how rotten he is. Perfection ruined by judgementalism is not perfection. Unfortunately, this is very resistant to correction. The Pharisee assumes that God agrees with him. He isn't about to give God the opportunity to correct that.

Tax Collector

Our tax collector is rather different. He has three rather admirable characteristics which we may safely imitate.

- *He knows who he is*. He is a toad of the invading Roman government. There's a reason people don't like him.
- *He knows who he isn't*. He knows he isn't righteous; he knows he isn't worthy to have a claim on God's mercy. He is the kind of guy who slips into the back pew of the church when he thinks nobody is looking.
- *He knows what he wants* — God's mercy.

As I said at the beginning, these are extremes. Most of us fall in the middle somewhere. So begin your examination of yourself with a few simple questions.

- Did you come here to judge other people to avoid examining yourself?
- Do you know what you really are — and aren't?
- Do you know what you want here in communion?

In communion you are reminded that Christ's body was broken and his blood was shed so that you might obtain the mercy of God. As you partake, remember his sacrifice for you. He gave us this reminder so that we might have the chance to remember his freely given mercy, no matter who we are.

- Racial Bias

MARCH 10

The device itself looks like a clip you would use to close a small bag of potato chips. It's a medical device that measures the oxygen in your bloodstream. It's a commonplace tool that medical professionals use for that purpose. It is known as the oximeter. It's clipped onto the end of your finger. It works by shining an infrared light through your finger to a sensor on the other side. Oxygen in your blood absorbs infrared light, so the brightness of that light on the other side tells how much oxygen is in your blood.
But did you know that the instrument could be racially biased? It turns out that melanin, the substance that turns your skin dark, also absorbs infrared light. The result is that if your skin is dark, some versions of this instrument may not correctly measure your oxygen level. Specifically, you may get a reading that says you're just fine when in fact you are oxygen deprived. This condition is called "occult hypoxia." Put simply, the instrument says you're doing fine — but you're running out of oxygen. As this is more common with those who are of black or brown skin, you can see why the phrase "racial bias" is used.

This is just one instance of what might be called a "false negative." The instrument says you don't have a problem, when in fact you do. Something similar can happen in your spiritual life also. You may think everything is fine when in fact you have a real problem. CS Lewis, in his classic *Screwtape Letters*, had his demon put it this way:
"The safest road to Hell is the gradual one - the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."
Because of this, we are given time during communion were which are to examine ourselves. The idea is to make sure that we don't get a false negative about our spiritual life.

Note please that this is not a group exercise. If you bow your head with everybody else, that's not sufficient. Look into your life and examine yourself. Don't bother with the sins of anyone else around you; don't brag to yourself about what sins you don't have. It's time to focus on what's wrong and what to do about it.

Why do we do this *during communion*? It is because you are about to handle the body and blood of Christ. These are sacred things and should be handled in a holy manner. The bread you take will represent his body; the cup, his blood. Prepare for it in a worthy manner by looking into your own life and seeing if there is something wrong. If so, plan your repentance and then partake.

- Separation

MARCH 17

Most of us are not cut out to be either monks or nuns. The idea of living in community where you clothes are prescribed, your days laid out for you and contact with the rest of the world is not encouraged — well, the line for volunteers is rather short. So it is when you hear a sermon on the subject of separation from the world we often think, "that doesn't really apply to me." But consider:

- The Old Testament repeatedly gives commandments to the ancient Jews that they are to dress differently, eat different things and follow certain rules of conduct which today seem rather fussy and strange. All of these were intended to give the Jew the idea that he was to be separate from all other people. Being Jewish in that time excluded a lot. This is an example for us.
- The New Testament gives us the same principle without the fussy laws. One particular instance comes to mind.

> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?
> (2 Corinthians 6:14 ESV)

Over and again the Christian is taught to be "in the world, not of the world." But how do we do this?

- The most observable matter by which we do this is probably what we don't do. If you have the reputation of never using the Lord's name in vain, or any other obscenity, it will be noticed when you walk in the room. You don't have to say anything; your coworkers will notice it quickly enough.
- Less visible, but perhaps more important, are the things we do. If you feed the hungry, visit the sick and those in prison and generally care for your neighbor with true Christian love, the light on the hill will still shine.
- Finally, there are the visible habits of the Christian worship. The

most noticeable of these is communion. If you knew nothing about it, the ritual would strike you is rather strange. You would want to know what this meant, and why the Christian did it.

Fortunately, the answer to that question is rather simple. First, it proclaims to the world that you believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. It is the central miracle of the faith, and we proclaim it every time we take communion. Second, it tells the world you believe in the atonement — that Christ's death was the sacrifice that paid for our sins and gave us access to God's forgiveness. Third, it proclaims that you personally have claimed that atonement, that forgiveness, as applying to you personally.

The picture in the ritual of communion is simple enough. You know that the bread represents the broken body of Christ, on the cross for you. The cup represents his blood, shed for the remission of your sins. Taken together, they say to the world "this man or woman belongs to Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

- Church Food

MARCH 24

One of the revolutions in behavior that has occurred in your author's lifetime is that men are no longer afraid to look into a cookbook. You may see this as either good, bad or innocuous, but it is a fact. Young men today know how to cook and are quite aware of the ingredients needed for a good recipe.

It is instructive to look at the ingredients used in communion. First, let us consider the bread:

- The main ingredient of the bread is wheat. In the original form the flour used was simply crushed wheat. You put it between two millstones and out came what passed for flour in those days. Note that it had to be crushed together, losing individuality but gaining usefulness. There's a parallel there in the church; we need to lose our egos, crush them, and then blend with all the others in the church.
- For the Passover the ancient Jew was taught to eat the meal with sandals on his feet, ready to move out. For this reason it is often called "hasty bread." Even today there is a place for recipes which are quick and easy to fix. This implied that there would be no yeast, and therefore no reason for the bread to rise. Yeast is often used as a symbol for sin in the Bible.
- This type of bread was often used to feed the poor — nutritious, but not particularly as well flavored and tasty as bread with yeast. The bread of poverty has its own particular style.

The wine used in communion has changed in its meaning as well. In the time when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, people would've seen some different meanings to it.

- One in particular would be that wine was a good antiseptic, containing a fair amount of alcohol. It would cleanse the wounds of life. Symbolically, it is there to cleanse the wounds we have from sin.
- It's also a good anesthetic, at least in that time. Sometimes the pain of sin is to be dealt with directly in communion because we cannot reconcile with someone who is already gone into the grave.

Like the wheat, the grapes must be crushed together before making wine.

The church is not a solo flight, nor a place for prestige. Rather, we are crushed together so that we might serve together.

As you partake this morning, begin by examining yourself. As much is possible, plan your repentance and reconciliation with others. Clean out the wounds of sin; except the ease given by the forgiveness of God, and come together with fellow Christians. The church serves; the church serves together; and "together" is always better when you join in.

- Fruits

MARCH 31

Among his many other duties, Roger was responsible for maintaining the bulletin board which the State of California required. This particular day he was posting a rather large piece of paper. One of the employees asked him what the new piece of paper was about. He replied that it was a revised version of the regulations concerning things like maternity leave and other aspects of pregnancy. One of the ladies present then asked what had changed. Roger paused, and then with a twinkle in his eye he told her, "they changed the phrase *pregnant women* to *pregnant persons*."

We have now progressed to the point where a person can simply state that they "identify" as female and are allowed to compete in women's athletics. Deciding what something is, now, is a very complicated process. It takes a biologist tell you whether or not a person is a woman.

Fortunately, things are much simpler for the Christian. In matters of the spiritual sort we have a simpler test. If you want to know if something in the church is genuine, you have only to follow Christ's instructions.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.
(Matthew 7:16-18 ESV)

Of course, this method takes some amount of time. Fruit, natural or spiritual, doesn't spring up in a moment. It takes time. But if you have the patience, the method works consistently.

What does this have to do with the Lord's Supper? Simply this: this is the method to use examining yourself. For example, you might ask yourself whether or not dissension and argument follow you everywhere you go in the church. If so, we suggest that you look at the

cause of this. Either you, or the rest of the entire congregation, are spreading dissension. Rather than that, you should be spreading the Fruit of the Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
(Galatians 5:22-23 ESV)

Is this what's growing in your life? If not, look inside yourself to and ask why. Examine yourself, and make plans to change accordingly.

- Altar of the Lord

April 7

Our church high school group had put together a musical production portraying certain parts of the Gospels. After performing it at our home church we repeated the performance at various neighboring churches. This was usually done on the Sunday evening. One such Sunday evening was particularly memorable. With six high school boys to help me I arrived early to set up the lights and sound. A most formidable obstacle soon faced us. In the middle of the platform there was a very large, very heavy communion table. It took all six of our lads to move it, and even with six it was a struggle.
We had it about halfway off stage when an elderly gentleman in coat and tie came puffing down the aisle in an obvious panic. "Stop! Stop! Stop!" We stopped. Coming up to us he pointed a finger heavenward and declaimed, "That is the ALTAR OF THE LORD! It may not be touched with human hands." Satisfied that he had done his best impersonation of Moses with the stone tablets, he turned on his heel as if to leave. Five steps later he paused; turned around again and pointed towards heaven and said, "Put it back."

How we were supposed to put it back without touching it with human hands remains a mystery. The gentleman left; we made sure he was gone before we picked it up and put it back. It was quite a nuisance in the performance.

Leaving aside the question of touching the communion table with human hands, we can look at this incident as instruction. No other piece of furniture in the ordinary church building could be described in the same way. The table on which the communion trays are placed is indeed an altar, for an altar is the place you bring a sacrifice. Christ is our Passover sacrifice for sin; the elements represent his body and blood and it is therefore fitting that they be placed on a table which is referred to as an altar. It meets the definition.

