

Meditations on the Supper



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Meditations on the Supper

A brief introduction:

This is a brief introduction for a book I didn't plan to write. I intended to finish writing with meditations on Psalm 119, the Great Psalm. A brief recap. 2008 I began to try and do an alphabetical translation of the longest Psalm, each section of eight verses, to begin with the same letter of the alphabet. That took five years, reading a dictionary, digging into the Hebrew. After the translation was done came the meditations on the sections, twenty-two eight verse sections of Hebrew letters, translated into English from A to T. My wife Paula was very important. If I did a section and skipped over a verse or ended a section early, she kept after me to complete that section. So, it ended up being a verse by verse commentary. After that was done, I focused on the twelve or more significant words. Psalm 119 had the pattern of putting one or more of those words in each verse, Torah (translated Law), blessings, judgments, testimonies, etc. Finishing with three meditations on silence and a meditation on sheep.

So, it was time to take a good long break from writing. But then this idea snuck up. It's attractive because of the way that the Supper has interwoven itself in and through my life. Many of the meditations are very intimate in character. I said snuck up. That is part of the character of the supper. You can receive communion very regularly over the years, part of faith and worship, and then one day, suddenly, it hits home. It might be the words "for you" and suddenly you are startled, taken aback, and confronted. It may be "My body" and it may be the words "shed for you." This is the experience of many people. For example, someone who has wondered far from the faith, suddenly is confronted, and responds, "He's real!" For another, "It's all true, everything, it's true!" For me it was receiving the wine, "The blood of Christ shed for you," at an overnight youth group retreat. The whole world changed and could never go back to what it had been. And again, that is part of the character of the supper.

As I was working on the book, Meditations on the Supper, I had done quite a bit of work and began to realize that each meditation naturally progressed from the previous one. They progress in a natural development and culminate in the last meditation, "What Kind of Kingdom."

Meditation 1: Look up, Look down

Look up is the unified theme of humanity. The great orator reaches for the heights in his speeches. The great inventor manages to lift humanity out of the dust and dirt. Great leaders of nations seek to make their nation great (“again?”). Philosophers and religious leaders seek to elevate human thought, morality, etc. The whole of human history looks up at the heavens. There are clouds, and beyond them the moon, planet, stars, and beyond them the heaven and the angels with glory and majesty.

With the exception of one. On a cold winter’s night outside the town of Bethlehem at the Tower of the Flock (The Migdol Eder) shepherds could look up and admire the wonderful starry skies. When angels appeared they could, at the same time, tremble in fear and be thinking of the glories of heaven. Indeed the choir of angels begins with “Glory . . .” and the angels had seen glory and would return into that glory in a few moments. But that is not their message. No, no, no. It is time to get down out of the tower, go into the small town of Bethlehem. Look for a scruffy stable. (Probably one of the caves in the hills adapted for livestock.) There they will find animal sounds, animal smells, things you don’t want to step in, and a manger. In that manger they will find a baby wrapped snugly in clothes and lying on a bed of straw. Look down.

You want to find God? You cannot rise. You cannot climb up to heaven. You cannot raise your mind and soul to where He is. So, the song, “Thou must come to me, I cannot rise to Thee. . .” And so He does, all the way into our world. More than a thousand years ago. More than a thousand years before that {In the pattern of the old spiritual} “Go down Moses, way down to Egypt land. Tell ol’ Pharaoh, ‘Let My people go.’”

And so with the Supper. Of course, in the pattern of “Look up” there would be those who would say, don’t look at the Supper. Don’t look at the crass eating. Let your mind and your spirit ascend to heaven where Christ is seated and then ask in a little bit of mockery, “Do you really think He climbs down a ladder to be in the supper and then climbs back up the ladder to sit in heaven again? Do you really think?” But the words are insistent. There is in fact a table, where there is carved into the top of that table the Latin words for “This is My body.” (Hoc es corpus meum.) Somebody with the initials ML would listen and then reply by pointing to those words that he had carved into the wood with a knife. Moses can think about it, and in a bit of running his mouth say, “if You will not go with us, then blot me out of the book that you have written.” but he would not have been able to follow through with it. Years later Paul would say, “I could wish that I was cut off for the sake of my brethren” but that’s only an idle imagination, a split-second fantasy. He would not be able to follow through with it. There is only One.

And again, 'Look down.' Look down Peter. You are sitting at the table at the Passover. Look down and you see somebody kneeling at your feet. He has wrapped Himself in a towel, He has a bowl of water, and He is washing your feet. Try and stop Him, Peter. "This is not right. It's not how it should be, is it?" But He insists. And when God insists the wildly unexpected happens. Take eat. This is My body. This is the meal where he will join Himself to you. Sussomos (σύσσωμος), says Paul. It means literally "together body." He joins Himself to you so He can take your punishment. He joins himself to you, so He can give you His life and glory. It's what He does.

Again, there is a hill outside of Jerusalem. On that hill there was a cross. On that cross there was a thief.

Look down. Look down, thief. Look down at your wasted life. Look around as things are coming to the end. Look to your left, see a nail driven through your flesh to hold you to the crossbar. Look to your right to see another nail driven through your flesh to hold you to the crossbar. Look down and see a nail through your feet to hold you to the upright. Look down, thief, as long as you can, until perhaps a raven lands next to your face and then with a piercing, stabbing pain, plucks out your eyeball. And then there is darkness. Soon there will be more darkness. If you look up, there is no grace and mercy. If you look down there is only death, and after death, hell. Look down next to you and see there is another cross like yours. On that cross there is a figure suffering in agony, bleeding, and dying, crying out in prayer. "Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani."

You do not know this thief, but many, many years in the future there will be a book and on the front cover of that book, there will be the words "Would you go to hell for me?" Look anywhere else in the world thief, and you will not find anyone else who could and would. He is the One, and He has come all the way down to be with you. He will suffer and He will die. Why thief? Why? He is looking down and going all the way down. He has come to be underneath you. Why does He do that? Because you are falling. He will take His place underneath you so that when you fall, He will catch you and He will raise you up. He did say it, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Prayer: Lord Jesus help me to look for You where You said to seek You, not to climb up where I cannot go, but to find You having come down all the way to me. Help me to wonder at the gift. Help me in you to see God who walks with me and carries my wrongs so that I may find my life and freedom in You. Help me to look down and see in my hand and on my tongue, the gift that You have given, You Yourself in this meal, and to never get over the wonder or the surprise. Amen.

Meditation 2: Suddenly Belonging

That is the way of the supper. It can sneak up on you. You grow up in a Christian family. You learn about it. You go through confirmation to study it. You prepare for it and then it's part of your worship, month after month, year after year, and then suddenly . . . (You could say out of the blue) There's been a growing closeness, understanding that it is part of your life. It has been very, very obvious, always saying exactly what it is that is coming. In one way there has been absolutely no sneaking. When the realization comes home, everything changes, and nothing can ever be the same.

For example, somebody who has wandered off, filled his life with every indulgence he can, suddenly has it dawn on him what exactly is happening and, in a flash, comes the realization. It may come to him with the thought, "He's real!" or "Everything is real!" or "Jesus is there." For another person it may come with "Ohhhh! I guess I'm a Christian. How did that happen?"

Very often it is the words "For you" that hit home. For me on a youth group overnight retreat, "I love you and I want you in my Kingdom." Suddenly there is no other possible way the world is put together. He is the center of it all and you can't do anything else with your life than devote it to the service of Jesus. "He lives. He is risen."

We talk about Maundy Thursday and say mandate or command. I think it would be better to say invitation. It is a call from God. "Come live forever." It is a confrontation in the way only Jesus can do it. Standing outside the tomb on Easter he says, "Mary" and suddenly reveals to her that she is going to live forever. It is what G.K. Chesterton defines as the "mystic moment". In the only definition of mystic that doesn't spin off into weirdness, he talks about it being that moment when there is only you and God.

He calls and it's like He says, "Hey kid! You and Me. Right now. Only you and Me. Come follow Me and live forever." What do you do? A solid twenty minutes of tears hardly fits it. Trembling and totally unnerved for hours and days. You can call it a new beginning. Nothing is ever going to be the same.

It is radically individual. It is as individual as somebody putting a piece of bread on your tongue and repeating the words of Jesus, "My Body given for you." In that way the Supper is entirely one-on-one, and you are confronted by God. It is like the whole business of Christmas, but instead of to the whole world, it is "for you." And in an instant, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, you look down and there, nestled in your hand is this "body of Christ." The bread plays the part of the swaddling clothes, and the

palm of your hand plays the part of the manger where He is nestled. In that moment it is you and God and the whole rest of everything can fade into the background. What do you do? Grab hold of the verbs: take, eat. And so you do.

