

THE SALTSHAKER

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The Lord's Supper: The Sign of Continuation

By Rev. Sean McCann

I love my children. That seems like a fairly obvious statement. Of course I love my children, even a worthless Dad (which I try not to be!) would be hard-pressed to say he didn't love his children. I know I love my children, you know I love my children, and my children know that I love my children. Yet we still have this tradition in our family: I tell them that I love them. I tell them a lot, usually multiple times per day, sometimes to their embarrassment! Why do I keep telling them? They know I love them, so what is the point? Do they doubt that I love them? No, though if they've done something pretty bad that thought might enter their mind. Are they so insecure that they need constant affirmation? I don't think so, but the heart is fickle and easily deceived. Am I worried they might forget? Not really, but we are forgetful people. It is simply because I want them to always know that their Dad loves them, beyond a shadow of a doubt. Of all the things they have to be scared and anxious about in their lives, I want them to always know that Dad loved them no matter what. So I tell them I love them. Over and over and over again.

Well if you are in Christ, then you are a child of God, and he tells you that he loves you over and over and over again. You are doubting, and insecure, and forgetful. You are unworthy and unfaithful and rebellious. But he loves you in Christ. And he tells you. he says it by the wonderful promises of the gospel, and he seals his love with the wonderful sign of the Lord's Supper. Pastor Sinclair Ferguson puts a twist on the old hymn: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Table tells me so." The Table is that of the Lord's Supper, and today we will continue our series on the sacraments by turning from baptism (the sign of initiation) the Lord's Supper (the sign of continuation).

It is important to begin by seeing how the Lord's Supper is connected to the Old Testament sign of Passover. In that old covenant meal Israel was to celebrate annually the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a sign throughout their generations of how God brought them out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 12). This redemption from Egypt was a

forerunner to the greater redemption Jesus accomplished when he came to save his people from their bondage to sin. His deliverance is so much greater than that of the Hebrews out of Egypt that it deserved a new sign, so during the Last Supper, as he was celebrating Passover with his disciples, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The Old Testament lamb whose blood was spilt to cover God's people from His own wrath was to be fulfilled the following day upon the cross. Paul writes of this connection: "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:8). The sign has changed, but the glorious truth remains the same: God had provided atonement for sin so that we might be safe from his judgment.

With that as background, the shortest explanation of this new sign is found in Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 96, which I have divided into three parts for us to consider: in the meal we SEE, SAVOR, and STRENGTHEN. Let's look at each part briefly:

We SEE: "The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is showed forth..."

Here we begin with the purpose of a sacrament: it is something we can see and touch. In the case of the Lord's Supper, the tangible elements are bread and wine. Our Lord Jesus held the bread, broke it before the disciples, and lifted up the cup – all before their very eyes (Luke 22:19-20). This sounds so basic, but in a worship service that is carefully guarded against unnecessary images in order to highlight the spiritual presence of God by his Word and Spirit, the simplest of images stand out in great relief. The grand drama of redemption is on display in the most common of elements. This is why our Table is raised and the pastors hold up the elements: they must be seen by the gathered saints if they are to have any use at all.

We SAVOR: "...and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits..."

November–December

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; crpchq@gmail.com).

The Lord's Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

During Morning Worship: November 3, 17 December 1, 15	During Evening Worship: December 29
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Shepherding Groups:

November 3, following morning worship.

Fellowship Meal and Christmas Pageant:

December 1, following morning worship.

Veterans' Restoration Quarters Meals:

November 6 (lunch), November 21 (dinner)
December 4 (lunch).

Christmas Eve Service:

December 24, 5 p.m.

Weekly Events

Sunday:		
Sunday School	9:30 am	
Morning Worship	10:45 am	
Evening Worship	6:00 pm	Except for 1st Sundays

Wednesday Evenings: (Except November 27th and December 18 and 25)	
Supper	6:00 pm
Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm

Bible Study

For Men:		
Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i> at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge		
Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:		
Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

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The biggest divisions in church history regarding the Supper have to do with what Jesus meant when he said, “This is my body...this is my blood.” Was he speaking literally? Some think so, they believe he meant the wine and bread somehow transform into the actual body and blood of Jesus (this is known as transubstantiation and is the view of the Roman Catholic church). Others believe Jesus was merely speaking metaphorically, and therefore the elements are simply an aid to help jog our memory, sort of like how monuments help us remember certain events (thus this view is known as the “memorial” view). Our Reformed heritage disagrees with both of these views and instead holds to what is known as the “spiritual presence” of Jesus at the meal.