Such an altar serves as a reminder of the reverence with which communion

should be taken. It is not an interruption of the service, but the center point: Christ died for our sins. This is the reminder he implemented so that we would always remember that one central fact. He took the unleavened bread, blessed it, and said of it, "this is my body." He took the cup in similar manner and said of it, "this is my blood." We are told to examine ourselves before doing this. This is so that we can do it with a pure heart, with due reverence and the lasting memory of his sacrifice on the Cross. Honor your Lord and Savior by participating in the one simple act of worship he commanded. Do this in remembrance of Him.

- Invisible Lint

April 14

She plucked from my lapel the invisible strand of lint (the universal act of woman to proclaim ownership).

O. Henry

William Sidney Porter, better known to English students as "O. Henry," penned this line in the 19th century. The gesture is still, however, well known to every husband today. Sometimes the tiniest gestures contained within them meanings of great importance which only need to be read to be understood.

So it is with Communion. It seems a simple thing, but it proclaims two things about you of great importance: you claim Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord. Let's begin with the word, "Savior."

- By taking communion you proclaim his death, and that he died for the sins of mankind — every one of us.
- You proclaim that you are a sinner, by definition someone who needs the grace of God.
- You also tell the world that on the third day he rose from the grave, resurrected — just as we will be on the last day.

Incidentally, you also tell the world that you are an obedient Christian, for your Lord commanded that you take the Lord's Supper. This leads us to what you proclaim when you call him "Lord."

- You proclaim that you live under his grace, forgiving and being forgiven. Your life is not one of vengeance but of mercy.
- You tell the world that you have access to the throne of grace. The Almighty listens to your prayers, and acts.
- Finally, you tell the world that you have been granted the privilege of eternal life with Christ.

Taken just on its face, communion seems a small thing. It takes a very small portion of the time of our worship service, and an even smaller portion of the words spoken. But like that invisible piece of lint, it tells the world, "Jesus is mine, and I am His."

- Faith and Knowledge

April 21

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began
(Titus 1:1-2 ESV)

Paul, in this short book, begins by touching upon the two pillars of Christianity: faith and knowledge. Both of these are central to the primary hope of the Christian — the resurrection of the dead. A Christian has faith that this will happen based on his knowledge of the facts. This can best be seen at a Christian funeral: like other funerals, there is a casket and a body. But at the Christian funeral there is also hope. We speak openly of the resurrection of the dead as a fact in waiting.
And upon what facts do we base this belief?

- We base it upon the character of God, who does not — cannot — lie. He has promised it.
- We base it upon the unchanging nature of God, who promised it before time began. The atonement of Christ was planned well ahead of time. It is an eternal fact, giving eternal hope.

Communion is a reminder of these two facts. For in communion we acknowledge the death of Christ as our atoning sacrifice on the Cross. We are told to do this in remembrance of him.
It is also a reminder of the nature of Christ: perfectly man. The price of atonement required the incarnation, Christ becoming man. He suffered as we suffer; he died as all of us will die. He has "been there and done that."
But on the third day he rose from the grave, the first instance — "first fruits" — of the resurrection of the dead. At his return the graves will be opened the dead will step out, "and all flesh shall see it together." Hallelujah!

As you partake this morning, remember that the bread you take is a symbol of his body, broken for you as the suffering endured for your sins. Remember that the cup represents his blood; without blood, there is no remission for sins. The

atonement precedes the it resurrection; the bill is paid, the delivery is certain. So as you partake this morning do so in a worthy, solemn manner befitting the greatest hope of mankind.

- Galloping Gertie

April 28

Physics students, if they persist long enough, will eventually get to see a video of the destruction of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Known as "Galloping Gertie," the video shows a bridge that is totally distorted beyond anything its engineers ever imagined. It seems incredible that the force of the wind could possibly move a steel and concrete bridge that much. Had the bridge been designed a little bit differently, its destruction would not have happened. But the prevailing winds interacted with the bridge in a phenomenon known as "resonance." If conditions are just right, the wind continually increases the motion of the bridge until it ultimately fails. Resonance, in effect, amplifies the power being exerted.

We also use the word resonance in a spiritual sense. For example:

- Very commonly we tell someone that we can feel their pain, whether that pain is physical pain or mental. If we have been through the same experience, we resonate with the sufferer.
- Less often, perhaps, but sometimes more intensely we resonate with someone who has been dealt an injustice by life. If you ever asked yourself, "why did this happen to me?" You understand injustice dealt to someone else, because you've been through it. Your outrage is all the greater because of your experience.
- Sometimes the effect is positive. We can share the joy of someone who has triumphed over trouble. If you are the one who has climbed that hill first, how good it feels to gain the summit. It resonates with you, doesn't it?

Communion is meant to provoke resonance as well. It is a rare thing today for someone to experience crucifixion – but pain is the common lot of mankind. When you think of Christ on the cross, think of the greatest pain you've ever felt. His pain will then resonate with you.

It is well to remember that Christ suffered as the innocent one — the sinless man was sacrificed on our behalf. It is an intrinsically outrageous act. We can see how obvious this was by the reaction of Attila the Hun. When told the fact that the innocent one had suffered on his behalf, Attila reportedly replied "if I and my men had been there, they would not have dared!"

But there is victory in communion too. Christ went to the grave, but three days

later arose. In his resurrection he became the first fruits of the bodily resurrection of the dead. The triumph of righteousness should resonate with all Christians, especially in communion.

So I ask you this morning, as you partake, to let that feeling of resonance flow through you. Feel his pain as you partake of the bread and the cup. Since the injustice of the innocent one being sacrificed. Rejoice in the triumph of the resurrection. Share your heart with the Lord Jesus.

- Kid Books

MAY 5

With the possible exception of laundry detergent commercials, the most difficult form of English language writing is found in the story books for toddlers. As any parent can tell you, the kid's book is a little different:

- First, it is a very tactile object. It's made out of thick and heavy cardboard to handle the wear and tear. Inside there are patches of fur, or skin or other touchable substances. These must be touched every time you read that book. It's a child's first "touchy-feely" experience.
- You will read this book over and over again. It must be repeated word for word correctly, leaving out none of the sounds or sights. You are restocking the toddler's memory, and it must be done correctly.
- Not only do the good guys win — always — but they must solve their problems in the way they are presented. If the sheep don't like the goats, the sheep and the goats have to get it fixed. You can't introduce the good fairy in the last paragraph. The toddler's mind is a very tidy world.

It's easy. You just write something that is extremely simple and yet quite profound. It's not *Moby Dick*, but it might be *Maybe Richard.*

Communion, being a ritual designed for all ages and all cultures, shares some of these characteristics.

- It is a tactile experience. You see and feel the bread and the cup. Depending upon your denomination you may touch with your hands or even share a common cup. It is not an exercise of the imagination but a touchable reality.
- For most denominations it is a regular weekly experience. It is repeated so that you will not forget. It symbolizes the most important facts of Christianity, the things you should remember.
- It is the ultimate story of right and wrong. You know who the hero is going into the story; you know his triumph over the worst of enemies. It tells you that the good guys win in the end.

So then, let us tell a story. Jesus, the Christ, is our atonement sacrifice who takes away the sin of the world. He is as tangible as the bread and the cup. He went to the cross, bled and died. He was buried in a borrowed tomb. On the third day he rose from the grave. He is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

So, this morning, as you partake, listen with your mind's ear to the story. The bread his body; the cup, his blood. Taken together, they are your salvation — the ultimate happy ending.

- Love of God

MAY 12

Romans 5:6-8

Sometimes it is good to remember the overwhelming details of the atonement which Christ accomplished at the Cross.

We may begin with the word WHO. Just exactly who was it that was sacrificed on the cross?

- We must begin by remembering that this is God in the flesh — the incarnation of the great "I Am" of the Old Testament.
- We may also recall that he is the creator of all things, the great artist of the universe. Our reality is his by right of creation.
- He is also the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will one day put all his enemies under his feet, including death.

Then we may recall that he did not just come as a teacher to instruct us — He DIED for us.

- Despite his prayers to his Father, asking to have the cup taken from him, he went to his death. He could've left his disciples there and ascended into heaven at that point, but he chose his Father's will.
- His death — and he knew it — would be extremely painful and extremely humiliating, the death on the cross.
- The purpose of this death was to redeem us. It was not a sacrifice on behalf of the noble and righteous, but for sinners.

Yes, the purpose of the atonement was to redeem SINNERS.

- Some of those sinners were the people who were crucifying him. Of these, he said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."
- Not one of us is worthy of his sacrifice. Christ never made any attempt to sort out worthy sinners from unworthy sinners. He died for all.
- In so doing he obtained not only our pardon, but also our reconciliation with God the Father.

What appropriate response does the Christian have to this sacrifice?

- We should worship him with thanksgiving and praise!
- We should proclaim his death, burial and resurrection to others.

But both of these start with remembering what he did.

That's why we have communion; to remember what he did for us. "In remembrance of me take this cup." And what is it that we are to remember? The elements of communion tell us. We are to remember his body being broken for us as we partake of the bread. We are to remember his blood shed for us as we take the cup. We are to do this until he returns to judge the living and the dead. Remembrance looks back; communion also looks forward to his return. Ponder these things so that you may take this symbolic meal in a worthy manner.

