

Holy Communion

August 20, 2017

Our Savior's Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Bill Mann

I've got some good news. If you can't rent a private jet to view the eclipse tomorrow—don't worry! Airbnb has teamed up with National Geographic to offer two lucky people the ultimate experience—one night in a geodesic dome in Oregon and then a private jet flight across the country following the path of the eclipse. Airbnb says on its website: "By the time you land, you might have a new appreciation for nature's awesome ability to bring us all together." "Bring us all together." The fact is millions of people will come together from all across the country to watch this once-in-a-lifetime event—a total eclipse of the sun—it's bringing people together. Today, I want to talk to you about something else that's bringing people together—it's called the Lord's Supper. According to a Gallup Poll, this morning 63 million people will come together for worship in churches across America. Most of them will be celebrating the Lord's Supper. 63 million people—that's more than will see the eclipse.

Today I want to talk to you about the Lord's Supper. It's one of the Sacraments of the Church and as much as the Lord's Supper brings people together, it also can separate us. Some of you may know that Sally and I went out to Las Vegas a couple of weeks ago. "Why Las Vegas?" you ask. Good question. Well, we had some time share points that had to be used up and Las Vegas was about the only place left to go and we'd never been there before, so we decided, "Why not?" Here are two things we learned from our trip—(1) Don't go to Las Vegas in August. It's too hot. Way too hot! And (2) Don't

gamble. That's the advice we got from my father-in-law and so we didn't. We just walked around looking in casino after casino after casino after casino. I think we visited 20 of these things—and then—lo and behold—not a casino, but a church. The Roman Catholics had built their cathedral smack dab in the middle of the Las Vegas Strip, surrounded by all of that neon and glitz and sin. The Lutheran Church was too far away, so we had church with the Catholics. And it was great!—Beautiful music, inspirational message, and then came communion. And I wasn't a Roman Catholic. And it clearly said, "If you are not Catholic do not participate." And so Sally and I moved out of the way and stepped aside as the faithful went up to receive the bread and the wine of Holy Communion. Was I offended by that?—No. I was a guest in that church and I knew the rules—Catholic altars are for Catholics only. There are some Lutheran Churches that live by the same rules. And I can understand where they're coming from. But at the same time I needed the Lord's Supper—especially as I began a week in Vegas. That place can drain you—I mean spiritually. I really needed something, at the beginning of the week, to fill me up. To prepare me for what was to come.

Wasn't that the purpose of the first Lord's Supper? Jesus was preparing his disciples for an experience that would drain them spiritually. It was the night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus and his disciples were face-to-face with Good Friday and the experience of the cross. Let's take just a minute to remember what Jesus said: "This cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it? What shall I say? 'Father save me from this cause?' But for this cause I have come into the world." Jesus said to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and rescue you and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you're going so how can we know the way?" Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." On the very evening when he was betrayed,

Jesus took the bread and blessed it and then he broke it. And he said to them, “This is my body which is broken for you.”

And on the same night he took the cup. “I am poured out like water,” Jesus said. “Behold, my soul is poured out unto death. Never-the-less, not my will but Thine is done.” “It is finished.” “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!” And the Apostle Paul tells us, seeing that Jesus paid so great a price, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a serving, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

We human beings, we want to analyze the Lord’s Supper. What shall we call it? Leavened or unleavened bread? Wine or grape juice? Once-a-week or once-a-year? Are we just remembering? Is Jesus spiritually present? Is it really his body and blood? And who should come? We analyze it up one side and down the other. But the true meaning of Communion is not found in analyzing it or defining it or explaining it away. The true meaning is found in doing it. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Doing it! That’s what connects us to God and to each other in a meaningful and powerful way. And so who should come? Martin Luther had a pretty good answer. “Who receives this Sacrament worthily?” And the answer: “That person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words; Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” So, if you believe. If you believe that Jesus died and shed his blood for you—then come to the Table. You are worthy.

Of course there are other things that you can do to prepare for Communion. Open up the hymnal to page 329. There you will find the last section of the Catechism—Section 4. It is entitled Christian questions and their answers for those who intend to go to the Sacrament. My favorite question is Question 20: “What if you don’t feel like you need to go to the Sacrament? What should you do?” And the answer: First, stick your hand in your shirt and see if you still have a body. Second, look around to see if you are still in the world—a world full of sin and trouble. And third, remember the devil is prowling around and he’s not going to give you any peace, day or night, inside or outside. In other words, if you are a flesh and blood human being, living in this world, subject to sin and the temptations of the Satan—you need the Lord’s Supper—no doubt. The other thing I like to do (especially if I’m sitting in the pew waiting to go up to Communion) is I turn to the inside front cover of the hymnal. There, under “Prayers for Worship” is a prayer “Before communing” and a “Thanksgiving after receiving the Sacrament.” One prayer for before Communion and one prayer is for after Communion. These prayers remind me that Communion is not an empty ritual that we just repeat Sunday after Sunday. Holy Communion is a gift from God—a gift of His grace and power for me and for you and for everyone who believes.

I’d like you to take a few minutes now to meditate on God’s gift of Holy Communion. As you watch the video, pay special attention to the image of the stone rolling away from the empty tomb. Think about how that image is like the eclipse of the sun. The Son of God was hidden in the tomb for three days. But His glory could not be hidden. And Jesus rose again!