Look down. And there you find what Paul calls “sussomos” (σύσσωμος). Literally it means “together body.” Jesus joins Himself to you sussomos, and Jesus joins you to Himself, sussomos. Suddenly you belong. The one verse of the hymn goes, “Ah dearest Jesus, holy Child, make Thee a bed soft undefiled. A pleasant place within my heart that You and I may never part.” And looking back at the Garden of Gethsemane, the last prayer in the garden was this, “Father, I want them to be with Me that they may see My glory.” (“I want you in my kingdom.”) That’s why He does this meal for you. In Romans 8 Paul says of God the Father, “He has destined us to be conformed to be the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

In Philippians 3 it says He “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for taking a hold of me, for grabbing on and pulling me into Your kingdom. It was sudden, instantaneous, and now I find where I belong, Who I belong to, and what my future will be. Thank you. Amen



Meditation 3: Sussomos, σύσσωμος

You come to the supper. God has called you. He meets with you. “For you.” You look down. Nestled in your palm is what the pastor has put there, repeating the words of Jesus, “This is my body” wrapped within the bread and nestled there in the manger of your palm. It is personal and individual. Again, the words, “For you”, an overwhelming gift. Grab ahold of the verbs: “take, eat.” You do and Paul’s word *sussomos* opens up “together body” and you belong. Jesus comes and “together body” takes your sin to carry as His own. He takes His life and eternity to wrap around you. “Together body” and then . . .

Your neighbor comes and takes his place by you. And “My Body”, “for you”, “*sussomos*”. He who is “together body” with you has made Himself “together body” with your neighbor., and that makes the two of you “*sussomos*”. You are brought together to be what a Lutheran centuries ago wrote in the title of his book “One Loaf” to help each other in every need, to defend, speak well of, and explain his actions in the kindest way. And then . . .

Your frenemy also comes. Is this craziness? Is it the plan to bind us together with those that do hurt us? Look over and see on his face the same question and there it is being asked about you. So yes, it is. We are gathered into the forgiveness of God. And by the way, forgiving your frenemy is taking hold of the forgiveness of God as something that is yours. That forgiveness is a claim by God for the forgiveness of your enemy. But how far will this go? Who all is invited to this supper? That question is easy and is part of a two-question set, “Who all is invited?” and “Who is ready?” Who is invited is, why, everyone. To the atheist who has spent his time raging against Christianity, God speaks the word, “for you.” And if he hears that word, he has everything there, exactly as the words read, forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation, God Himself, given and belonging to Jesus as much as you do. The catechism focuses on the words “for you.” It does not say “whoever believes these words is ready.” It says “Whoever believes these words **has**. “The words “for you” call for all hearts to believe. Such is the Lord’s Supper. A man can come to the supper as an enemy of Christ and stand up from the supper as a believer and disciple of Jesus. He is as surprised as anybody else around him to find himself to be a Christian. As we say of the whole scripture, we say of these words, they are self-authenticating. They bring their own truth. They carry it with them, and they bring it home to the soul.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for the unbelievers, enemies, and frenemies that You have brought into Your kingdom, and that we now share in the gifts You give. Continue to

expand Your kingdom. It is truly an amazing thing. Thank You for making me a part of it. Amen.



Meditation 4: Messing with Time/Every When

{There is an apt observation by June, wife of retired pastor Fred} Compare the caterpillar and us human beings. The caterpillar crawls along the branch of a big bush. There is not a very large perspective. He crawls along little considering where he has come from to get there or where his destination is. That's not his goal. In a while he will come upon leaves and then he will begin to eat them. His body will convert the material of the leaves into a cocoon, and he will spin that, crawl inside and have a pupal stage. When he emerges, there will be a drying out of wings and flying. But he does not see or consider that from where he is. We look at him and see the branch, the leaves, where the branch is from, and we think about his metamorphosis. We have a much broader perspective. In the same way we human beings compared to God have a much more limited perspective. We go along the path of our lives, not always considering where we are from, what our future is, and the destiny that awaits. We simply go along our way. As Christians we leave the future to God and trust Him. He, however, sees the whole thing, where we are, where we have been, and our eventual destiny in our relationship with Him is to be transformed and to be children of God, living forever, filled with the glory that He gives.

We get discouraged; He knows. We lose our perspective, for Him it is steady and constant. In addition, He sees all the stages of our lives, both simultaneously and in what theologians have called an "eternal present tense." He doesn't have to wait and see if we will get to heaven. He sees it as a "now" that He shares with us. The day of Him calling us to faith through our baptism is not a faded memory. It is part of the eternal "now". In the same way when Moses asks Him for a sign, He does not tell him the things he will see along the way (so that Moses could check them off as he goes, "Well, that was part 1. Check. Now on to part 2"). Instead, He says, "when it's all done you will be here worshipping Me." From a human perspective Moses could call out impatiently, "What kind of a sign is that? I need it spelled out and You just tell me the end's going to be good." But really, he is dealing with an Eternal God, who speaks from the perspective of eternity. And that perspective is part of the sign of Who He is, and Who He is, is the greatest sign to guide us through our journey.

In the same way, Eve does not get scolded for jumping the gun and saying at the birth of her first child, "I have gotten a man, the Lord." Instead: That part is right "the Lord", it will be the Lord. Let's fill in some more details and through Isaiah the detail is there, "The virgin will conceive and bear a son and will call His name Emmanuel." Through Micah, "Israel will be abandoned until she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of His brothers return to join the Israelites." The angel to Joseph in the dream, "Call His name Jesus, for He will save His people."

The Bible is written into our world as such, the language of the Bible conforms to our framework of understanding and God bends down to speak to us in our language. This is true for the entirety, but there are places where there is what I call a slippage of language, it is spots where a different perspective shows through. My favorite passage to illustrate this is Zechariah, where God says to Zechariah, "Take the 30 pieces of silver, the handsome price at which they priced me, and throw it to the potter in the temple."

The matter of time in theology is fascinating. In the St. Louis Seminary library up on the top floor in the southwest corner there is a section of books dealing with time. The name of those through the centuries who have taken up that subject is fascinating, as is what they have written. I turn to Zechariah and the verse, "Take the 30 pieces of silver, the handsome price at which they priced me, and throw it to the potter in the temple." 30 pieces was the fixed price, true from the book of Genesis, all the way through to when the Pharisees paid Judas.

Back in Genesis when Joseph's brothers sold him, it's pretty sure that they did not sell him for 30 pieces of silver. In that case the Midianites would have paid 30 pieces and sold him for 30 pieces, leaving no profit. And after you take out transportation, feeding, and extra pay for the guards, they would operate at a loss. I'm absolutely sure they would expect some profit so there would have been some haggling to reduce the price they paid his brothers. There would have been a lot of arguments and back and forth, but they settled on something and made the transaction. The absolutely fascinating thing about Zechariah is that the phrasing is in past tense, "The handsome price at which they **priced** me."

All of which makes for a fascinating point of argumentation. The 1970's was a time with a lot of furor about the Bible and a lot of questioning whether it could be true or trustworthy. I was involved in many conversations where somebody questioned whether there even was such a thing as prophecy. I did not reply, "Yes there is. Yes, there is. Here's an example. Here's another example." I took a different tact. I gave some temporary hope that they might have in their position, and then took it away. "You know, you might be right. There might not be any such thing as Old Testament prophecy." Then taking it away, "That's because this looks for all the world like something very different. It looks like a simple reporting back in time of what the Holy Spirit and the writers of the New Testament have seen and can witness to. It is like the Holy Spirit took his Greek New Testament in His left hand, and the pen of the prophet in His right hand and wrote the Old Testament that way. So to speak it cannot miscarry or fail to happen because it has happened. It is not predicting something and then working hard to make sure it comes true. It is simply after the fact telling people before about

what has happened, even though it is way in the future for them. Zechariah is right that it will be 30 pieces of silver because the One who was there, about whom it happened, told him that it was 30 pieces of silver. That is a different pattern. It comes along with absolute, total, complete, 100% surety. Zechariah: it will happen, it must happen, because it has happened." There were a few faces expressing sudden and complete disappointment when that argument hit home.

But we go on to bring this back to the Lord's Supper. There is a curiosity, that is in the distribution of the wine/blood of Christ. The words reflect the eternal perspective. It does not say, "This is my blood of the New Testament which will be shed for you tomorrow." It says, "which is shed for you." That is in the perfect tense, an accomplished, completed fact that can never be undone. It is spoken to the disciples before heading out to Gethsemane, then arrest, trial, carrying the cross, crucifixion and shedding of blood.