- First Lessons

MAY 19

Luke 22:7-13

It is a curious fact. The preliminary directions given to Peter and John to prepare the Last Supper are quite remarkable. This is made all the more so by the fact that they are seldom if ever remarked upon. Consider these items:

- Peter and John are to go into the city and find somebody carrying a water jar. No name; no description; no location in the city — just a guy carrying a water jar.
- They are given no instructions on greeting this man. They are simply to follow him until he walks into a house. They still don't talk to him, but to the owner of the house. The man probably doesn't even know he's a signpost.
- Matthew's account tells us that they are to identify themselves as disciples of "the Teacher" who needs the room for the Passover. He introduces this statement by saying, "my time is at hand." Evidently the owner of the house has some idea of why Jesus is going to Jerusalem and what that phrase, "time is at hand", really means. It's clear that Peter and John don't know.
- Perhaps even more curious is the selection of Peter and John, two of the closest disciples that Jesus has. It emphasizes that even the inner circle of his disciples does not know what is going to happen.

So we have a combination of random chance (the man with the water jar) and careful preparation ("my time is at hand") providing geographic directions. Christ is master of the past and the future. At the very least his disciples should have understood this from the directions he is given them.

Think that through. This set of directions shows us that Christ has control over the tiniest of things as well as the "big picture" of the future. It is a very timely reminder, as the disciples are about to go through the experience of the crucifixion. All their hopes will be shattered; all their confidence destroyed, leaving them wondering, "what now?" Then came the morning of the resurrection, changing everything.

We are to take communion "in remembrance of him." Consider the experience

the disciples underwent: in three days time they went from absolute despair to glorious hope. You may look at the world today and conclude that there is no way that the church can triumph. Just remember: Christ's disciples have been down this path before. You will take the bread as the symbol of his body; the cup as a symbol of his blood. In so doing you remember the sacrifice he made for our atonement. Also, then, remember the hope that came with the resurrection. Someday our Lord will return to judge the living and the dead — taking his children home to be with him forever. Communion is not a celebration of despair, but of hope.

- Priestly Blessing

MAY 26

Numbers 6:22-27

Many of you have heard this blessing used in the past. You might be surprised that it comes from the Book of Numbers, which usually is associated with long lists of how many people were in what tribe. Let's take a look at the blessing itself:

> The LORD bless you and keep you;
> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

It sometimes puzzles the evangelical Christian to find a God prescribes a certain amount of formality to his ceremony. It is a way of teaching the importance of the truth. Why this particular combination of words?

Who Old Testament

Designed for Aaron and his sons, the high priests, it begins with a general statement of blessing. Considering that the other option is "smiting" we can understand the beginning. But notice that is starts also with "keep you." The blessing is not just general blessing but also the idea that God will protect you and let you keep the blessings that he gives to you. This way you can build blessing upon blessing, which should yield thanksgiving upon thanksgiving all your lifelong.

Such things might come from an impersonal God; they actually come from the God whose face shines upon you. As the Beatitudes put it, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Your relationship with God should be such that you can picture his face beaming in your direction. Build on that relationship and go to the next step: that God might be gracious to you. Every little "oops" has its consequences, but a gracious God brings blessing out of all those little things. Your relationship should be so good that God "lifts his countenance" upon you. Picture yourself going into a meeting of people of high position in your company. Suddenly the president of the company looks at you and says, "aha, there you are! Come on up here." That kind of recognition — that the God of the universe knows you by name and called you to be his. Finally, your relationship with God is

so tight that he gives you peace. Peace in your self; peace with your family; peace with others around you and peace with God himself.

Now ***that*** is a blessing!

Christ Our High Priest

The Old Testament is very often a precursor of the New Testament. We can see Christ as our high priest in this benediction as well.

The Lord bless you… — give us this day our daily bread.
… And keep you… — Deliver us from evil.
The Lord make his face to shine upon you… — He knows my name.
… And be gracious to you… — Forgive us our trespasses.
The Lord lift his countenance upon you… — Well done, good and faithful servant
… And give you peace… — Christ is our peace, reconciling us at the Cross.

As we partake of the cup and the loaf this morning, we remember the price paid for our reconciliation. But not just reconciliation; a complete change in our relationship with God. It is a relationship where mercy triumphs over judgment because of the price paid the Cross. The joy of relationship with God in which he smiles upon us and continues to forgive us is the greatest of treasures. Someday he will return to judge the living and the dead. You will be our peace then as he is now. In this simple ceremony we proclaim that truth until he returns.

- Xerox Tie

JUNE 2

John 13:1-17

Perhaps you haven't observed this, but a Xerox repairman has a minor ritual to attend to before working on a copier. In addition to laying out some protective covers, he will usually remove his tie. This, it would seem, is a sign of cleanliness. After all, ties usually have to be dry cleaned and you don't want to get toner on them. The real reason is different; it's a safety measure. Copiers have rollers to feed paper, and they will eat your tie just as easily. If the tie is still attached it will eat the technician as well. It's one of those little hidden things that the technicians know very well, but never convey to their customers. It's similar to the customs that we see here in this passage of the Gospel of John. It's not obvious why anyone would want their feet washed at dinner.
The reason is that, if you've gone to a public bath — common at the time — you walked home in your sandals and got your feet dirty. So you needed them cleaned. The job usually fell to the lowest ranking servant in the house.

The curious thing in this incident is that Jesus has never done this before. It's clear from Peter's reaction but this is something new. It doesn't seem quite proper to him. Which raises the question: why did Jesus wait until the Last Supper to do this? Why didn't he make this a practice from the beginning of his ministry? I submit there are three good reasons.

- The disciples have recently been bickering about who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Because Jesus loves them, he is teaching this important lesson in humility at a time when they cannot miss the significance.
- These same disciples will become important people in the early church. They need to realize that importance and leadership in the church mean service and humility in the one who serves.
- There is also the matter of Judas Iscariot. Is he to be left without a final chance to repent?

There is also a lesson for us here which is pertinent at communion. Christians sometimes come to the conclusion that they got baptized too early. There was a movement in the early church to be baptized just before death, so that you would commit no sin between baptism and death. Actually,. Jesus is showing us here

what to do about our sins which we commit after we are baptized. As with baptism, the cleansing power is with Christ, not within us. So how do we invoke that cleansing?

It is done as you prepare for communion, though not limited to that time. Take the following steps.

- Begin by examining yourself in deep honesty. When you see something that needs to be corrected, you then…
- Ask Christ for his forgiveness for your sins. Ask him to apply his cleansing to your soul. Be prepared for him to take action over a long term if need be. His objective is not just the forgiveness of your sin, but the prevention of its recurrence.
- Give thought to making amends to those whom you may have sinned against. It is likely enough that they have also sinned against you, so look for reconciliation.

Having done these things, partake. As you lift the bread, remember that it represents his body, broken for your forgiveness. As you take the cup, remember that it represents his blood, given for the cleansing of your sins. Do this, in a worthy manner.

- Five Smooth Stones

JUNE 9

First Samuel 17:40

It remains one of the great mysteries of the Bible. David, on his way to meet Goliath, stops to pick up five smooth stones out of the brook. The mystery? Why five stones? Why not just one? After all, that was all that would take. So why five?

- A large number of authors have declaimed on the numeric value of five having some great significance in the Hebrew language. This explanation would be a bit more impressive if they all agreed on what that significance is.
- Many authors just take advantage of the number five to put forward a five point sermon. They never explain what the connection is with David's stones — but it is a very flexible approach.
- Others make various connections into the prophetic literature, particularly Revelation. A computer search for the word "five" will yield about 170 verses, many of which occur in prophetic literature.

There are, of course, a few more mundane possibilities.

- Perhaps it's just this: maybe God didn't tell him he needed only one stone. Given the results, you can see why David didn't complain of this oversight.
- David has used the sling and stone before. He has a good deal of experience with them, evidently. Maybe it was simply just good judgment.
- Maybe the bag would only hold the five stones. We have to allow for a small bag, I suppose.

So what does this have to do with communion? It's very simple: I'm going to give you five smooth stones — of the mental variety — to remember. Here are five things that you should get out of communion anytime you partake.

- *Bread.* You should remember that the bread represents the body of Christ, nailed to the cross for your sins.
- *Cup.* You should remember that the cup represents his blood, which is given for the forgiveness of your sins.
- *Atonement.* You should remember that Christ is the Lamb of God who

takes away the sins of the whole world. Anyone who accepts Christ is forgiven and — more than forgiven — reconciled to God the Father.

- *Resurrection.* You should remember that Christ rose again on the third day in bodily form, victorious over the great enemy of mankind — death.
- *Coming again.* You should look forward to the return of Jesus Christ and the great judgment of the world, including your own resurrection. We hope each of you hear from him, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

- Party Wine

JUNE 16

John 2

> There is a recurring suspicion that Jesus of Nazareth might just have been one of the great party animals of all time. Certainly his opponents, the Pharisees, frequently accused him of being a sinner — a winebibber and a glutton. So it might be well to state just how Jesus viewed wine. We find the story in the second chapter of the Gospel of John, when Jesus turned water into wine the wedding feast at Cana.
>
> - Please note first that the wine was excellent. It's quite clear that Jesus was prodded into doing this miracle by his mother. There is no sense of petulance here, of Jesus making cheap wine at the end of a feast. Rather, it's the good stuff.
> - Somehat less commented upon, but of great importance to the partygoers, is the quantity of wine which Jesus made. Those stone jars held at least 20 gallons apiece.
> - Most interesting of all is the fact that these are *sacred* jars. The water in them is used for ceremonial washing of hands. I leave it to the reader the problem of determining whether or not those who consumed the wine became holy or wholly drunk.

What does show here is Christ's superiority. Frequently, when accused by the Pharisees, Christ's response is simply that as long as he is around the rules do not apply. He often uses the analogy of the bridegroom being present.
This can be seen to be of great importance. We are told that the church is the bride of Christ, which makes Christ the bridegroom of the church. The union of our Lord and his church is therefore a happy and joyous one but it also is a forerunner of what is to come. Perhaps the divine style was showing through here at the wedding, looking forward to the marriage supper of the wedding of the Lamb. Details are sparse, as befits prophecy, but the divine style is well known. The wine will flow in rivers, it will be excellent wine and the party will be wonderful.