Of these three views, “spiritual presence” can be the hardest to understand, but the richest to experience. The Larger Catechism explains that the body and blood of Christ are “spiritually present to the faith of the receiver, no less truly and really than the elements themselves are to their outward senses” (Q170). So the physical experience of eating bread and drinking wine is matched by the spiritual experience of eating by faith (John 6:35-59). How does the presence of our Lord spiritually join these physical elements? Only by the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit. he makes the crumb of bread and sip of wine a veritable feast for our souls, so that we feed on him by faith, receive of his fullness, trust in his merits, rejoice in his love, give thanks for his grace; renew our covenant with God, and renew

our love to all the saints! (WLC Q.174)

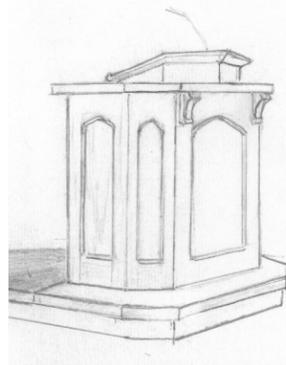
We STRENGTHEN: “...to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.”

What is the result of such a feast? Our weak and weary souls receive the nourishment they so desperately need so that we might continue to grow in the grace of God. Just like Momma told you to eat your veggies and take your vitamins to grow big and strong, God gives us the nutrients we truly need for life. Michael Horton answers the skeptics who wonder if we as Christians really need this regular strengthening: “If baptism is a means of initiating grace, the Supper is a means of persevering grace – not because it gives us an additional ingredient or a power not present in preaching or baptism but because it is a perpetual ratification of God’s peace treaty with his people. Faith is created by the preached gospel and confirmed and strengthened by the sacraments.” Who of us is satisfied with the strength of our own faith? Who of us doesn’t long for greater assurance of God’s accepting love for us? Who of us is so secure that he don’t need regular reminders to address our lingering doubts? We need our heavenly Father to tell us he loves us – again and again and again.

With this easy outline in mind I hope each of us will enjoy a richer and fuller meal at the Lord’s Table by which we see, savor, and are strengthened; and in the coming months we will grow together to eat and drink by faith to the very good of our souls.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



When we gather weekly as a community for worship we are following the ancient paths of our Hebrew forefathers as they journeyed year-by-year up Mount Zion to Jerusalem. Despite the rigors of the journey and the mockery they endured, the pilgrims testified of their joy when they heard the call: “Let us go to the house of the Lord” (Ps 122:1). This same call comes to us every Sunday; though now we have traded the obstacles of a dangerous road crowded with troubles for the temptations of a lazy day brimming with diversions. Rarely do we step into our sanctuary with David’s same awe (“Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!”), and yet the design of our humble worship gatherings remains the same: to meet with the living God who sits enthroned in the heavens. These gatherings at our earthly Zion are so important to God that he sets aside an entire day to ensure that we have sufficient time and energy to devote to him.

Here at Covenant Reformed we so revere and cherish God’s gift of a day to worship that we follow the ancient pattern of beginning and ending our Sundays in gathered worship. It is no coincidence that the gradual disappearance of the evening worship service – and of Sunday rest in general – has coincided with a gradual rise of people feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, stressed, and distressed. In a world that chews us up and spits us out, why do we ignore the very means by which our God restores us and makes us whole? The only tried and tested way for us to endure the long journey to the New Jerusalem is to stop and rest at the table that God spreads for us weekly in the desert. Here our souls find rest as we hear again the wonderful promises of the gospel and lay hold afresh of our risen Savior by faith alone.

If it is not your habit to return for evening worship, I invite you to join us for our new sermon series *1-3 John: Knowing God*. These three short books were written to struggling Christians to restore and reassure them in Christ – what better way to close your Sunday and get ready for a new week? It may be a struggle at first to adjust to a different Sunday schedule, but I am confident that if you stick it out for a few weeks it will become a joy. Many of our regular evening attenders testify that this service has a sweet intimacy to it and has become their favorite gathering of the day. Come to the rivers of life and place yourself in the streams of God’s grace to experience the renewal of your soul at the closing of the Lord’s Day.

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
Nov. 3	Psalm 128	
Nov. 10	Psalm 129	1 John 2:3-6
Nov. 17	Psalm 130	1 John 2:7-14
Nov. 24	Psalm 131	1 John 2:15-17
Dec. 1	Psalm 132	
Dec. 8	Psalm 133	1 John 2:18-27
Dec. 15	Psalm 134	1 John 2:28-3:3
Dec. 22	John 1:1-5	
Dec. 24		John 1:6-13
Dec. 29	John 1:14-18	1 John 3:4-10

The Reason to Evangelize

By Rev. Chris Brown

Why evangelize? “Jesus says to do it, so we do it,” is the answer that we often hear. The problem is that we really don’t do it. Not only do we not do it, we beat ourselves up about not doing it. And then, when we do evangelize, we fear we’ve done a poor job of explaining such an important message. So, if Jesus commands us to evangelize, why are we so miserable and frustrated in our evangelism? I believe that one reason, and I’m sure there are many reasons, is that we have *forgotten the reason to obey Jesus* in the first place. Before Jesus commanded his disciples to get going to make disciples, he said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word” (Jn. 14:23). In short, we obey him because we love him. Perhaps, then, our lack of obedience to evangelize is because of our lack of love, or inconsistent love, to our Lord.