Let me bring together some observations at this point. What happens at the Cross is an eternal event. It has particularity in time and place, and specific events. But it is also lifted into eternity and is a fixed point for our soul, forever true spanning time and eternity. Being eternally true, it manifests itself: in song, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Messiah's veins, and sinners plunge beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains"; in the supper and here not specifically pointing to the outside of the sinner, "Take, drink, My Blood shed for you" it invades us and courses through our veins and fills our body and soul; sussomos; look down and see, this is "for you take hold of the verbs: take, drink." You are loved and your eternity is that Jesus will transform you into His likeness by the power that enables Him to subdue all things to Himself.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You are my eternal, and Your supper, and Your plan of salvation is the great eternal fixed point of the universe. Thank You for the day to come when my knees will be among the "every knee that will bend and every tongue confess that you are Lord." As I look forward to that day, may Your eternal truth hold my soul and sustain me in faith. Amen.

Meditation 5: More than These

There is a most common interpretation of the question asked of Peter over breakfast by the sea of Tiberius, “Peter do you love Me more than these?” with these designating the other disciples. Taken in that way, “do you love Me more than you love these?” is a question of dedication and of priorities. Will you stay true? Will you stay devoted? Will you stay focused in terms of your relationship to Me and your mission? If others turn away, will you stay? If others question your devotion, will you hear their questioning or will your heart stay focused? Peter, are you My man for what I am sending you to do?

A variation on this would be asking, “Peter do you love Me more than these love Me?” If it is asked in that way, then it is a matter of doing. It is sanctification. It is dedication to care as He cared, to comfort, to guide, to place the priorities of the Kingdom above all. It is a matter of sanctification. Will you continue to love while others get distracted and their attention to the mission fades? Will you comfort and guide the circle of believers to show compassion to those who are grieving and hurting? Will you truly call for and care for the lost and the erring? Will you do works of love? On and on the questions can go, but it is always the matter of the sanctified life. And from that point the sermon can turn on matters of where we fall short and matters of where we are called to greater and truer discipleship. Peter, do you love me more than these love me? But then . . .

Maybe “these” does not refer to the other disciples. There is another possibility. That possibility is the fish. It may sound odd at first, but it puts things back into context. Remember, after a long night of fishing, Jesus, there, on the shore, telling them, “Cast the net on the other side and you will find.” They did and caught 153 large fish and though there were so many, the nets were not broken. It was a miracle. It was a miracle of caring, feeding. It was a miracle of provision. It was a miracle that told them of His daily watching over them. Simply, it was a miracle. So who, or what, do you love? That is a contemporary question when there are so many who look for miracles and so many preachers of miracles. Through the ages people look for signs.

We can say so many wonderful things about the supper. The question is, why are we coming to the supper? What is the supper? It is the body and blood of Jesus bringing forgiveness, life, and salvation. Being joined to the body of Christ is strength and renewing. It is not surprising people talk about miracles happening in connection with the Lord’s Supper. There is the possibility of healing, physical restoring. There are actually miracles that can happen there, at the table in the eating and drinking. There is the possibility that some of those miracles may not be hidden, but out in the open, and we would sing, “Praise!” and “Glory!”

We live in an age when preachers of miracles say, "This is why you come to church. To see miracles." They even say, "if you don't see miracles, that faith is a dead faith." So, who do you love? Again, who or what do you love most, desire most? Is it miracles? Is it benefits? Do you go to that church because they help you with rent? With food? Years ago, we were shooting the breeze about church names. "How about Signs and Wonders Lutheran Church?" "How about Miracles Lutheran Church?" And then there was, "Island of Broken and Misfit Toys Lutheran Church" That grabbed everybody's attention. Someone said, "That's wonderful because we're all broken, and why not just say it. It would speak to all the broken people out there."

Why do you come to the Lord's Supper? "I come because I believe." "I come because I have my faith strengthened here." or is it "I come because I am a broken sinner." That's what Jesus said when he said, "This is My Blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Why do you come here Peter? Is it fish and bread? Is it miracles? Is it bread and wine/Body and Blood? Or is it because He's calling sinners. Again, I come dragging all my sins along, and such sins they are. They make a "clattery clang", a "*katzenjammer*" in my life. There are the tiny little ones, and there are the great, big stinky ones. My life is covered with them, and I reek. This is the meal that is not for holy people. Instead, it's for sinners, so I know I belong here.

Years ago, I heard a young preacher telling that he was going to teach his congregation to receive the Lord's Supper in the proper way, when and how to kneel, when and how to bow, etc. And I thought to myself, hmmm, and then I said, "What I propose to do with the Lord's Supper is I will take it and put it in the the single most unclean place in the universe that I know of. I will eat and drink and so put it in me. You may look at the outside. I know what's inside here, and it is the most unclean place in the universe that I know of. But that's what Jesus said to do when he said, "for you for the forgiveness of sins." So, I walk up as a sinner. I kneel as a bad sinner. I take and eat as a terribly unclean sinner. I drink as a revoltingly unclean sinner dragging my bag of clanky, *jammerthal*, loud and stinky sins. I come as the ultimate, utter mess I am. Does that mean I should clean up a bit first? No! It is as Luther said, I should run to it. Where else can I find the place where God invites someone like me, and that is endlessly and persistently astonishing. I think that part might be beyond me, even in eternity.

Around Christmas the question has been asked countless times in countless places, "Is it the giver or is it the gift?" So, children are taught to quit ripping open the paper and pause to say thank you. Of course, it's the giver. That's true of every present. It is asked a different way when the Giver is the Gift, and the Gift is the Giver. And then in the Supper, we find how the giving continues on, all the way to "Take", "eat", "drink." About the Gift, the Giver (of Himself) says, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Prayer: Thank you for calling me Lord to this one place; the place where sinners may come into the presence of God and find out that there truly is forgiveness. You feed me with Your body, and You refresh my soul with Your shed blood, as forgiveness feeds me and courses through my veins. May I also become part of Your Great Sign to the world of forgiveness. Amen.



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Meditation 6: Out into the World

And when the Supper is over, we are sent. That is part of the plan of God. He calls one in order to call another, in order to call another, in order to call. . . Jonah was called partly, in the plan of God, so he could be on a boat on the way to Tarshish, because the sailors were being called by God. Jonah could give his witness before being thrown overboard so that the sailors could dedicate their lives to God and call on Him and believe in Him. So that . . .

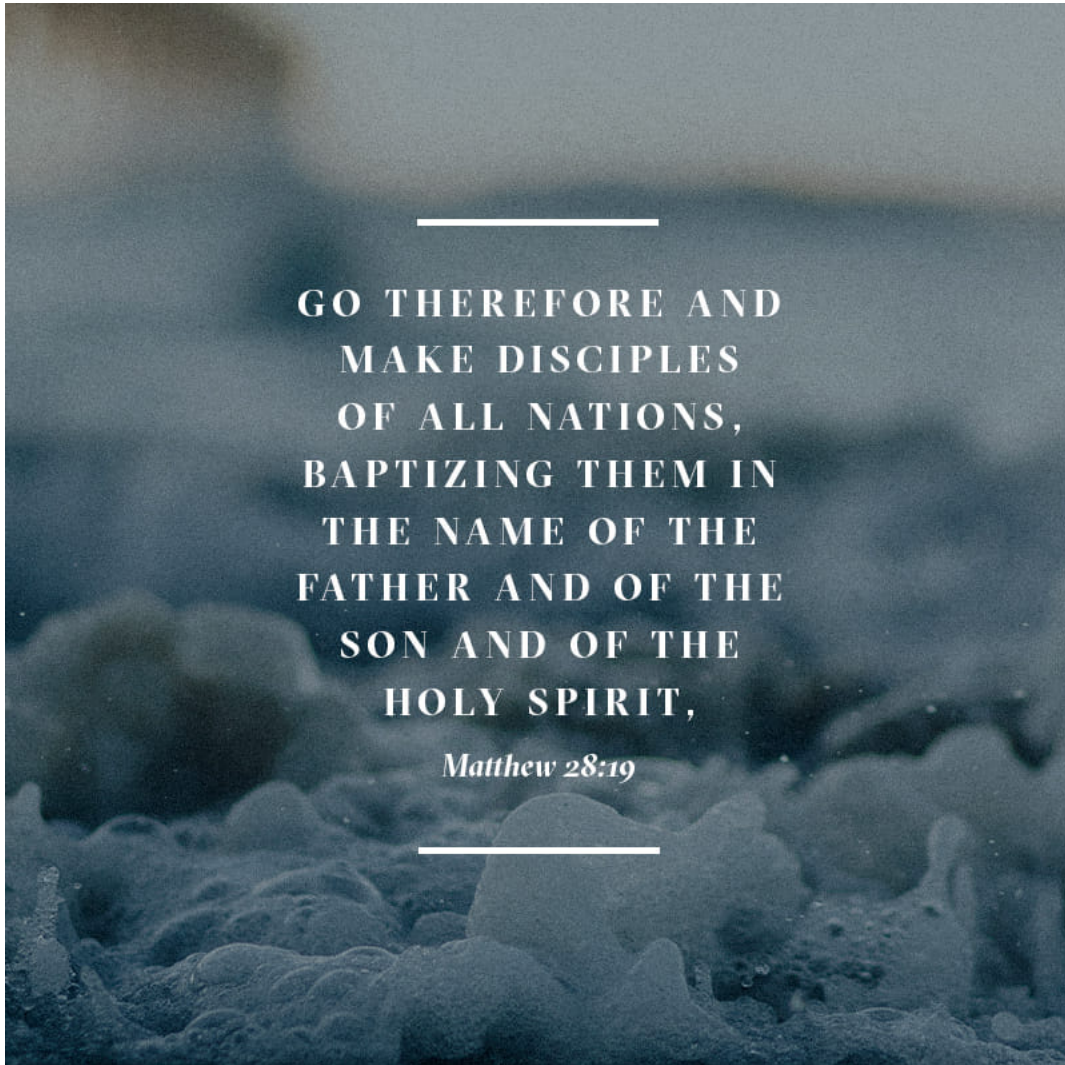
So, we are sent. Sent where? Out into the world, of course. “We’re on a mission from God.” (Blues Brothers), but actually we are.