Communion looks forward to that feast. It was no accident that Christ chose wine to be the symbol of his blood, for ultimately it will bring joy to all those who have

accepted him as Lord and Savior. We are to remember his sacrifice but also to look forward to his coming again. Communion looks back to the cross, but also looks forward to the second coming of Christ. That day will be a terror to some, but the redeemed will know their Savior has come.

Indeed, our Lord extends this metaphor to the point where he commands that we go out and round up all the stray people we can, bringing them into his church so that they might share the marriage supper of the Lamb — and be blessed with eternal salvation. The cup and the bread look back to his sacrifice, but also inspire us to go forward and bring salvation to all we can.

- Absalom

JUNE 23

2nd Samuel 18:33

One of the more unpleasant stories in the historical books of the Old Testament is that of Absalom, the son of King David. You may recall that he went out of his way to foment a rebellion against David, with the object of having himself installed as the new king. This eventually wound up costing 20,000 lives. A measure of how much Absalom despised his father may be found in how Absalom treated his father's concubines.
David had to leave the palace on very short notice when Absalom's revolt started. To see to the housekeeping while he was gone, he left 10 concubines in the palace to take care of the sweeping up. Absalom went to the trouble of erecting a tent on the palace roof, in plain sight of everyone in Jerusalem, and one by one took those concubines into the tent and had sex with them. It was a deliberate offense, designed to make Absalom a stench in David's nostrils, as the expression would be used then. It was a most deliberate, grave insult.

But see how David reacted to it. He gave instructions to his army to be careful not to harm Absalom, but treat him gently for David's sake. This did not sit too well with his army commander. When he had the opportunity, he put three javelins into Absalom. When David got the news, here was his reaction:

> And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"
> (2 Samuel 18:33 ESV)

You might think that after all that Absalom had done, David would feel triumphant at his death. Absalom's words and actions were designed to produce hatred in David; they had the opposite effect, producing love. Hatred gives rise to triumphant vengeance; love gives rise to grief. Here we can see David's love for his child.

The Scripture tells us that David was a man after God's own heart, and this episode can give us a look into God's heart. As David would have preferred to die in the place of Absalom, so our Lord Jesus chose to die in our place. Quite literally, he died for you and me. We commemorate this fact in communion this morning. The bread represents his body; the cup, his blood. We are told to do this in remembrance of him.

The existence of communion is a reminder that the grace of God is greater than all our sin. You have never gone too far; you are never into deep. The love of God surpasses all that we could possibly do. In a small way we see it here with David; it is an example of what love does. The greatest example of love was given to us at the cross. Remember the great and deep love of God for you and for me as you partake this morning.

- If It Ain't Broke

JUNE 30

Acts 11:19-30

Stories about our troubles tend to take a lot of words; stories of success are much more simple. This is a success story.
Let's review the history. A persecution had broken out in Jerusalem against the church, and many Christians left the city. A goodly number migrated to Antioch, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire. (A parallel in our time might be persecution in New York City, with the migration to Chicago.) Some of those who migrated preached the gospel to the Greek citizens of Antioch. This perturbed the church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to investigate.

Barnabas' reaction to the situation shows his good sense.

- He saw the grace of God in action. People were being saved; in the process people were being given the forgiveness of God.
- He therefore counseled the church at Antioch to continue to do what they had been doing; to stay faithful.
- To further their effort, he (and Saul) stayed for a year, assisting in the teaching of the church.
- This resulted ultimately in a gift to the church in Jerusalem to help alleviate the famine that was coming.

In other words, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

If by some act of God Barnabas were to appear in our church this morning, it would be most pleasing if he were to have the same reaction. It would be most obvious at this time of our service in communion. He should see the grace of God in action — Christians repenting as they examine themselves, seeking and finding God's forgiveness.
This would be a result of the faithful teaching of the church, proclaiming that Jesus saves. "We preach Christ, and him crucified." Christ our atoning sacrifice is the consistent message of the church.
Communion is the visual lesson we see each time we take it. In the bread we see the body of Christ; in the cup, his blood, shed for our sins. In obedience to his command we do this in remembrance of him. The church has done this for thousands of years. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

- Seating Squabble

July 7

Luke 14:7-11

It is apparent that in the matter of where people are supposed to sit at a banquet we have made great progress in the 2000 years since Jesus visited us. We now have place cards and round tables to settle disputes like this. But at the time, it seems that people jockeyed for position at a banquet. It seems rather silly today to think of enhancing your status by trying to move up a couple of places. Maybe the food was better in their time.

Early church history indicates that the Corinthians at least squabbled over who was going to sit and what place and who was going to eat what. Paul had rebuked him in this matter; it seems to have stuck. If you notice, communion has no seating priorities. Whatever pew you're in, you're in. Why is this so?

- First, I submit, it's because it's not our meal. It is the Lord's Supper, and he has prescribed the rules for it.
- Second, all of the guests are admitted sinners. Repentant sinners, to be sure, but nonetheless sinners who have accepted the grace of God.
- Indeed, a meal whose main feature is to highlight the grace of God would hardly be well served to have some sort of hierarchy of seats. The ground is level at the foot of the Cross.

"In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female but all are one in Christ Jesus." So of what use is a first-class ticket to communion at this church?

Just what does Jesus expect of you at communion?

- First, honesty. Look at yourself, know yourself and confess it — no holds barred.
- After self-examination, he expects genuine repentance. You may call upon his assistance to do this, but you have to honestly want to change.
- As at any other point in the service, he expects your worship to be sincere.

In the bread you see his body; in the cup, his blood — given so that you, the sinner, might obtain the grace of God and grow in it.

- Like a Trumpet

July 14

Isaiah 58:1-4

Being a prophet of God in the Old Testament days was not an easy job. If you notice Isaiah's instructions here, there are two rather nasty looking points:

- He was not to hold back, but rather let it rip.
- He was there to tell the house of Jacob their sins.

Why such a strident reminder? Because the leaders of Israel were giving everyone a good impression of being righteous. It was such a good impression they themselves believed it. Just to look at them, appearances would tell you:

- They are in the temple every day. Every day they seek the Lord.
- Appearances would show them to have clean hands, a righteous people.
- They loved to be in the presence of the Lord.
- You didn't see them neglecting the judgment of God.

So, from their point of view, convinced of their own righteousness, they asked God: "why aren't you listening?"

God's reply is simple: He points out the results of their worship. On the day that they are supposedly fasting, they seek their own pleasure. Worse yet, they will press their own workers. It's pretty much impossible to be humbly fasting and throwing a party at the same time.

It gets worse. The day of "fasting" is a day of quarreling and fistfights. God then asks the question: do you expect to behave like this and be heard in the courts of heaven? The question answers itself.

The Christian has a much lighter burden when it comes to ceremonial law than the ancient Jew did. There is only one recurring ritual; communion. It's bad enough when we sit there and ho-hum our way through communion. It's much worse when we think of ourselves as being wonderfully righteous because we take communion. This is the root cause of the command to examine yourself. It's a time to humble yourself before God.

Humility is basically a form of honesty; you acknowledge what God already

knows. It is the regular weekly maintenance of the human being for his spiritual welfare. Therefore, take an honest look into your life and see if there's some improvement to be made. Commit the problem to Him. Then, take the reminders of his body and his blood, given so that you might be forgiven that which you repent.

- Let There Be Light

JULY 21

On Christmas Day, 1642 there was born what is probably the greatest combination of mathematician, physicist, astronomer, alchemist and — to the surprise of many — theologian ever to walk the planet: Isaac Newton. Among his many contributions was a comprehensive theory of optics, the science of lights and lenses. The sharpness of the shadows he observed, and the lines between colors, convinced him the light was a particle phenomenon. There were little pulses of light, little particles running around the universe. It set in motion a path of discovery and debate.
It didn't take long for other physicists to decide that Newton was wrong. Through the end of the 19th century most engineers and physicists would have told you that light was a wave phenomenon. The matter seemed almost settled when the 20th century arrived with quantum mechanics. It now seen the light was both a wave and a particle phenomenon — a "wavicle", as one physicist put it.

The nature of light has puzzled man for many thousands of years. But its constant nature has made the subject for theology as well. As Paul put it to the Corinthians, "what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2nd Corinthians 6:14). You can mix white paint with black paint to get gray paint, but you cannot mix darkness with light. Some things never change.

When you partake of communion, you are declaring yourself to be on the side of light. You are saying that you have accepted the atonement of Christ, taking him this is as both Lord and Savior. You announce that you are, as Christ labeled us, "the light of the world." And therefore you will have no fellowship with darkness.

So examine yourself, and see if there is some area in your life which is not filled with light but is hidden away. If so, bring that to the Lord in repentant prayer; ask his forgiveness and his help. Then, take of the bread to remind yourself of his body broken for you. Take the cup, the emblem of his blood shed for your sins. Do this, in remembrance of Him, who laid down his life that you might walk in the fellowship of light.

- Barbecue

JULY 28

Saturday night in our neighborhood followed a pattern much loved by the children. The old man would drag out the barbecue, which was a signal for his children to invite their friends for hamburgers. He took great satisfaction in his recipe for hamburgers. It involved two different kinds of steak sauce, one particular brand of cheese and a number of other minor herb ingredients. The barbecue smoke trailing out of the cooker was the notice that dinner was about to be served. Two large trays for condiments accompanied this. Kids lined up for a burger deposited directly on the bun. Bouncing feet and happy smiles told the old man everything he needed to know about how good the burgers were.
The children who were invited were usually the same ones every week. It was a sign of the fact that you were "in" the group. It feels good to be in the group, particularly when the eating is that good. Getting a hamburger from that barbecue was a sign that you were among friends.

