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Do This In Remembrance of Me Matthew 26:26-30

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, *“Take, eat; this is my body.”* 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, *“Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”* 30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Have you ever had the experience of being in a place where you didn’t understand the language? I don’t mean necessarily another country. For some of us, going to a garage where a mechanic explains what’s wrong with our car is like someone speaking another language. Listening to someone in the military speak about the service with its million different abbreviations - sounds like another language. *“After leaving the HQ in our BDU’s with our LMR’s we’re going to the BX.”* Even each branch of the military speaks its own language they all don’t have the same acronyms. Or if you don’t know baseball, you might have trouble figuring out what someone meant when he said a pitcher had no cheese but a nasty Uncle Charlie that lead to many hitters stepping in the bucket.

There are times when we know the place and language so well that we forget what it’s like to be on the outside. This can happen not only in automotive shops, the military or sports but in churches too. Those of us on the inside of the church may look at the Lord’s Supper and think, *“I know what that is all about,”* but to others, to the uninitiated, it may appear somewhat mysterious or strange.

Today I would like to talk about what we call The Lord’s Supper or Communion or what some of you grew up referring to as the Eucharist. Some of us may not have ever been taught what it is all about and others may have forgotten and others can appreciate hearing about it again. My hope is that by the time you leave worship today you will be able to answer a friend’s question, *“Can you please explain to me the significance of that thing you do with the bread and the juice?”*

First, listen to two other passages of scripture: Luke 24:30-31, 35, *“When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him....he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”* Acts 2:42 says, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’*

teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” These passages, along with Matthew 26, focus on the importance of eating or breaking bread together with Jesus, but they are not exactly the same. In Matthew the meal is the Last Supper Jesus ate with his disciples before he was killed the next day. The passage from Luke is a triumphant celebration of life when the Risen Christ is made known to the depressed, despondent, grieving disciples in the breaking of the bread. In the verse from Acts we learn that the early church’s identity came from focusing on Jesus in all their teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.

As these scriptures reveal, there are many layers to what we call the Lord’s Supper, it is kind of like an onion that way, so we are simply going to try and peel a few of those layers back today. **First of all, why do we call what we do The Lord’s Supper?** Because the Lord Jesus invites those of us who believe in him, trust, love and serve him to come and participate in the supper. It is the Lord’s Supper, it is not mine or yours or even the church’s supper. It is also a very inclusive meal because all of us who share in it – in this church and around the world are brothers and sisters in the same family. There are no strangers at this Supper. All followers of Jesus are welcome to the Lord’s Table regardless of race, culture, denomination, nationality, or political affiliation. That’s part of why Jesus says in Matthew, *“Drink from it, **all** of you.”* Even the ones who would betray, deny, and forsake him were invited and allowed to drink. Jesus invites all his weak and wavering disciples to drink from the cup with him.

It is **The Lord’s Supper** because the Lord issues the invitation and because as our Host he is with us. What we share and eat is bread and juice - in our tradition we don’t use wine in part out of respect and concern for those for whom addiction to alcohol is a struggle. The bread and juice are ordinary things of little earthly value yet they communicate the deepest spiritual realities. In the beginning of Christianity the Lord’s Supper was a real meal usually shared in a private home among a family and some close friends. There were no church buildings for perhaps the first 100 years as the faith grew and spread. The faith was also more underground and countercultural at the time. Over the centuries the Lord’s Supper moved from being a real meal in a home to a symbolic ceremony in a church building.

Some of you grew up calling the Lord’s Supper a sacrament. Augustine defined the word *sacramentum*, this way: *“Signs when they are connected to divine things are called sacraments.”* A sign is something which reveals some truth beyond itself. The miracles of Jesus, for instance, are signs because they reveal something of the nature

and character of the person who does them. (Just as our behavior reveals something of the nature and character of the person who does them.)

A sacrament is usually a common thing which has a meaning beyond itself. In the case of the Lord's Supper, that means beyond the elements we use.

The little piece of bread and small sip of juice don't seem like much on their own. They are not impressive, it is the meaning they convey that make them important. This is true in life. For example, in all of our homes there are items that to an outside appraiser have little or no value whatsoever. It could be something like a bowl that to us has great sentimental value because it reminds us of a special trip or friendship that is very meaningful to us. The most valuable thing in many homes is not jewelry or electronics or even money, but photo albums and pictures that remind us of our most treasured memories, relationships, and life experiences. If our house was burning it is these things we would want more than anything else because we know the meaning and story behind them. The Lord's Supper is such an experience for Christians.

Sharing in the Lord's Supper or communion is also not optional because Jesus said, *"Do this in remembrance of me."* Like baptism, participating in the Lord's Supper is part of Christian obedience. Jesus didn't say, *"This is my body, take and study it, or take and admire it."* He said, *"Take, eat; this is my body,"* he said about the cup, *"drink from it, all of you."* The bread that is broken and the fruit of the juice that is poured don't refresh us unless we consume them. In the same way, Jesus must be intentionally and personally received by faith.

Communion comes from the Greek word meaning partnership as in marriage, sharing, participating, self-giving, or generosity. The word "communion" reminds us that we eat and drink in memory of Jesus, not in memory of his teaching, but in memory of him as a person. When we receive communion it is also like a spiritual check up. Have you ever noticed that the week before your annual physical, all of a sudden, you start to pay more attention to your diet and exercise? Or a week before you go to the dentist you start searching around for dental floss you haven't used in an age? We do this because accountability impacts our behavior. Paul tells the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:28), *"Examine yourselves and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup."* Examining ourselves means looking at our recent behavior, confessing the areas in which we have sinned, forgiving others who have wronged us, and seeking God's forgiveness and guidance for the future. We are to be at peace with our Christian family

before we receive communion with them. When we neglect to do this, Paul says, communion can become a judgment on our spirit rather than a blessing.