But wait. We are changed, and nothing can ever be the same. What has happened in this meal? We have been given to eat: eternal bread, eternal wine, the best of meats, the finest of wines (Isaiah 25), the bread of heaven, the wine of forgiveness, the actual, real Body and Blood of Jesus (with mysteries). You walk down the street and what is in you is greater than what is around you. When God insists, God who is infinitely greater than the Universe, and decides to lay Himself down for a bed in a tiny manger, the properties of space and physics must bend and yield to allow this. So, when He decides to place Himself on your tongue and say “take, eat” space and physics must yield to allow this. We eat the bread, carrying within it the Body of Christ given for you. That is the Body of Christ from the Cross. We drink and carried in the wine is the Blood of Christ shed for you on the Cross. And so we are sharing in the supper of the night before with the disciples, and yet it is past tense “shed for you.” Time itself must bend and yield to allow it. I asked in church once, “if God puts eternity within you, what does that make you?” and Wade, who was going through confirmation at that time, called out “Eternal.” Indeed it does. So, when you walk down the street what is inside is much bigger than what is outside of you. To quote a TV show, “It’s bigger on the inside.” So, you go into the world. Like this. Do you really expect to completely fit in? A Lot of things can happen. All of those lists of possibilities of what can happen in your life, but, fit in with the world is not one of them. You never will be able to totally fit in. You may pass, and make your way through the world, but you do not belong.

You are on a mission from God to take the Eternal that He put in you and to give it to somebody else, by His words. What you are not fitting into is all the limited, all the small, all the finite. Embrace the not fitting in. Embrace the eternal. Embrace the infinite.

Prayer: Lord I live in a world where everything changes, every person passes, and every monument crumbles. Thank You that in You I find what is sure, what is eternal

and unchanging. Be my eternal, because I am not. Be my anchor, because I am passing. In my forgiveness and new life, claim Your own victory and I will praise You. Amen.



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Meditation 7: Across the Ages

It is a basic truth, every time Christians come to this meal they have been seen, known and called. They have been prepared for, and as God says through Isaiah, the preparation has been done at the Mountain of the Lord. On this mountain the Lord will prepare a lavish feast, whether it is only a few or a great many, every portion has been set aside from eternity. "the best of meats; the finest of wines."

It is time for celebration. It might be done quietly, deep within the soul. It may be expressed in singing. Some of our deepest emotions we voice in the songs about this supper. In 2000 our congregation in southern Illinois, first sang the song "What is this Bread." I got watch as some of the old men in the congregation sang while using Kleenexes to dry their eyes. "What is this wine, the Blood of Jesus shed for mine . . . My God, my God, why have You not forsaken me? O taste and see the Lord is free."

Reformation Day 2002, at the church in Ventersdorp, South Africa, nine of us were guests. The congregation lead the many visitors and guests in dancing down the center aisle to receive communion. Then we got to watch as the alter guild there with very skilled hands, gathered the cups, took them behind the altar, washed and dried them, refilled them, and brought them up; keeping pace with those who were coming up the aisle to receive communion. We Americans then went to go sleep, while the assembly continued with preaching, singing, and praying the rest of the night. In the morning we regathered for worship. One of the songs our student group learned at River Forest in the 1970's says, "I've seen men take His holy meal and dance all night." I had to travel quite a distance to see it, but yes, I have. (Christ is Changing Everything) There is an amazing amount of joy in this meal. Remember the joy when you come to the supper.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You call us to come to Your supper and to know the fellowship of Your joy. Fill us with Your joy so that the sweetness of eating and drinking of Your meal may always mark our days and that we may stand before the whole world marked with the goodness and joy of Your relationship with us. Amen.

Meditation 8: Who is Invited? Who is Prepared?

Actually, our answer is quite specific and a little surprising. In our Catechism we read, "But he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins' for the words 'for you' call for all hearts to believe."

"Call for all hearts to believe." Is that a demand/requirement; or is that an invitation? In this setting it is both. But if it is a call out, it is an invitation. It is quite possible for a person to come, not believing, going through the motions intending to kneel down; kneeling down as an unbeliever and hater of Jesus and standing up as a fully committed disciple. Thinking "I'll take this body of Christ and spit it out later and throw it to the pigs and they can treat it filthy." And then the words, "My Body given for you." come along and give pause, "Wait a minute. What is this? My body? Does He know who I am and what I am going to do to His body?" Yes he does and it is specifically "for you". He is here to give Himself. And then following right after come the words, "Take drink . . . My Blood . . . shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." And he who knelt down as a hater of Jesus, stands up as a full convinced, committed disciple. Stories of such things happening are told through the centuries.

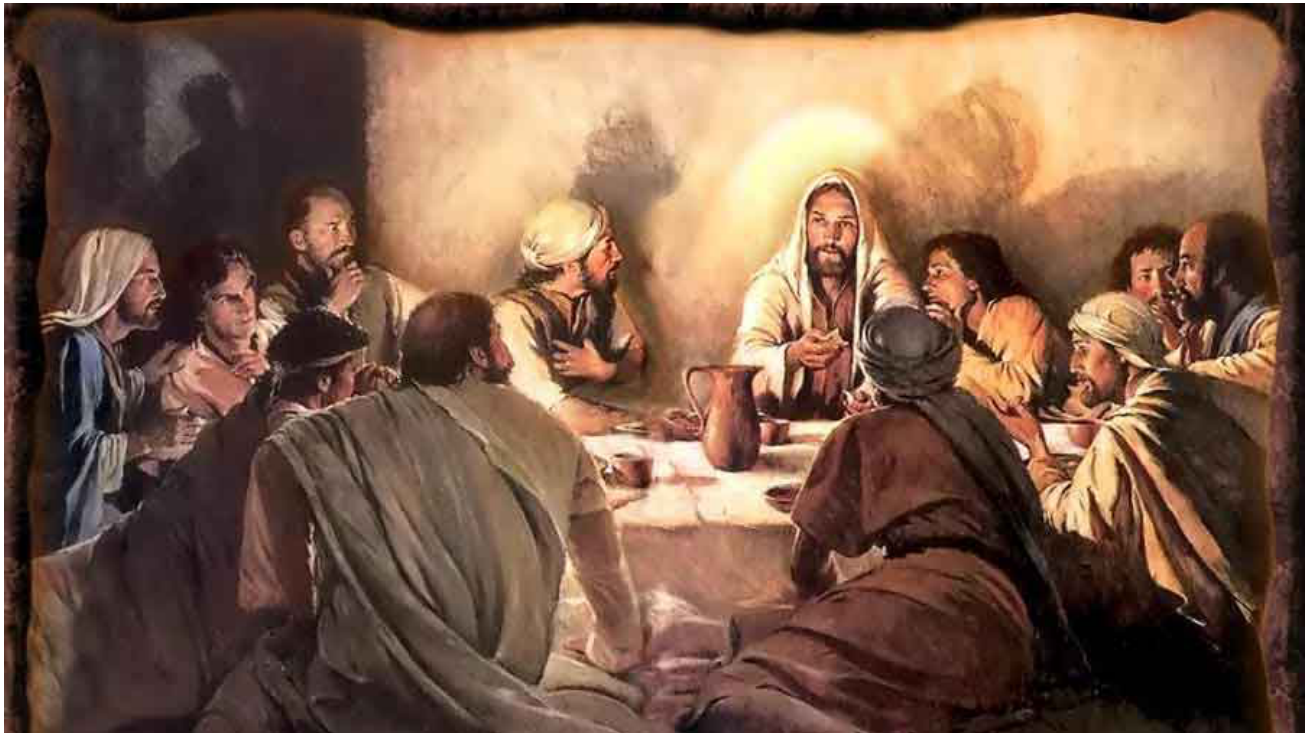
Who is invited? Lutherans have made a point of saying the forgiveness is unrestricted. The work of the cross is unrestricted. I can go to anybody on the street, one whom I have never met, and say the forgiveness is "for you." If he believes he has all the benefits of the cross. I do not put a condition on it. I do not say, "If you will invite Jesus into your heart then your sins will be forgiven." As one of my teachers used to say, "Sins do not send people to hell. It's unbelief that does that. The sins themselves have all been forgiven."