Have you ever had the feeling that Satan was standing over you, accusing you by saying, "how do you know you're a real Christian?" It can be a perturbing feeling. "Feeling" is the right way to express it; Satan is just planting doubt to see if it will grow. But in the same way the old man's hamburgers told the kids that they were welcome in his house, the Lord's supper tells you that you are welcome among his people. Most of us don't feel out of place taking the Lord's supper. If anything, it comes down to routine for us. If it feels comfortable and "just like last time" it probably means you are where you belong. Let that feeling counter the uncomfortable one Satan is trying to plant.

As you partake, remember that the cup represents his blood, shed for your sins. You are forgiven by the power of the blood of the Lamb. Remember that the bread represents his body, broken for you. Finally, remember that this meal will be replaced upon Christ's return with the great feast at which you will welcome all believers home.

- Redemption

August 4

and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
(Romans 3:24 ESV)

It is not a particularly common word in the New Testament; "redemption." One author (Robinson) gives us the Greek roots of this word:

Through the redemption (*dia tēs apolutrōseōs*). A releasing by ransom (*apo*, *lutrōsis* from *lutroō* and that from *lutron*, ransom). God did not set men right out of hand with nothing done about men's sins. We have the words of Jesus that he came to give his life a ransom (*lutron*) for many.

Despite Matthew 10:45, we do not usually associate the word ransom with our salvation. But the definition is rather clear; something must be done to pay for our sins, hence, the ransom. God could not, in justice, forgive us without paying for our sins as well as cleansing us. If he forgiveness without paying the price once we would certainly give Him opportunity to do it again.

Perhaps this is why we see so often the connection of "body and blood." You might want to look at it this way:

- Blood, in the Old Testament, is used for ceremonial cleansing. It yields purity in the believer.
- The body, however, symbolizes the total commitment of Christ to our salvation. You can get blood out of a human being without death; the Red Cross does it every day. But the entire body being committed is total commitment.

So it is that communion is composed of both elements. We take the bread which represents the body and the total commitment of Christ to our salvation. We take the cup which represents his blood, completely capable of forgetting any and all sins.
And what does Christ ask for in return? Only that you do it in remembrance of him, in a worthy manner. Examine yourself and bring your sins to him to be cleansed, knowing that he is totally committed to your salvation.

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness."

- Examine Yourself

August 11

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.
(Tit 2:11-15 NASB)

It sometimes seems an annoying habit. The speaker in a communion meditation exhorts you to examine yourself. You might wonder why. After all, it's a ceremony, a rite — why the self-examination? Paul, in this passage to his apprentice Titus, gives us a very good reasoning behind this.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

Communion tells the world that God has sent his grace to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, bringing salvation to all who will receive it. Those who have received it should reflect the grace of God, accepting his forgiveness. That requires repentance.

instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

As we have accepted this forgiveness, we are obliged to follow the instructions which come with it. Those instructions are not unreasonable; we are to live sensibly, righteously and in a godly manner. Occasionally we get off track; that requires repentance.

looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

We are to live in the hope of the resurrection. Communion will continue until our Lord returns to judge the living and the dead. We hope, each of us, to hear the

words, "well done, good and faithful servant." When we sin, it is necessary to return to our living hope. That requires repentance.

who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed

Christ gave his life to redeem us from every lawless deed — total forgiveness. Even the worst of sinners can be forgiven. That requires repentance.

and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

We are intended to be the people of Christ. We are the sheep of his pasture, the flock he cares for. He wants that flock to be his own possession, guided by no one else. What characteristic do these people have? They are zealous for good deeds. They are pure Christians; that requires repentance.

True repentance brings true forgiveness, a complete cleansing of the soul. Let me urge you today to examine yourself and bring your failings to your Lord for his forgiveness and correction. Then, as befits the people of God, seeing in the cup his blood and in the bread his body, given for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Partake, then, in a worthy manner.

- Monday

August 18

The date was April 25, 1976. The place: Dodger Stadium.

Two young men came out on the field carrying an American flag. They laid it on the ground and began to douse it with lighter fluid, preparing to ignite it. From outside the camera's perspective, the centerfielder — Rick Monday —dashed in and in full stride snatched the flag away from these men. As the crowd perceived what had just happened, they rose in a standing ovation.

When human beings want to say something of ultimate importance, they turn to symbolic language. A flag is not just a piece of colored cloth; a wedding ring is not simply a trinket on your finger. We use symbols to communicate that which cannot be fully communicated in words.

Often, it is not sufficient just to display the symbol; we must interact with it. This takes us from the symbol to the ritual. Wedding rings are bestowed at a wedding after being given a lifetime significance to the newly married couple. The ritual passes; the symbols remain.

Frequently, when constructing a ritual, people turned to the principle of *identification*. Something in the ritual says, "I belong…" The bride belongs to her husband; the groom to his bride. In marriage a new identity is created: the family.

Communion is a ritual in which we use that same principle. What is it that we identify with?

- First, we identify with Christ. In particular we identify with his atoning death on the cross, claiming that we are among those who have been saved by grace.
- Next, we identify with the church. This means both the local church with whom we take communion, and the church universal and triumphant — all Christians of all places at all times.

- Finally, it means that we identify (and look forward to) the return of Christ and his judgment. We expect to be the ones who to occupy the New Heaven and New Earth.

Communion is indeed a very important ritual. Let us do as we should: take it seriously. In the bread perceive his body; and the cup, his blood. It is of high importance, the Lord's Supper; we should treat it with the respect it deserves.

- Man of Sin

August 25

2nd Thessalonians 2

You can understand the problem fairly clearly. The Thessalonians had been sent a letter, ostensibly from St. Paul, that the Day of the Lord had already occurred. For those of you not too familiar with prophecy and the book of Revelation, that would mean that you had missed the resurrection of the dead, and your best chance to get to heaven. The letter was fraudulent, and Paul in his second letter to them takes the opportunity to explain a little bit more about the second coming of our Lord. In particular, he explains about the Man of Sin whose arrival precedes that of our Lord.

Without getting into a particular theory of Revelation, we can examine this from what Paul tells us here without picking a particular method. The Man of Sin has these characteristics.

- As of now, he is being restrained. There is a goodly amount of debate over what, in particular, is restraining him — but he is being held back.
- When he is released, he will oppose all known religious systems and take over in the temple of God (variously interpreted.)
- He will in some sense occupy the throne of God and be attributed counterfeit miracles.

The key factor in his appearances that he will take over the church from the inside. (There is a great deal of divergent thought on how all of this will work.)

For us, the key question is, "what do we do about this?" Are we supposed to leap tall buildings with a single bound, or ride out on a white horse yelling, "hi yo Silver?" Not really. Remember our salvation comes from the blood of Christ, the sanctification provided by God through the gospel. The triumph of God over this man of sin will be just that; the triumph of God. In the meanwhile we are to do this:

- We are to stand firm. Keep calm, don't panic and carry on.
- We are to hold to the tradition and teaching of the faith.

It's been a while since anyone told you to hold to the tradition, isn't it? The teaching of the Scriptures has not changed; the Good Book still tells us conduct and expectations for the Christian.

Communion exemplifies this. In communion we see Christ as our atonement sacrifice, his body and blood given for our salvation. We are receiving this not for our own merits, or our own work, but by the grace of God. We understand that Christ will return and we should be ready for that.

All this is drawn up in the symbolic picture of the body and blood of Christ, the bread and the cup we take it communion. It is our commitment to Christ, no matter what the Man of Sin does. When will this happen? Who knows. But we prepare today for what we know will arrive someday.

- Water Ski

SEPTEMBER 1

John 15:9-10

There are some stories which only come out at family gatherings. You know the type of stories they are; humorous, though not funny at the time they happened. A story that can be shared amongst the family in an atmosphere of laughter and love.

For example, there was the day I was supposed to learn how to waterski. I was 10 years old and my uncle had the finest looking inboard motor powerboat on the Ohio River — a mahogany masterpiece. He assured me that it would be no trouble at all to learn how to waterski; just hold onto the rope. So, with lifejacket in place and ready to go, I took my place behind the boat. The boat roared off with me behind — but not skiing. I was being dragged along at about 100 miles an hour (or so it seemed), swallowing most of the Ohio River as I went. When my relatives tell the story today, they always ask me how many fish I swallowed as I went. It took some time for the folks in the boat to realize I wasn't skiing, but eventually I was rescued from the river. You can only tell a story like that among loving relatives. One of the uses of a family is to laugh at our pain. It unites us as a family. But note, please, this has to be done in an atmosphere of love, not an atmosphere of ridicule. You don't share things like this with people who don't love you.

That's why Christ told us that we are the family of God. We are to be a community which shares love and pain with each other. As Christ told his disciples,

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

(John 15:9-10 ESV)

We see such a story in communion. It reminds us of the central message of the gospel; how God in the flesh, Jesus the Christ, came to be living among us and was crucified for our sins. Crucified — but the story has a happy ending. Three days later he rose from the grave, triumphant. Because of this our sins are forgiven and we are guaranteed salvation. It's a story to share with those who will learn to love the Lord Jesus.

Communion is the symbolic portrayal of that story. The bread symbolizes his body, hung on the cross for us. The cup portrays his blood. We share this story among his loving family. It is the greatest token of love ever given; Christ loves his church. It is only fitting and proper that we love him in return. As you partake this morning, remember his great love for you. Remember the sacrifice of his body and blood. Then remember to share his story with all you can.

- Wait for One Another

SEPTEMBER 8

First Corinthians 11:33

Every church congregation has had to face the problem of timeliness in its worship services. We prefer our services to move along well, without waiting. It may come as a surprise, therefore, to learn the Scriptures command us to wait during communion. Specifically, in his passage in First Corinthians on the subject of communion, Paul tells us this:

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another--
(1 Corinthians 11:33 ESV)

So one might ask, just exactly for whom should we be waiting?