In the movie *Dead Poets Society*, an English poetry teacher inspires many of his students to live life to the fullest. But after their teacher is fired, and is being escorted out of the classroom, we are shown a diverse reaction on the part of the students. A number of the students leap up onto their desks, and cry out a line of poetry in honor of their teacher, “O Captain, my Captain!” Meanwhile, a large amount of others students bury their heads between their arms on their desks in shame. When we encounter people who would escort Christ out of the conversation, we sometimes find ourselves flip-flopping between the students crying out their pride, and the students hiding their faces in shame. This is because our love to the Lord is so inconsistent.

But I think our problem goes beyond even this. I think that the Church’s crippled ability to evangelize is also a result of another major shortcoming. We lack love for the lost. The lost person is our very upright, good-natured neighbor, who thinks they’re a very good person. Or it’s the hippie down the street who thinks everything is god. Maybe they’re immoral, or godless, or they have a view we don’t like and shouldn’t like. But why don’t we pity the folly of their desperate raging against God? Are we too afraid of their opinions about us to explain to their faces the consequences of sin, the holiness of God, and the free offer of eternal life in Jesus? If we don’t evangelize out of love for Jesus, surely love for the lost should be enough incentive to speak up. Their souls and bodies are bound for hell, and they will never escape it unless someone tells them the way to be with God forever. Do you love them like Christ loved you—a lost, helpless little sheep, who had wandered its own way? Charles Spurgeon argues to all of us that our love must move us to speak,

“If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”

May God fill us with his love—love for his Son, and love for his lost sheep, so that we might become obedient evangelists, and so fulfill the law of love.

Books on the Church

by Rev. Sean McCann

“Therefore, the church as *organization* is defined as Christians who gather together to rally around the Word, the sacraments and the oversight of godly officers. The church as *organism* is the same body which then goes out into every walk of life bearing witness to the world of the transforming power of the Kingdom of God.”

This helpful distinction concludes Chapter Four of *The Enduring Community: Embracing the Priority of the Church* by Brian Habig and Les Newsom, one of my favorite books on the topic of the church. This December I will teach the Adult Sunday School winter quarter on the topic of ecclesiology – the doctrine of the church – and to prepare for that class I would like to recommend two books to you. Two campus pastors wrote *The Enduring Community* as a sort of introduction for their students to the role the local church should play in the life of the Christian and in the world. Unlike many books on the church that paint an idealistic picture, Habig and Newsom are realistic about our experiences in the body of Christ. In the opening chapter on “The Disappointment of the Church,” they identify some of the reasons why much of evangelicalism has such disregard for the institutional church: “It’s not like the Book of Acts,” “I worship better in nature,” “Campus ministry is my church,” etc. These excuses reveal how much we misunderstand the church, and so lay the groundwork for the compelling picture of the church that is beautifully laid out in the rest of the book.

The second book is *On Being Presbyterian: Our Beliefs, Practices, and Stories* by Sean Michael Lucas. Dr. Lucas is a pastor, historian, and seminary professor who has focused much of his writing and research on American Presbyterianism and is one of the foremost scholars in the history and development of our own denomination. So while *The Enduring Community* is written for a broader and less-informed audience, *On Being Presbyterian* focuses on the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and what it means to be a conservative Presbyterian in the postmodern age. Dr. Lucas organizes his book around the three factors that form our Presbyterian Identity: our beliefs, practices, and stories. Under beliefs he covers the topics we usually associate with a Reformed church: the sovereignty of God, the Doctrines of Grace, Covenant Theology, etc. Under practices he turns to piety (i.e. how Christians should live), worship, and government – those convictions that set us apart from our fellow Protestant denominations. And finally he reviews our history, from Calvin and Knox all the way up to Twentieth-Century Presbyterianism in the American South. It is here that Dr. Lucas flexes his academic muscles by so clearly summarizing and explaining the theological and cultural roots of our denomination.

If you have time to pick up and read one of these books, you will be greatly helped not only in preparing for my class, but more importantly in gaining an appreciation for the unique ways that we “do church” as a Reformed and Presbyterian community.