So then the question for this meditation, "Did Jesus commune Judas?" You can, and I have read through each of the accounts of the Lord's Supper to try and tease that out. It's tricky. Follow through the conversation and the events, at exactly what point did Judas leave. Notice three specific times Jesus warned him: in preparing for the supper; when Judas was leaving; in the garden at the kiss of betrayal.

There is one other time: at the giving of the sop. Two small pieces of matzah will be broken off to make a sandwich. Meat and other ingredients will be put between them, the whole thing dipped in sauce, and presented to a special guest of honor sitting next to the host. At the Lord's Supper, that person was Judas. He being honored in this way, as they say, "pray tell" who is not included in the call to come to the supper and know forgiveness? In one of the parables the king sends his servants out "to the highways and the byways. Compel them to come in that my house may be full." Again, "how could you

not be called and invited?” Let’s say it one more way. Jesus gives a call out and an invitation, “Come to the supper and know the forgiveness of sins. Come be a part of the feast of eternal life.” As He does so He is taking on the sins of the whole world. If He carries any of your sins (any of them) then He has the right to do the call out and the invitation.

Prayer: Lord help me to hear Your call and Your invitation, and to know that it is very, very personally for me. By Your Spirit give and keep me in faith that I may be a part of Your eternal kingdom of life. Amen.



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Meditation 9: Through the Ages

It is something you should know. When you, a believer, come to the Supper, you have been called, the meal has been prepared, and God has brought you to this place. The invitation has gone out. Paul says, "Before the ages . . ." (1 Corinthians 2:7) The preparation has been made. God says through Isaiah, "On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will prepare a rich banquet. The best of meats. The finest of wines." (Isaiah 25:1-6) Paul, again, goes into great detail describing the preparation in advance. That's Ephesians chapter 1. In fact, everyone who is here has been prepared for.

There is a contrast between before the ages and in the ages. The New Testament uses the phrase, "In these last days." That would be "in" the ages. It also uses the phrase "before the ages." To fill in some details, it is before time began, or more precisely before God the Father created and started time. Proverbs 8 uses the phrase, "before the first dust of the world appeared" and then it goes on to portray the relationship between God the Lord and "Wisdom." For, as Paul says in Ephesians 1, the entire plan of salvation is conceived within the purpose and goal and heart of God the Father. Jesus makes that reference when He says (1) The Father Himself loves you, and (2) John 3:16. The same is spoken in a different way in the hymn "A Lamb goes Uncomplaining Forth." "Go forth, My Son," the Father said, "And free men from death's awful dread, From guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear, But by Your suffering men may share The fruit of Your salvation."

That verse interestingly ends with the very picturesque:

O wondrous Love, what have You done! The Father offers up His Son! The Son, content, descended! O Love, how strong You are to save! You laid Him low within the grave, Whose Word the world created.

Again Ephesians 1 and I Corinthians 2 speak of the interplay between the plan formed before the ages and the carrying out of the plan of salvation in the ages.

In the ages then, there is first the prophecies scattered through the Old Testament. Many, most of the details of the Gospel are spelled out in advance. (Look up and find the book Alfred Eidersheim [The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah](#). In the back of it is there are lettered appendices. One of them is a compilation of Messianic prophecies. Read each one, speaking out-loud the number of the prophecy as you get to it and then reading the prophecy. That is a very instructive exercise. As the plan is fleshed out in all of its details, those details include the passing on of the Gospel from Nation to nation, and language to language, from generation to generation finally reaching you. They include the particular point at which the Word of God connected to your soul and called

you, woke you up. They include you coming to the font and being named, and the proclamation of forgiveness and salvation. They include your instruction, being taught what the Supper is and what becomes the pattern of your attendance. They include the details of your life so that on a particular day when you are attending the supper, all of these things, all the way from before the ages to all of the details through the ages bear on that particular encounter with God. They include all the further details as Christ Himself feeds and strengthens you with “My Body given for you”, “My Blood shed for you for your forgiveness”, until the time when you leave this earth and join with the multitude that no one could count to celebrate and share life in heaven with Jesus.

We can push the illustration to the extreme, comparing it to a state dinner. Let’s say a dinner is prepared for ambassadors from all over the world. They arrive in limousines, come into the White House. Everything is prepared. Chefs have been busy. Everyone has their place. Those who serve are all prepared and dressed. And when it is time for the meal, the workers go throughout the assembled multitude. They take one small wafer of bread and serve it. They take one tiny sip of wine and serve it. Then everyone is told to return next week for the meal to continue. Let’s say they do. And again, one small bite, one small sip, and they are told again to return the next week. That is a very strange picture (I did say pushed to the extreme). But when we come to this meal we receive a wafer of bread, a sip of wine, and will return again, and again, and again it happens. And the meal stretches out. It extends months, years, throughout our life. In fact, in the end of our lives we leave, called to heaven. And others are called to the supper. and on and on it goes, generation after generation. Century after century. Each bite, each tiny drink, has been prepared “from before the ages.”

What is this meal? Luther says, “It is the true body and blood of Christ, under the bread and wine, put there by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and drink.”

Who is invited, and who is ready? The questions go together. Invited is every human being. Everyone who hears the words and believes for them it has been prepared, they are seen. God has intervened in their lives and called them to come to what He has prepared. Not everyone believes and is ready. It is part of our job to help them prepare. But again, who is prepared? And again Luther, “Everyone who has faith in these words.” That is all. And then a wonderful quote, “the words ‘for you’ call for all hearts to believe.” That is the extent of the supper. That is how far reaching the call is. That is the full measure of the invitation. That is why the apparent non-Christian, or lapsed Christian can turn up at the supper, urgently desiring the meal. The call and invitation have worked their way through all the defenses he has built up and has hit home.

Q: Who is the most surprised, he himself or the Christians at the table with him?