- One very obvious group of people for whom we should wait are those who are physically handicapped. It would be most ungracious of us to prevent someone in a wheelchair from taking communion simply because he could not get to the front of the church in time. Such a discourtesy would be obvious, but the example points out that there are people who need a little more time for communion. The rest of us should wait for them.
- We might also need to wait for some of those who are young. Perhaps your memories of this have faded, but often the young find it difficult to face Christ so directly. It takes some time to work up the courage when you're new at it.
- Some of the members of this congregation might be facing the problem of a besetting sin. It's a very real problem to those who have it. The question comes into their mind, "should I take the body and blood of Christ when I know that sin has control of me?" The rest of the should give them time to work this through.
- Indeed, there are also those who will simply say, "can Christ forgive what I have done this week?" They need the time to seek out the forgiveness of the one who died for their sins.

One might take the attitude these things should be resolved before entering the church. But remember: not all of us are perfect people. We wait for each other for these reasons —

- First, to preserve the unity of the church. In a very real way communion defines who is in and who is out of the church. All those who have accepted Christ should be in.
- There is also value in making sure that no one feels "hurried" through communion. It is meant to be a meaningful experience, not something you just rush through to get done on time.
- Communion is the most common time in which a Christian experiences the forgiveness of Christ. Forgiveness is very precious; we should always take the time for it.

So as you partake of the body and blood of Christ this morning, be patient with those around you. You do not know what they may be thinking; you do not know what they may be going through. Give them the chance to meet their Lord and Savior in a truly meaningful way. Wait for one another.

- Assassination

SEPTEMBER 15

The assassination attempt on Donald Trump brings to mind an earlier attempted assassination of a presidential candidate. Teddy Roosevelt, running as the candidate of the Bull Moose party, was shot in the chest by one John Schrank on October 14, 1912. The bullet went through Roosevelt's glasses case and 50 pages of speech before winding up in his chest. An experienced hunter, Roosevelt knew that since he was not coughing up blood the bullet had not reached his lungs. He therefore stayed to give his speech and then went to the hospital. The doctors, after examining the x-rays, decided to leave the bullet where it was as it was more dangerous to remove it. Roosevelt carried the bullet in his chest for the rest of his life.

Lifetime bullet wounds are a rather rare phenomenon. Lifetime spiritual wounds unfortunately are much more common. They come in one of two flavors:

- There are our sins against our fellow man for which we have made no attempt to reconcile. If you have a running feud with someone else, and you simply will not attempt to clear it up, that's a lifetime spiritual wound.
- Then there's the opposite case: where someone has sinned against you — and you simply refuse to forgive. That too is a lifetime spiritual wound.

Where do we get the strength to overcome our own anger at our fellow man? Where do we get the courage to forgive? If we been wounded a long time, it's pretty obvious we don't get that strength from within ourselves. We must therefore take that strength from God. He commands both reconciliation and forgiveness; he will give you the strength to do both.

In communion we are reminded to examine ourselves. As we do, we should not overlook the ancient wounds. Bring them up before God and ask his assistance in dealing with them. Remember that every sin against us, and every sin we commit, is also a sin against God. His forgiveness is required. It is his plan that that forgiveness would be made available to us at the cross. The blood of Jesus will never lose its power.

So as you partake, remember that the blood of Christ, symbolized by the cup, was given for your forgiveness. The bread, symbolizing his body, tells you of the depth of that sacrifice. So, this morning, do not neglect old wounds. Rather, take him to the Great Physician for their healing. No matter how old the wound, it can be healed.

- On Base

SEPTEMBER 22

We are now approaching the time of year when major league baseball conducts its World Series. To get you ready for this, we have chosen a trivia question for you. If you're a batter, there are eight ways to get on first base. Name them.

It is the nature of the universe that some things have only one way to do them. Everybody wants to get to heaven just like every batter was to get on base. There are some interesting ways that have been thought up as to how to do this. For example:

- There is the guy who is convinced that because his name is registered on the roll of the church, he has paid his dues and is in the club.
- Then there's the Cosmic Jelly Bean Counter. He figures if he had licorice jellybeans — bad deeds — all he needs to do is get more jellybeans of, say, watermelon flavor. After all, God can count, can't He? If my good deeds outnumber my bad ones, I'm in the door.
- Then there are those with no particular theory who are convinced that they are good people, and good people go to heaven.

But listen to what the Lord Jesus says:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

(John 14:6 ESV)

He is the way because he has paid the price for our sins on the cross. By his atonement he has opened the pathway to heaven – the only pathway. Communion is the regular remembrance of this. We are instructed to do this in remembrance of Christ. The bread reminds us of his body broken for our sins; the cup tells us of his blood shed for us. It is a solemn occasion during which one should examine himself. Each of us must seek out the way, the truth and the life. As one great saint put it,

"Without the way, there is no going.

Without the truth, there is no knowing

Without the life, there is no living."

Oh, yes. How does one get on base? Here are the eight ways that it can be done.

1. Base hit
2.Walk
3. Hit by pitch
4. Fielder's choice
5. Reached on error
6. Dropped third strike
7. Catcher's interference
8. Fielder's obstruction

- Clovis

SEPTEMBER 29

The name of King Clovis the First is likely enough unfamiliar to you. That's not surprising; he lived about 1500 years ago. He is known as the first King of France, as he unified the tribes known as the Franks into what today is approximately modern France.

Late in his reign he converted to Christianity, in particular the Nicene variety of Christianity. His decision on which of the two versions of Christianity at the time (the other was Arianism) set the standard for what is today France. The theological point at issue was the nature of the Trinity; not coincidentally, your view agrees with his. As part of his conversion, he naturally received some instructions on the subject. When his teacher came to the point of telling him about the crucifixion, his reaction was noted at the time. The instructor told him that Christ was…

eventually, he was killed. Crucified…nailed on a cross of wood." Clovis came to his feet. He struggled to comprehend the injustice. His eyes shifted back and forth as he looked for meaning in the killing of this Jesus. Sacrifice was understandable, familiar, but only to a reasonable purpose. For a man to die there had to be more—an offense, a crime, or a kingdom to win. He assumed his most commanding posture. "If I and my men had been there, we would have avenged his death!"

Clovis had a typical viewpoint of a medieval king. There were only two reasons to execute a man. One was that he tried to take over the kingdom, and failed. The other was that he committed some sort of crime. How then, could the Romans have possibly executed Jesus? You see from his reaction that he was outraged at this violation of justice. It is the particular duty of monarchs to see to it that justice is done. Failure is not forgivable. "If I and my men had been there, we would have avenged his death!"

So new to Christianity, Clovis would have to learn that justice was done that day. Christ was performing the thing he was sent for: the Atonement. Nailed to that cruel cross, he paid for the sins of mankind — and therefore God's justice was satisfied. Justice was done; it just wasn't done to us. Christ paid the price of your sins and mine that day. Love triumphed over justice.

Communion is given to us as a form of remembrance of this most vital lesson. Yes, it is outrageous that Christ suffered on our behalf, but suffer he did. The least we can do is remember his suffering with gratitude. As you partake, remember that the bread represents his body nailed to that cross. The cup shows his blood, shed for the remission of our sins, in accordance with the law of God. The innocent one was sacrificed for the sake of the guilty. Let us remember that grace.

- Interlude

October 6

Daniel 7:13-14

It is a curious little interlude. Daniel's vision up to this point has been one of monsters in the sea, all horns and kings, all of which is given scholars of prophecy much to write about. In the middle of this great portrayal, he gives us a two verse interlude which all scholars agree is the Messiah being presented to God the Father. The person being presented to the Father is, all agree, the pre-incarnate Christ. There are three primary characteristics which are emphasized here:

- Glory. Whatever praise and honor there is in this scene, it belongs to the Messiah who is to come. He is worthy of all praise, and we see that briefly reflected here.
- Dominion. It is clear that he is to establish a kingdom and will have everlasting dominion over that kingdom.
- Power. Power such as is associated only with God Creator is given to him.

All these things are confirmed in other prophecies, including those in the New Testament. But there is one thing that is often overlooked here: the description which Daniel gives to the person walking in is Son Of Man. This person is a human being, Homo sapiens, one of us. A long hike, stony ground to sleep on and he wakes up with his feet sore and is back aching, just like us.

So why would he exchange the glories of heaven for a body with the back aching, feet hurting? His purpose is clear: he came to be the atonement sacrifice which takes away the sin of the world. That's the point of the Cross. His motivation is also clear: "God so loved the world…"

When he returns — and he promised that he will — he will show us that glory, dominion and power. Until that time he has commanded us to keep this ceremony known as communion, the Lord's Supper. He asks us to remember the sacrifice that he made so that we might be taken home to God as children in his kingdom. Each and every time you do this you proclaim his suffering and death,

and his coming again. The cup represents his blood, the bread, his body. These were sacrificed for you. He asks you to remember.

- He asks you to remember his pain, suffering and death, driven by God's love.
- He asks you to remember that he is coming again at which time he will establish his dominion and power, an everlasting kingdom.
- He asked that you remember that he is coming to judge the living and the dead, as judge to the evil and rewarder to the righteous.

At the end of all days the Creator will set up his everlasting kingdom. By taking communion you proclaim yourself to be a citizen of that realm.

- Cohort

October 13

Matthew 27:27

The cohort described in Matthew here probably numbered between 400 and 600 men — 1/10 of a Roman legion. An event such as the crucifixion, particularly with the opportunities to mock the victim, would have been considered a form of free entertainment. Soldiers are encouraged to laugh at his victims, so he will not sympathize too much with his enemies in combat. Successful combat is usually one in which your side was much more capable than their side — and the ability to instantly demonize your enemy is a valued skill.