The Lord's Supper is also a celebration of the risen and living Christ in our midst. It is a time when we experience God's grace and forgiveness anew by remembering what Jesus did once for all of us. All of us on the Cape I think were touched by the death of Marine Corporal Nicholas Xiarhos and his courage in laying down his life for his friends and comrades. This is what Jesus did for us and we should never forget it. The Lord's Supper helps to remind us that the focus of the church and our personal identity is Jesus.

Re-membering means to put back together. When we, who are individually members of the body of Christ, gather to worship, sing songs, offer prayers, share the word, and gather around the table - we are truly doing it to re-member Jesus. We meet Jesus here, together, in a way we don't elsewhere on our own. Unity is part of the importance of the Lord's Supper.

If you've ever been to a symphony you know there is a time when the lead violinist or someone else will get up and play a note. Up to this point the musicians have been warming up in their own way, playing whatever notes they want and making a discordant bunch of noise that has seemingly nothing to do with anything. Once that leader plays that note, however, everyone, pretty quickly, picks up on it and starts to play it on their instrument, and you think, *"If these folks work together we might hear something worth listening to."* Then the conductor comes out and the symphony begins to play, not all the same note, but a wonderful combination of notes, depending on the instrument, that is truly music to our ears. In a successful orchestra or band that plays beautiful music, everyone follows and obeys the conductor.

The Lord's Supper is a reminder to Christians who the conductor is and that we are to follow his lead and obey his teaching. When we let Jesus have his rightful place as leader, the shrillness and noise of all our personal tunes is changed into beautiful music when we work together to produce the music the master commands. Our task as followers of Jesus is become increasingly in tune with Christ. Together at this table we celebrate the presence of God's grace and seek to bring our lives increasingly under grace's powerful influence and rhythm.

Perhaps the image of Christ we think of most at Communion is the Crucified One. The Lord's Supper is done in remembrance of the Crucified One who bore our sins in his body on the cross. Just as the bread and the juice are broken and

poured out so was Jesus for the world. Paul reminded the Corinthians, whose celebration was marked by excess and selfishness that the Lord's Supper was not only a joyful celebration and empowerment for life, but it is also a reminder of crucifixion. The focus shifts from Jesus' living presence to the bread and fruit of the vine as symbols of Christ's body and blood. We remember the sacrifice of Jesus who laid down his life for his friends. Baptists believe that the primary place of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper is not magically in the elements but within our community of faith. We celebrate not the power of sin but the forgiveness of sins; we celebrate the power of life to conquer death. We believe that the Christ we meet in the bread and the cup will also meet us everywhere we go in life if we will have eyes to see.

The Christ who comes to us and meets us at the Lord's Supper is not just the Crucified One but the Risen One – the first celebrations of the Lord's Supper were about Christ's resurrection and new life for him and for all who put their trust in him. The meal was first an ordinary meal that had its roots in the post resurrection experiences of the disciples. The presence of the Risen Christ in the midst of the faithful was repeated each time they united for this common meal. Here Christ comes to be with the community of believers and the focus of his presence is not so much in the bread and juice but in the fellowship of the table companions with one another. Jesus said, *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them."*

I really like the fact that this Sunday when we observe the Lord's Supper, we also have a meal in between the worship services so we can eat, fellowship, and continue to sense the presence of Jesus in our midst as the first Christians did. For all Christians, whatever their tradition, the Lord's Supper is a celebration of joy that the Lord is alive in our midst and empowers us to truly live also. Jesus had within himself and he gives to others the kind of life that even death won't destroy.

In some traditions, The Lord's Supper is also called the Holy Eucharist. **Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving.** Think about the setting of the passage from Matthew, it seems to us like a strange time to be giving thanks. Before the night was over, Judas would betray Jesus, Peter would deny him, and all the others would forsake him. The next day he'd be killed. Can you imagine giving thanks in a situation like that? Yet Jesus did. He was thankful for bread, thankful for a cup to share with friends. Jesus could give thanks in all circumstances because the focus of his thanksgiving was the God who is above all circumstances. That is something we can all learn from. We also give thanks for Jesus' love, courage, and sacrifice.

What is the significance of what we do with the bread and the cup?
When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we participate in one of the two acts that Jesus explicitly commanded us to do – the other is baptism.
When we celebrate Communion we realize the many different ways we remember Jesus. He is the **Crucified One**, the Lamb of God, who shed his blood on the cross for our sins that we might be forgiven and in right relationship with God. He is the **Risen Lord** who offers new life to all.
He is the **Ascended Christ** who lives forever at the right hand of God to pray for us. He is the **Abiding One** who promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age. He is the **Unseen Guest** at every table. His presence is experienced and celebrated especially when we eat and drink at his command in remembrance of him.
Finally he is the **Coming One** and we proclaim and share our faith until he returns. At the Lord's Supper we celebrate who we are and whose we are in Christ.

Blessing

Loving God send us from this place

With the light of your hope in our eyes;

And the fire of your love in our hearts.

Send us from this place conscious again of the unseen cloud of witnesses who surround us; and certain of the presence of our blessed Lord Jesus.

Send us from this place sure of the forgiveness of sins

And of the life eternal, to which there is no end.

Send us from this place sure that in this life you are with us

And that afterwards you will receive us into glory.

Give us such knowledge and love of yourself

And such power and grace to tell of it

That through us others may come to know you and to love you,

In Jesus name and to for your glory. Amen.