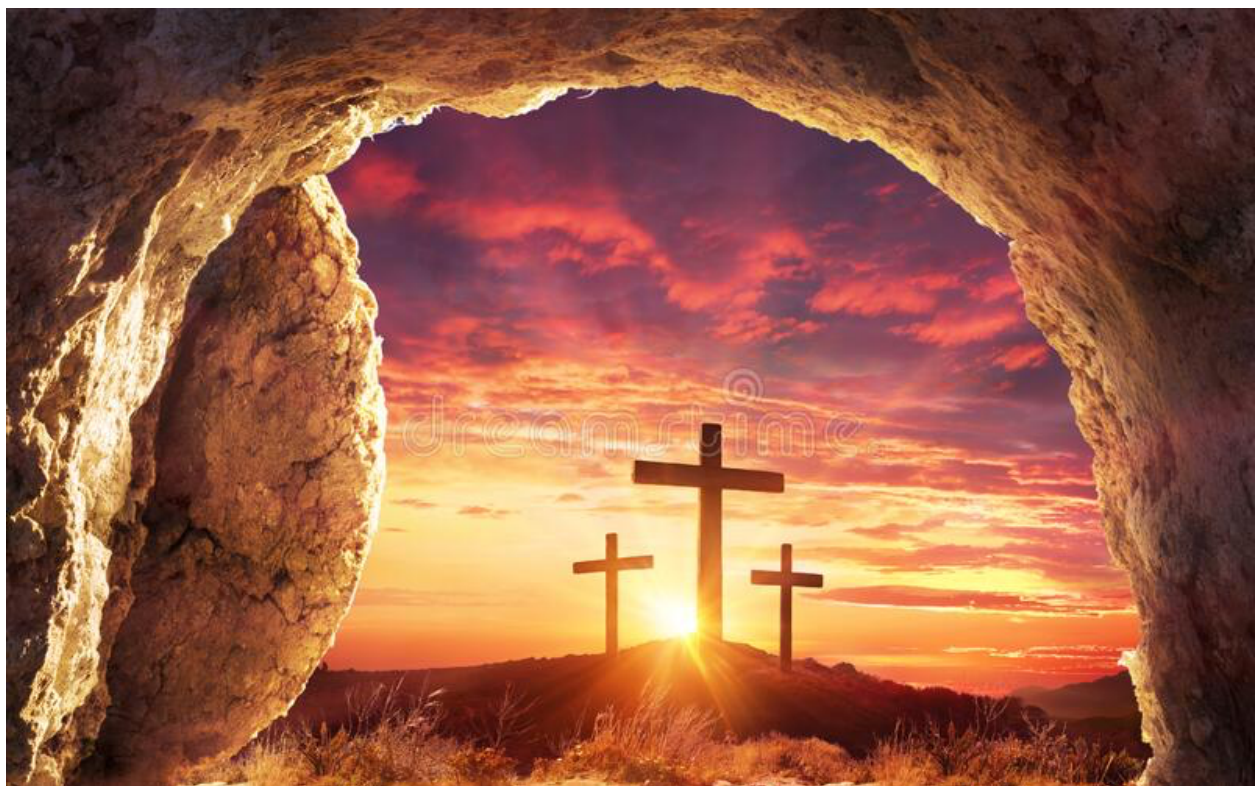
A: Yes.

Q: Who is the least surprised?

A: God.

And once again we are dealing with God who insists, and when He insists things, we would not expect happen.

Prayer: You have called, and You have insisted. Lord, what a wondrous, amazing thing to say. What a wondrous and amazing thing it is that I, a foolish and refusing sinner should have unnumbered things throughout history all coming together, and your Word working its way through all my defenses, and finally bringing home Your call into my soul, that here I should be invited to come to Your meal, and together with a tiny morsel of bread and a tiny sip of wine I should have the promises from eternity and to eternity. I know absolutely I am worthy of none of this. I should fear to come, but You have called. You said, for forgiveness and with that You have named me. How can I refuse. I the unworthy am invited and because You are true, I receive. In my forgiveness and receiving, You claim Your victory. I have no argument to make and so I receive. I am defeated by Your grace, and so I am blessed. You have won, and so I will receive life and salvation, and by receiving I praise You. Amen.



Meditation 10: There is Death in this Meal

This is a good thing. That may sound like a strange way to start. The kernel of this comes from some things about baptism. A lot of recent preaching reminds us that it is far too weak a thing that we bring our children to church to have them improve morally and spiritually. A far more radical solution is needed. There must be a dying and rising, and so it comes through in the service of baptism. One song says, "Here we bring a child of nature, home we bring a newborn creature." Again, baptism is not to improve the sinner, it is to kill and raise. And by the way improving the sinner just means you would get an improved sinner, better at covering his sins, more effective at justifying them, and more on point in being self-willed and curved inward. Indeed!

So as one seminary professor put it irreverently, we take the little stinker by the scruff of the neck. We plunge him into the baptismal waters, and we drown him. Then we pull him out. (irreverently) But it is a valid point and accurate illustration. We come Sunday after Sunday to hear the words of our baptism, to have the Word grab hold of us and plunge us under the water again. And then that professor illustrates our life in this world as, "I need my weekly drowning. The little stinker somehow crawls out of the baptismal font once again, and we have to take him once again and drown him in the Word."

So likewise, in the Supper there is death. It is not random target carelessly aimed death; it is me. It zeros in on me. It targets me, speaks to me, the words come out, "This is My Body" and I am in the crosshairs. But it is the One who steps in to share in that death "My Body given for you." He grabs ahold of me, throws an arm around me, and says, "Come on. Let's walk this together." Together we share in death as You come to share in my death, and we share in the death of death as You take Your victory and share it with me.

I find out that His dying takes His Body, crucified on the cross and three days later risen from the dead, and takes that risen from the dead eternally living Body and gives it to me. He takes His Blood shed for me and gives that as well. If I take my life and run to it, I run straight into the arms of death. If I take His death and run to it, I run straight into the arms of the living God.

It transcends time and it becomes the eternal dying and rising. It becomes a permanent and eternal thing.

It transcends time as it's given. "Take, drink" He says. This is (present tense) "My Blood of the new covenant shed (past tense about what will happen the following day, or more precisely, perfect tense. In the Greek it means done once, becoming a fixed reality

that cannot be changed or undone.) Again, it transcends time. If you watch the Dr. Who series, then you are familiar with the concept of a fixed point that cannot be changed. This is the one fixed point in all of reality and eternity, and why His Name is the Name above all names, so that every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess.

Prayer: Thank you my Lord for putting Your death into this meal. It is the death that is too big. Your death is too big, and death cannot contain it, it cannot hold it. The tomb cannot seal it in. Your death is the place where the victory is won, where death is swallowed up in life, and when I eat and drink, I eat and drink that victorious life, that eternal life, that death devouring life. As You walk my death with me, and bring me to walk Your death with You, You bring me into the eternal. Thank You for lifting off of me the useless and clothing me with the things of God. Help me to see this and in my soul run to Your meal as often as I may. Guide, guard, and lead me until that day that I bow my knee and with the rest of the multitude proclaim You Lord and Your Name above all names. Amen.



Meditation 11: One-on-One

As Jesus comes into the world to set the plan of salvation into motion, He is the Light of the World. He is Emmanuel, God with us. As John says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This is not just location; this is also because He takes on human nature becoming one of us. He is, Emmanuel, the God-Man. And whether the tense is perfect or not, the reality is perfect, a thing that has been done and can never be undone. A surprisingly significant verse is this, "As they were going along, a man came up and said, 'Teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' Jesus replied, 'Man, who made Me judge or arbiter over you?'" Say What? And again, "As they were going along, a man came up and said, 'Teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' Jesus replied, 'Man, who made Me judge or arbiter over you?'" SAY WHAAT?! Notice He refuses to "pull rank" or even "accept rank" over the man. So one more time, "As they were going along a man came up and said, 'Teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' Jesus said, 'Man, who made Me judge or arbiter over you?'" SAY WHAAAAAT?! Objectively He is of a higher rank. He is God. He has the right to declare and decide. He is judge over all. As the Greeks say "pantocrator." But he refuses to pull rank. He insists on this, and again, when God insists unexpected things happen.

We are propelled into a discussion I had with a vicar, driving around our town. It turned to Matthew 10:28-30: Jesus, "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Alternate phrase for gentle and humble in heart is "meek and lowly in heart." The question I love asking about that and many verses is, does this refer to Jesus as God or man? So, with this passage, when He says, "in heart" is it as God or as man? Is it functionally humble in the course of carrying out His mission, or is it the whole person, the character and personality of Him? In that sense it says, "in heart" that it means the whole person as God and man in the whole mission and in His personality. It is who He is. Which leads to the very strange conclusion, we have a God who is the humble God, the meek God, the lowly God. And once again, SAY WHAT?!

While you work at getting your mind around that one, let me show you how it goes further. He is the one who sits with Nicodemus at night and insists on sitting with him as an equal and talking about spiritual things. In the next chapter, he is the one who insists on sitting at the well with the Samaritan woman with the bad reputation. And again, talks to her as an equal and tells her about the living water that will soon fill her soul. He reveals to her things far above what she would have been able to figure out but does that while refusing to pull rank. Her description is, "Come meet a man who told me everything I ever did." Once again, "Come meet a man . . ." Two chapters later, right

upon the feeding of the 5000, as there are many who are taking offense and leaving, Jesus says to Peter, "Do you want to leave also?" In that phrasing there is a huge weight of emotion. There is sadness and disappointment, and He shares it with His good friend Peter. This is an aspect of the person Jesus that you have to read the Gospel of John a few times (or a few dozen times) to begin to get it in focus. But there it is, the One who will sit with you as your friend, and simply be there as a friend. He doesn't have to have you bow down to Him or pick up a paper and pencil and be ready to take notes of His every word. He will simply be there, looking into your eyes, as an equal, and hearing and knowing all that is in your soul. He will sit with you one-on-one, bypassing all the structures and strictures that would lead us to expect how far above us and how distant God is from us.