Consider well, however, the effect that this treatment has on the mind of the victim. It's not that you're the butt of the joke; it's that you're the butt of the joke and there's no escape from it. It is an extremely painful experience, mentally. It's designed to be that way.

See what this does to the Christian experience. "Love thy neighbor" — but laugh at them whenever you can. A biting sneer seldom conveys Christian love. Indeed, it is only recently in human history that capital punishment ceased being viewed as a form of innocent entertainment for the populace. Hangings and other executions were carried out in public not only because they warned you against committing the same crime, but they were entertaining. They were also emotionally devastating to the person being executed. That's what makes it fun. Indeed, the phenomenon seems to increase when there are crowds of people. It makes you honestly wonder what you would've done had you been in the cohort that day.

In communion we remember the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross. Please do not forget that this includes several hours of torment before the actual execution takes place. What may surprise you most at first reading is this:

Christ went through this voluntarily. He did not have to do this. But as he said to his Father, "not my will, but thy will be done." The crucifixion was not a snapshot of an execution, but a long drawn out movie of suffering and final death.

We remember this in communion. You take the bread, which represents his body bruised, battered and bleeding. You take the cup, which represents his blood, necessary for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. As you do, remember that Christ was fully human as well as fully God. He suffered mentally to immense agony.

Why? "For God so loved the world…"

- Arise, Shine

October 20

Isaiah 60:1

In what is often referred to as the "fifth gospel" — the book of Isaiah – we find the church commanded as follows.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

(Isaiah 60:1 ESV)

It is prophetic, of course. Isaiah is instructing the church in what to do when her Savior arrives. It is a simple pair of commands.

- "Arise" — start by getting up and getting to work. Stand on the promises, but don't sit on the premises.
- "Shine" — the word in the original Hebrew means to reflect light. It is the command to the Christian to reflect the light of the world so that all may see it.

Why? Because the day has arrived. Christ inserts himself into time and space as a baby in Bethlehem. Eventually Christ will tell his disciples that He is the light of the world (John 8:12) but that we also are the light of the world (Matthew 5:4).

And what is this light? It is the Glory of God. We take this to be the results of the atonement of Christ, who gave himself for the sins of the world. This leads, in the normal course of discipleship, to the transformation of the Christian. We go from being an admirer of Christ to an imitator, one who follows Christ's principles and teachings as the first rule of his life.

Communion plays a part of this. It is a symbolic picture of Christ's atonement sacrifice, and therefore reflect the glory of God. By remembering our Lord's sacrifice on the cross, seen in the bread as his body, in the cup as his blood, our minds dwell for a moment on the

supreme event in history. We turn our eyes to the light; no wonder we reflect his light and shine.

- Born Blind

October 27

John 9:1 – 3

> It may just have been a question of idle curiosity to the disciples. The common belief of the time was, if you were born blind then either you or your parents were great sinners. It's an interesting question; did the man sin before he was born? Or was it that his parents were great sinners and the penalty for that sin was visited upon the baby? You can see the intellectual appeal of the question. It makes a difference to the man born blind, too. If his parents sinned, then he is probably socially acceptable in polite society. If he's the sinner, he would be treated as an outcast. So it's not a question of trivial importance.
>
> Jesus surprises them what the answer: neither. This man was born blind so that you might see. See what? The glory of God. But suppose the disciples were right in their assumptions, specifically that the man himself was the sinner. The man is blind; he is unable to defend himself against such an accusation – at least if he wants to be a continued success as a beggar.
>
> It may surprise you, but churches face the same decision. What do you do when a known sinner comes into your congregation? There seem to be about three methods:
>
> - Some churches simply direct the man to the back row of the church, with instructions to keep his mouth shut. After all, we wouldn't want him polluting the other members of the congregation with his evil influence.
> - Especially if there's more than one of them, they may have a special group just for such sinners. It's convenient if you have this group meet on some other day than Sunday.
> - "Glad to see you — now find another church."

The test for most congregations comes in communion. You see, there are no instructions in the Scripture as to who should or should not take communion based on their previous sins. The outrageous sinner is not prohibited, but welcome like all others. There is no sense of "acceptable" or "nonacceptable" sinner. This conflicts with the notion that many people have that there are socially acceptable sins. But, as the old saying goes, "the ground is level at the

foot of the Cross." All of us are sinners; all of us need the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

That's what we remember at communion: the atonement. We remember the sacrifice Christ made. We remember his body being broken for us in the bread; we remember his bloodshed for us in the cup. We do this after proper reflection and self-examination. We take it seriously with regard to judging ourselves and refrain from judging others. We don't care if it was his parents or he himself was a sinner before he was born; Christ tells us this is for the glory of God. Therefore, make no judgment of those around you but praise God for this most superb showing of God's glory.

- Fisher

NOVEMBER 3

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

(Romans 7:4-6 ESV)

Through the end of the 1984 model year, almost all General Motors cars were advertised with a carrier nameplate that read, "Body by Fisher." If you grew up in the 1950s this was something of a puzzle. It was never explained why this was an advantage for General Motors, or why it should be desirable. No explanation was given as to why you would prefer "Body by Fisher" as opposed to "Body by Someone Else."

Paul, in this passage, distinguishes two kinds of spiritual bodies. The first of these is the Body by Law. This applies to those who had adopted the ancient Jewish code of law, and by extension any code of man-made law. The results are rather predictable: we are sinners, and we are going to violate the code fairly quickly. Things go downhill from there. The ultimate end of a man-made code is death. By contrast, the body by Christ gives life. The Holy Spirit indwells us and therefore we shall live. Unlike Body by Fisher, we have a good explanation why we would prefer one over the other.

Communion is a reminder of the choice we have made. It reminds us of the price paid to get the Body by Christ. The bread reminds us of his body hung on the cross and broken for us. The cup reminds us of the forgiveness of sins, purchased by his blood. As you partake this morning, contemplate what has been given to you as a free gift, by grace. You are forgiven, you are a child of God who will live with Christ forever when he raises you from the grave. Commemorate these things.

Almost everybody got "Body by Fisher." There was one exception: the Chevrolet Corvette got "Body by Chevrolet." Most human beings get "Body like Law." Those who follow Christ get the better body — one that lasts perfectly forever.

- God of Peace

NOVEMBER 10

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21 ESV)

Peace is often sought, but not achieved. Peace is not simply the absence of conflict, but the resolution of conflict. It is often desired but seldom fully contained in human relations. It always seems just out of reach. It is often prevented by a deadlock of wills; neither side is willing to make the first move towards reconciliation. It's a fact: the reconciler pays the bigger price. We want the other person to make the first move. Peace is also rather fragile. If the underlying causes are not corrected, the peace is really an armistice and will not last.

Paul, or whoever wrote the book of Hebrews, briefly describes for us here the "God of peace." He mentions these things:

- "The blood of the covenant." This of course refers to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. His bloodshed established the forgiveness of our sins. God moved first and reconciled us, because we were helpless and could not reconcile ourselves to him.
- He did not just make peace with us and then leave us on our own. No, he intends to equip us with everything we need for every good work. It is not sufficient to make peace if you are not willing to keep the peace.
- He provides us with the Holy Spirit as our guide, so that we might know what the will of God is and therefore do what is right.

We see this reflected in communion.

- In the cup we portray the blood of Christ, which is the blood of the covenant. As we partake, we remember his sacrifice which established the covenant between us and God the Father by which we have peace.
- In the bread we portrayed the body of Christ. It reminds us that Christ was in fact incarnate in the flesh, a human being just like us. He knows what we are capable of and where we must have his help, for he walked as one of us.

So as you partake this morning, remember your Savior on the cross, his sacrifice for you. Then go in peace with God, ready to do his will.

- Forsaken

November 17

Many Christians reach the mistaken conclusion that, since Jesus was in fact the son of God, God in the flesh, he didn't really suffer on the cross. We sometimes forget that Christ was not only Son of God, he was also Son of Man. As such, he was subject to the same doubts and fears as any other human being would be. We can see this in his opening cry, "why have you forsaken me?" We will take it one word at a time.

- **Why**. It is the question that Job asks over and over again: why? He acknowledges the justice of God, but asks to have it pointed out where he sinned. Frustratingly, God never tells Job "why." The Son Of Man asks the same question, starting from a position of innocence. You can see the intensity of the frustration.
- **Have**. Note the past tense. Jesus is not arguing with God to see if he can get things reversed; he accepts that God's judgment is final — which is of no relief to his mind.
- **You**. Of all the beings in the universe to putthe innocent one to the punishment of the guilty, surely the least likely is the author of justice itself. Perhaps as Son of Man he cannot see himself being offered as a guilt offering or sin offering. But that is exactly what the ruler of the universe is doing.
- **Forsaken**. In English, that word carries with it the connotation of completely abandoning someone. It's like being marooned on a desert island far away from the shipping lanes. It means that the person forsaking you intends to give you no hope.
- **Me**. To whom is all this happening? To the innocent Son of Man, the one without sin who is now being offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. If ever there was someone who didn't deserve it, Jesus is that man.

If ever there was agony in the soul, this is it. Jesus went through all of this — for us! It is by his stripes we are healed. This is the price of grace; it is expensive beyond measure. So as you hold the bread, his body, and the cup, his blood, remember it wasn't just these two that Jesus experienced. Every bit of his humanity was nailed to that cross. Therefore, as you eat the bread and drink the

cup, and do this in remembrance of his sacrifice and his agony. No greater love has ever been shown.