To the woman about to be stoned, "Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" And then, "Neither do I condemn you." In John 10, to those arguing with Him, "Before Abraham was, I am." Is this making a huge claim, or is it a simple, quiet answer of truth? The fact that it leads to some trouble makes it much more likely that it is a simple answer of truth. In John 13, He leans over at the meal and having prepared the morsel (pieces of matzo sandwiching something special and tasty) He gives it to Judas. The morsel is traditional in that meal to give to somebody you are recognizing as a special friend. And so He does, including and calling back to Himself the very one who would betray Him.

There's a certain quietness about this including the prayer for the soldiers crucifying, and the promise to the thief on the cross next to Him. In fact, that quietness pervades the entire account, including the one word statement, "Mary", outside the tomb, and the mealtime prayer which likely started Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam (ברוך אתה יהוה, אלהינו מלך העולם). And the two at Emmaus know from the phrasing and pattern who He is. Finally, and very significantly there is the meal at the sea of Galilee where there is no great revelation, and no great teaching and no healing, raising of the dead or other specific miracle. Just breakfast, but breakfast on the beach with the risen, living Jesus is entirely enough. There is time to linger, and He does. It's a time of sweetness when the demands of the mission pause for a while and there is simply being there.

It reminds me of a time when a group of high schoolers figured out that they could go by Good Shepherd at 6th and Warren Streets in Maywood, Pastor Paul Bacon, and sit there in the dark and just hang out. And the pastor would stay as long as we wanted to stay, and so we did, riding there on our bicycles, meeting others when we went in. A few in that group smoked some cigarettes and we talked and enjoyed the quiet and darkness.

And the pastor had to wait in the church office and do whatever work he could until we finally left, sometimes well after nine o'clock.

So, it is in one way with the Supper. In this aspect it is a very simple meal, and nothing dramatic has to happen. It is just simply time with the Jesus, Emmanuel, our Brother. It is enough.

There is in the Gospel of John, a pattern of Jesus when He sits down, the one-to-one encounter. And in that encounter, it looks for all the world like it is very simply, one person to another, and looks for all the world like he comes to them and treats them as an equal, one soul to one soul. So, there is in communion that quiet aspect where He meets with you. It is quite profoundly the same - the rabbi, the woman at the well, each person in the crowd who is weary and heavy laden, Peter, the servant of the high priest, the high priest himself, the governor, the soldiers, and the thief. In the Supper this is who speaks to you and feeds you, and you are called, and wanted in His kingdom. It is profoundly true that there is no one in all of history or all of existence who could do this other than He, Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have called me Your friend. And as You have called so many You have called me to know the joy of fellowship with God. Help me to hear Your invitation and to gladly come to Your supper. Amen.



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Meditation 12: There is Life in this Meal

Remember a couple of meditations ago “There is Death in this Meal”? It is not death in general, or some random death. It is my death. It is where the Son of God comes along and joins Himself to each of us, He makes that His issue, and so He goes into death but death isn’t able to hold Him. He has life in Himself, and all the glory and righteousness of God. So, it cannot contain Him. He shines forth within the bowels of death itself, and bursts it asunder, so that as He rises all those who belong to Him follow in His train.

Quite a number of years ago, one of my brothers and I took to the hobby of watching really bad science fiction movies. Some were funny. More were just horrible pieces of film. He recommended a truly nasty piece of trash, that I still have not seen, by the title of “The Stuff.” It was about food that people would eat. Once inside of them it would 1) compel them to need to eat more and more; and 2) would continue to grow and expand in them, stretching them horribly and in total pain until they burst apart and the stuff inside expanded like a tube of crescent rolls. As he describes it, it was a truly nasty piece of horrible film. You have been warned.

The normal wording we use in distributing communion is: 1) Take, eat, the body of Christ given for you; 2) Take drink, the blood of Christ shed for you for your forgiveness.

But that is not a fully precise definition. It is much more general.

What then is it? This is the born and laid in the manger, nailed to the cross, laid in the tomb, risen on the third day with all the power of Easter and the glory of God, body of Jesus that is here to give you life. It is the body of Jesus that we will see on RESURRECTION DAY. With that body Zephaniah in the Old Testament tells us we will see - the Lord will rejoice over you; He will quiet you with His love; He will exalt over you with loud singing. I do indeed on that day want to see Jesus who calls me His friend break into loud singing. (Zephaniah 3:14-17) Likewise, what is that wine? It is the blood that flowed through His veins, that then on Good Friday began to bleed out with the driving of the nails and then with the piercing of the spear; that stained the cloth that they wrapped Him in when they laid Him in the tomb.

This is the real stuff. It is not simply bread and simply wine, and it is not dead flesh and blood. It is the living reality. It is joined to the bread and in the cup brought to your lips so that you may eat and drink and receive the living flesh and blood of your friend, Jesus. He then, through His living body and living blood, transforms your lowly body so that it will be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him to subdue all things to Himself. John says it differently, with an absolutely marvelous turn of phrase,

beginning with effect He says, "We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:2)

So, then the living Christ is giving Himself to you, lives then within you and me, and is rewriting our entire existence.

Prayer: Lord and Savior, what a wondrous arrangement and plan this is. You live in me that I may live in You. It is Your body and Your blood. Your body risen from the dead, laid in the tomb, and coming forth with all the power and glory of Easter. It is Your blood shed on the cross, pouring out from Your veins that is in this cup and brought to me. Again, it is the same body that was born in Bethlehem, laid in the manger, puzzled the rabbis when You were 12 years old, walked around the holy land healing, and raising from the dead. That was there to teach the Word of God, that was arrested, that witnessed to the Sanhedrin. That witnessed before Pilate, that was nailed to the cross, lifted up on it, that bled and died, that was taken down and laid in the tomb, that was raised on the third day, that walked with the disciples to Emmaus, that appeared to the disciples in the upper room, that invited Thomas to see with his finger, that rose and will return from heaven for me. It is that body. It is the same blood that coursed through your veins that was involved in the agony of prayer when there were great drops of blood that bled from the nails and the spear, that stained the cloth. That is what I am given. So that it is Your living, physical self that lives in me. Again, it is the inner You, the human soul, that truly lives in me. As Paul says, "we have the mind of Christ." And it is You as God that dwell within me. All this in part so that I may dwell within You. As the Bible says, we are raised up with You and seated in the heavens in You. So, it is Your desire that Your life should be my life, with all of the joy and eternal glory that you have. It is beyond my ability to comprehend, so I simply thank You and worship You, my great and true Savior and Friend. Amen.

Meditation 13: Bring it!

I am invited to a supper. It is high class (nobility and royalty). The prestige is beyond measurement. In attending, what do I bring? In modern times invited to such a supper you might bring a hostess gift. Perhaps a bottle of wine. (No) Luther gives a nod to the practices of his day, "Fasting and bodily preparation are . . ." (No)

What do I bring? This may sound counter intuitive, but it is not. It is straightforwardly based on what this is and what we are told. What then?

There is a saying that I have used more times than I could count. "The only safe place for a sinner is to stand as a sinner in the presence of God." In this vast universe extending thousands of light-years (parsecs even); with more stars than you can count, planets, moons, terrain (unknown biospheres even?) - in this vast, vast universe there is carved out a tiny area surrounding a meal with a wafer of bread and a sip of wine. There is carved out a tiny little safe place, again, the only safe place in this universe for a sinner is standing as a sinner in the presence of the holy and righteous God. It sounds counter intuitive; after all didn't somebody in our nation's history preach a famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." (Jonathan Edwards). But look at what He says. Look at what He does. He meets with the sinner. He takes the sinner's sin; He lifts it up. He holds it on His shoulders, and He walks off with it. The only safe place then is to stand before Him, as fully the sinner that you are.

So come. Bring it. Bring all the lousy things. Bring all the hatred that we together have packed into the cauldron of history, so that 20 - 25% of all human deaths are sudden and not by natural causes. Bring the hatred and sniping that you have plastered over the image of your neighbor. Bring the cruelty and viciousness that you have acted out in the worst parts of your life. Bring the nastiness toward your neighbor and the nastiness in your morality. Bring it all! You are invited too. You remember something that you had forgotten at first. Bring it too! Walk yourself there as the most unclean being you know of in the entire universe. Honestly, when I am honest with myself, that is what I am to me. And that is what you are to you. Don't pass it off on Adam, or Eve, or the devil, or someone else. It is you.