- More Blessed

November 24

In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

(Acts 20:35 ESV)

Just to give you the context of this verse, Paul has met the elders from Ephesus and is giving them his farewell set of instructions. He knows that he will never see them again. He wants to leave them with one final set of good things to do all the time. The curious thing about this verse is the quotation from the Lord Jesus. The phrase, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," is not found in any of the Gospels. It is likely one of many phrases that Christ said that never got written down in the Gospels. Interestingly, we seldom quote the first part of this verse about helping the weak. That is the context in which Paul gave it to us.

The ultimate example of helping the weak is, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Look at it this way:

- What greater gift could he have given to us than the sacrifice of his life on the cross?
- What greater honor could God the father have given him the name that is above all names? So you see that he is blessed in his giving to us.
- Note too just exactly who the week are in this instance: us.

So it is we see that our Lord sets the example for us in all good things.

Communion is the time in our worship when we remember this sacrifice. We recall that the bread represents his body given for us on the cross. The cup represents his blood, shed for the forgiveness of our sins. The blessing for us is great beyond measure; blessing for Christ even greater than that.

Therefore, having so great an example in front of us, as you go through this coming week remember the weak and the poor. Be a blessing to them, knowing that this returns to you in a blessing from God that is even greater.

- Set You Free

DECEMBER 1

and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

(John 8:32 ESV)

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

(John 8:36 ESV)

So which is it? Is the knowledge of the truth that sets you free from sin, or knowing the Son? As is often the case, it seems to be both. So what is the core of this truth?

- Jesus of Nazareth is God in the flesh, the incarnate Word.
- He came with the express purpose of becoming our Passover sacrifice, taking away the sins of the world.
- He died, was buried but rose again on the third day.
- He is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

It is not sufficient to have an intellectual faith in these items; you must be in a living relationship with the Son. It is by his power and his will that you are set free from sin and given eternal life.

Communion is the regular reminder of these facts and this power. In the bread we find the body of Christ, broken for us. In the cup, his blood, shed for our sins. He is our Passover Lamb of God. We proclaim this truth every time we take communion.

As such, this is no mere formality. It requires you disciplined attention to what you are saying and doing. Therefore, please examine yourself before you partake so that you may partake in a worthy manner. In so doing, you proclaim his death

as our sacrifice for sins, until he comes again. Look back to the crucifixion; look now at your life in Christ; look ahead to his return.

- Wash the Feet

DECEMBER 8

John 13:1-17

As a teacher, Christ knew that the most important concepts in human thought are often best expressed by a symbolic approach. This approach often precludes expository preaching, so you hear very little about it. It is, however, an important teaching technique that he used. Nowhere did you use this to such great effect as on the night of the Last Supper. He begins the evening by dressing himself like the lowest servant in the house, getting a towel in the basin and without a word washing the feet of his disciples. It could have been a mime performance; not until he was done did he say a word. But the picture he was painting was very clear. In this one action he proclaims to the church that there will be no position given which precludes service. The church is led by servant leaders. But this is just the beginning; the highest of man has done the lowliest of things to the servants. The picture will become even more clear after the crucifixion.

Later in the evening Christ will give his high priestly prayer, in which one of the things he asks for is the unity of the church. It's hard to have a church that is united if people think they can't do this or should do that — it's too undignified for them. He wants us to be one, as he and the father are one. In this simple gesture he has portrayed that leadership. Here we have the greatest man of all time, quite literally God in the flesh — Jehovah down from the mountain walking among us as a man. And to what end? That he will very shortly go to his crucifixion and become the Passover sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. The greatest sacrificing himself for the service of the least. That sacrifice unites us with him, and each other.

Communion is another portrayal, symbolically, of the events that were about to happen. Jesus, the God man, divinity incarnate has come for the purpose of being

our Passover sacrifice. He will suffer; he will bleed and he will die for the purpose of reconciling us to God Almighty. If the greatest among us can do that, then who among us can throw up a barrier to the unity of the church by saying, "I shouldn't have to do that."

As you partake this morning, please notice the sameness of your communion with everyone else. You take the same cup; you eat the same bread. Symbolically you are united with all the other Christians in this room, and also with those all around the world. As you partake, remember the price that was paid for this — in the glory that is given to Christ because of it. He whose name is above all names has invited you to his ceremonial feast. Play your part; show the world that you are united with the church and with Christ. As you partake, examine yourself and then partake in a worthy, solemn manner.

- Reconciliation

DECEMBER 15

Ezra 6:22

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are among the lesser read historical books of the Bible. They recount the history of Israel after it had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians. You will recall that Israel and Judah were deported from their homeland as slaves by Nebuchadnezzar. As prophesied, they remained in that land for 6o years, and then were allowed to return.

It's interesting to see how the hearts of the various Assyrian kings were influenced, even to the point of returning the golden treasures of Solomon's Temple. The Jews return with the intention of rebuilding the temple, but soon ran into opposition from the local residents. The story of how they overcame this is well worth your time to read. It's a good example of the nation's faith in action.

Eventually, the rebuilding of the temple was completed. The people celebrated by celebrating the Passover. It's not generally recognized, but Passover was a seven day festival in which you eat only unleavened bread — no doughnuts. Ezra records their reaction:

And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

(Ezra 6:22 ESV)

(Note the word joy in the Scripture here). In Old Testament times, the temple would've been a necessity to mark the reconciliation of God and man. Reconciliation is a process that we would understand fairly clearly:

- It begins with self-examination, looking at yourself and seeing what the problem is.
- Following that, you must take action. That's called repentance.
- If you're dealing with God, the next step is complete restoration of the relationship — reconciliation.

Communion portrays for us the price tag of reconciliation. As Paul puts it,

… through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

(Colossians 1:20-22 ESV)

We see in this method Christ's reconciliation of mankind to God required his physical body — the incarnation. The Christmas story is not just a nice little bit of music, but essential to the reconciliation of mankind. It was necessary that he have a body to sacrifice. We recognize that body in the taking of the bread in communion; it represents his body.

His blood is represented by the cup in communion. We remembered that in the Old Testament blood was used to cleanse the Temple and various altars and other furnishings, dating even before the construction of the first Temple. That blood is a necessity for our cleansing from sin.

In partaking of communion, the Scripture tells us that we are proclaiming his death until his return. It is his death that paid the price for our sins, and my partaking of communion you claim that you are covered by that body and blood. You should of course a partake in an unworthy manner, but as Ezra shows us, this is not incompatible with joy. There is a reason we "celebrate" communion.

- In Sync

DECEMBER 22

One of the common demonstrations used by physics teachers to teach the concept of resonance is what is called spontaneous synchronization. Several metronomes are placed on the board which is then placed over a pair of aluminum cans. The metronomes are started one at a time, not at all in synchronization with each other. It often amazes students to see that it takes less than a minute the metronomes to be clacking in perfect synchronization. There is no central controlling authority; it is a natural characteristic of things that keep rhythm that they want to go together. (As of this writing, a good video on the subject is found at spontaneous synchronization, provided by UCLA.)

Metronomes designed to keep time for musicians. There is great benefit in being in the same rhythm, with each artist hitting his side notes at the correct time. The same is true for the church; we are to know what the time is and act accordingly. We are to act in rhythm with each other so that the message of the church is clear. So then, what is the message of the church?

- As is always the case at communion, it is *time to remember*. We are specifically commanded to remember the sacrifice of Christ as we partake of the bread and the cup. Every Christian should have a clear explanation of this, ready for those who ask.
- More generally, it is a *time for grace*. The message of the church is that God is willing to forgive sinners, and we are the ambassadors of that reconciliation. It is God's will that no one should perish, but all should have everlasting life. It's our job to spread that word.
- How do we do that? We do that by *proclaiming his death*. By his death we proclaim his sacrifice on the cross, by his resurrection we proclaim the power he has over death.

As you partake, remember that the bread represents his body. God the creator, the ruler of the universe, took upon himself human flesh for the purpose of being the sacrifice that would satisfy God's justice. CS Lewis called the incarnation the grandest miracle, because it bridged the gap between man and God.

As you partake, remember that the cup represents his blood. In the law of the Old Testament, blood was used to purify all of the furnishings of the tabernacle and the temple. It is the symbol of our cleansing, our release from our sins.

Finally, remember that the days are short. We proclaim his death "until he comes." The day will come when it is too late to proclaim his death; there will be one last convert to Christianity, then the end. When you go forth from here remember: the time is short. Even so, Lord, come soon.

- Worthy

DECEMBER 29

Revelation 5:9-12

Mr. Noah Webster defined the word "worthy" in these ways:

1. Deserving; such as merits; having worth or excellence; equivalent; with of, before the thing deserved.

2. Possessing worth or excellence of qualities; virtuous; estimable; as a worthy citizen; a worthy magistrate.

It is interesting to note that when Christians describe Jesus Christ, they seldom use this word "worthy." It is as if it escapes their notice. Yet we have in Revelation a superb example:

> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"
>
> (Revelation 5:9-12 ESV)

for those not familiar with the book of Revelation, the scroll in question and its seals represent an unveiling of the future. We might well ask, "Why is Christ considered worthy? We get two answers here, which are related. Both happened at the crucifixion.

- Christ's sacrifice on the cross because his physical death. He was a dead body in the ground; slain.
- As part of this, his blood was spilled on the ground and became the ransom for all sinners in the world. Have you ever considered this: you are bought with a price, the ransom paid at the cross?

No other sacrifice would have been acceptable. It is the ultimate sacrifice that any one person can give; “Greater love hath no man…” Because he went through this, he is worthy to hold the future.

In communion, we remember the sacrifice; we remember his spilled blood, poured out for our sins. It is fitting and appropriate that we should do so — “in a worthy manner.” I suggested one part of a worthy manner is that we remember that he is worthy. As you partake this morning, count him worthy in your thoughts to hold your future. In the bread see his body broken; in the cup see his blood shed for your sins.

Count him worthy. Worthy for what?

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"