Come with it. Come with all of it. This is the one safe place. This is the one place carved out in the whole universe, again, the one safe place for me a sinner, and you a sinner. And again, it's what He says. Am I sure? Yes. "Shed for you for the forgiveness of sin." This is not a meal for the holy and righteous and spiritual and good (if you can find them). It's set out for us, the vicious and nasty and horrible. And, once again, this is not

counterintuitive. It is exactly how it is designed and what He says. So, when I come, I want to come with the full measure of my uncleanness and filth.

Years ago, I heard a young pastor, right out of seminary, explain to others how he would teach his congregation how to rightly take the Lord's Supper. He spoke of bowing, kneeling, prayers to say when you approach the railing, when you take the bread, when you drink the wine, when you bow your head after receiving, when you stand up, when you turn to leave, customs like making the sign of the cross, etc. etc. I spoke up and said, "This is what I propose to do with the body of Christ. I propose to take it and put it in the most unclean place in the universe that I know of. I intend to put it within me. To take and eat it." It did raise a few eyebrows. But that is exactly what we propose to do, because it is what we have been told to do. And that cleanness there in the body of Christ is so powerful that it is able to deal with all that we are.

So, I come with my sin, with all the big ones and all the tiny little ones, leave nothing out. Bring it all. As if you are walking up the aisle with this big bag of clanky, disgusting, loud and stanky things that I have piled up everywhere in my life. I bring them all because He has invited me the sinner, in my entirety, and He will meet me and lift these things off me. What an amazing friend and what an amazing meal.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You call me and as You call me, You call all of what I am. So, I come, come all of me, I come. I leave nothing behind, not the display of abomination while I gleefully point to my neighbor's sin while excusing my own, not the awful offal that is my morality. I bring it all. I know it reeks, but You call, and You open up the safe, loved by God, place for me to be. So, I come. I do not understand, but You have called. I come the sinner that I am, not understanding but still called, and You meet, and welcome, and take it all. So, I come and I worship. I worship and I praise. I praise and I thank You. Amen.

Meditation 14: Friend

With all that we have said, how do we bring this together? Jesus comes into the world “to seek and to save that which was lost.” In seeking, He seeks out and connects with Nicodemus, opening up Old Testament theology. They talk about new birth and new beginning.

He connects with the rabbis in general and opens up for them what they have somehow missed. He tells how God talked to Moses. “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. So, He reveals the resurrection. (QED; *Quod Erat Demonstratum*)

He connects with the Samaritan woman. He also has suffered a bad reputation as the Pharisees have followed Him around saying that He cast out demons, did miracles, etc., by the prince of demons.

He connects with the crowd that is weary and burdened, as He also has been weary and burdened, revealing Himself as the “humble, lowly, gentle, meek God.” (And who of them would have seen that coming?)

Peter learns this lesson also in a very different way, as His Lord and teacher washes his feet, likewise the rest of the disciples.

The servant of the high priest, right in the middle of carrying out His arrest, learns of this gentle and humble God who stoops down to care for his need healing his ear.

The chief priest learns of the simple speaking of truth, “I am, and henceforth you shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.”

The governor learns the truth about authority as Jesus answers him with both authority and gentleness, hearing, “you have no power” and “My Kingdom is not of this world.”

The soldiers try to maintain physical authority and control, but they are out of their depth, and He is beyond their understanding, yet He prays for them.

The thief on the cross confesses that he deserves to lose everything eternally, and yet this One brings his soul into salvation, promises paradise. And so, he (the thief) confesses.

With all of these things He does, all of these ways connecting, it would seem we are running out of descriptive words. Yet there is one more. It is a word that is more than I understand in my daily life. It is a Word whose impact and meaning are way more, and way deeper than I would understand by my simple daily life, and it is very much who He is. He is - My Friend.

He says it Himself, to his disciples, to me, and to you.

“Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends. You are My Friends.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus:

Thank You my Friend for calling me to Yourself. Thank You for inviting me to live in Your presence. Thank You for Your promise of forgiveness and eternal life. Thank You for calling me to this meal and joining Yourself to me; that You and I may remain close and never parted. Thank You that I may be numbered among Your friends. On that day when You call all Your friends to life, to live forever. Amen.



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Meditation 15: What Kind of Kingdom

The question leading into this meditation, What Kind of Kingdom, will take a detour into politics. It is not however taking sides in our current discussions if you were hoping. There is something entirely different at play here. The entire history and list of nations and kingdoms is divided into two models. Those are 1) those with an elite where the rest of the population are subjects, and 2) those that hold that all humanity is created equal, endowed with unalienable rights, and that governments are established to protect those rights, deriving their legitimate authority from the consent of the governed. We are the second kind. Almost all the rest of history and the rest of the world is the first kind. And when an upheaval takes place and a government is replaced, how often (virtually 100%) is it simply the substituting of one elite for another. (as one rock song puts it, "Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss." And the rock song is "Don't get Fooled Again" by the Who.)

However, go back to our founding documents and the statement, "All men are created equal" and the expectation that this is a country where they are equal before God and before the law. That is something that is a tremendous rarity in the history of nations. Where this connects in - John mentioned the talk with Nicodemus in the garden; the conversation with the Savior and the woman at the well; and others. In addition, that is what took place in the meeting with Nathaniel. The exchange runs, "Rabbi, how do you know me?" "Before Phillip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." 2000 years later we have no more clue as to specifically what that referred to than we did in the first century. Such is the way it is.

The individuation of the relationship is a tremendously powerful and, sadly, almost completely overlooked theme. But that is the way it is with someone who insists on being so thoroughly human ("The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.") that He can approach any one of us and sit with us as an equal, as I have said before "Looking into your eyes and telling you what is in your soul."

There are other examples from the gentle correction of James and John who wanted to call down fire on the village that refused to receive them, to the gentle dealing with Thomas' doubts and questions ("Put your finger here.") to the breakfast of fish and bread on the sea of Tiberius, to the exchange with Peter at the end of the Gospel ("but when you are old someone else will lead you by the hand and take you where you do not want to go." Then Peter looked up and saw John and said, "Lord, what is to become of him?" and received a correction, "If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you?") The correction to Peter is, come on back to the center. I have a one-on-one relationship with you. You are My friend. That is the same thing I would say to him if he

was asking about you. The correction is to call him back to the center where Peter's relationship with Jesus is of such ultimate significance that doing compare and contrast is ruled out as inappropriate.

That individualized aspect surfaces for us every four years when we are considering candidates for president and the question is asked along the lines of, "Which one would you be more comfortable having a hamburger with or having a beer with?"; and it is often the man who is best able to fake this who will gain the victory. Whoever you like or favor, none of them is able to truly do what is lined out and described in the Gospel of John. His act is (when God insists amazing things happen) that He approaches us in this way and that we are drawn into that significant relationship. (Interesting and just in passing: it is G K Chesterton that describes mysticism as that "moment when there is only you and God.")

What then is the Kingdom of God. It would be easy to miss the mark to focus on the words in Revelation 7, "A multitude that no one could number" and bypass the significance that each person in this multitude has been approached personally, called personally, related to by the Lord of the Church. Let's put it this way, He is building His Kingdom. How He does that is one person at a time, connecting individually, drawing that person into a relationship, so that when the Kingdom of God is revealed, what is revealed is each individual who He has come to, drawing into a relationship with Himself and calling them a friend. (Not to belabor the term, but in an "individuated manner.") The experience of the kingdom of heaven will not be simply to be a part of a throng, but to be among a countless number who each have the same type of one-on-one relationship, and who have been called by "a friend" to share in eternity.

When Jesus is born as one of us, truly human, that is part of the establishment of a pattern where He is able to deal with each of us one-on-one (rabbi, Samaritan woman, pharisees, disciples, blind man, Peter, Judas, servant of the chief priest, Chief Priest, soldiers, thief) - Again dealing with us, coming in addressing us as equals. This is the stunning way of the Kingdom of God. It is such that, "No one expected that!"

This one-on-one aspect runs completely through every part of His relationship with us when He meets us in the Supper. There also it is, and must be, an intimate and individual aspect. The aspects of that one-on-one relationship are so thorough going and multitudinous in their detail that each instance of coming to the Supper for years on end can be unique and memorable. This is, in fact, our experience of the Supper.

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus that among that countless multitude You single out such a one as me, and having called me as just one soul, You then also call me "friend." You

continue to grow Your kingdom, and as You do so it is always one soul individually, called to be Your friend. Help me to treasure this relationship, and then to treasure each of the relationships I have with Your people. Guide us to those who are alone and need such a Friend, to call them, and call them "friend." Amen.



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