

“Known in the Breaking of Bread”

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First Christian Church, Hamilton, Illinois – January 24, 2016

1 Corinthians 10:13-17 NIV

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 NIV

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.

When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.



As I may never have mentioned to you, I was first ordained and elder in 1964 in the Methodist Church. After that I served as a student pastor of several churches in New England while completing my doctorate in biblical studies. Then I taught college in Texas for three years and had the opportunity to conduct weekly chapel services, and after that I was a Methodist pastor in western Illinois for three years. Then I spent two years on the staff of a Foursquare Gospel church in the Quad Cities. But in 1980 I lost that job and had to start all over again.

At that time I joined another denomination, the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, with which I still hold ministerial credentials. But for one reason or another I wasn’t able to get back into either full

time pastoral ministry or college teaching. So I spent twenty years working for Rand McNally as a transportation data analyst, from which I retired in 2001. During that time I served an interim ministry in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, and also tried to start two churches on my own, but they never got off the ground.

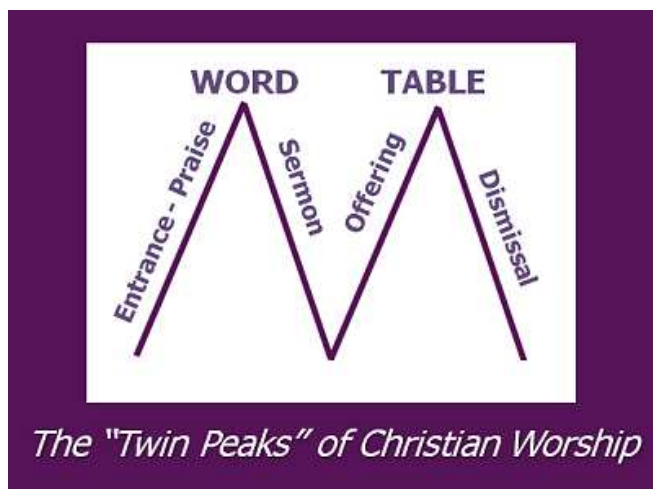
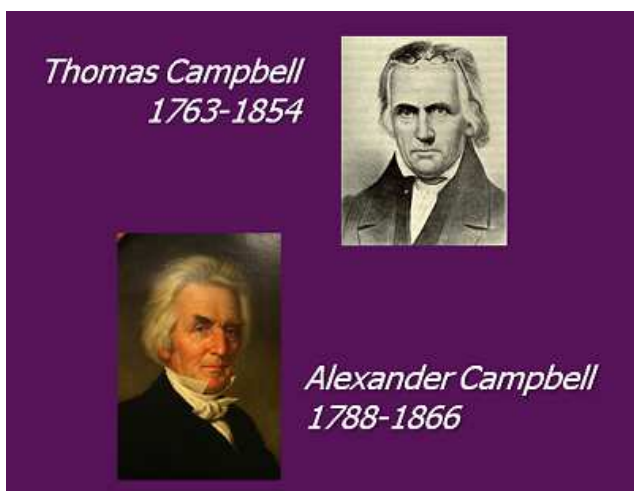
Eventually I started attending an Anglican church in Wheaton, Illinois. Because my credentials were with the C.C.C.C. (4-Cs as it's called) I had no ministerial standing in that church, so I wasn't able to function regularly in a ministerial capacity. Then, from 2004-2005, I was interim pastor of Union Congregational Church in North Aurora, Illinois. During that time we moved to Kirkland, Illinois, and in 2009 we moved to Hamilton. On one of our first Sundays after moving we worshiped here — in fact, it was Lee Wiley's last day as your pastor. Shortly I became a member of the Evangelical Free Church of Keokuk, where Shirley Anne and I were married in 2001, because in order to keep my ministerial credentials with the C.C.C.C. I had to be a member of a congregationally governed church. But at E-Free I rarely functioned in any ministerial capacity, preaching only on a few occasions. Shirley Anne and I also worshiped occasionally at some other churches in the area, and for a while we were part of Maranatha House of Worship led by Pastor Paul Smith, and then joined him for a time on his "Lightning Strykes" TV program. Finally, late in 2014, I revisited this church and was invited to speak, and then became your part-time interim pastor.

So, why am I telling you all this? Only to tell you about what I've missed the most in not regularly being a pastor for several decades. It wasn't the administration of a church. It wasn't working with groups or counseling people. It wasn't preaching and teaching. Those things can all be very satisfying, but what I missed the most was what I have the privilege of doing today, and that is to stand by the Lord's Table and take part in leading the people of God in celebrating Holy Communion. It's your elders who actually administer Holy Communion, but at least I get to offer the prayer that begins our Communion service. In one way, that's the most satisfying part of working with you during this time of transition in this church's life.

The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is the most basic act of Christian worship, and this was recognized by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, who began the "Christian Church" movement in the early 1800s. (By the way, Campbell is my middle name, but no relation as far as I know.) In the New Testament we read about prayer, and prophecy, and psalms

and hymns and spiritual songs, and other acts of worship. We hear those great anthems of the Revelation to John: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12). We catch the vision of the apostle Paul for universal worship, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). But none of these acts of worship are set forth in any great detail. It's the Supper of the Lord that gets the most attention from the New Testament writers, in both the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. This act of worship is known by several titles, each of which conveys something of what it means when we gather at the Lord's Table, and that's what this teaching today is about.

From the very beginning, Christian worship has followed the sequence I outlined last week: Entrance, Word, Table, Dismissal. We enter the Lord's presence, are taught by the Word of God, gather at the Lord's Table for Holy Communion, and are then sent forth as his faithful servants. So historic Christian worship combines two main elements: the Service of the Word, and the Service of the Lord's Table. In First Corinthians, Paul discusses both of these aspects of worship; he explains how we're to prophesy in



the Christian assembly, and how we're to conduct ourselves at the Lord's Supper. Some scholars think these were simply two parts of the same Christian gathering on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week.

Whatever the case, the teaching of the Word of God and the sharing in the Table of the Lord have always gone together, and something is missing when one of them is left out. I like to call them the "twin peaks" of Christian worship. We saw this in the Scripture readings we referred to last week. The account of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20–24, has this double emphasis. First, Moses declares to all the people the Lord's words that he received on the holy mountain. Then the elders of Israel go up the mountain with Moses and, we are told, "they saw God, and they ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11). The same two aspects of worship are present in Luke 24. First, the risen Jesus opens the Scriptures to his unwitting disciples, showing them how they teach that the Messiah must suffer and then be glorified. Then Jesus shares a meal with them, and as he breaks the bread they realize who he is. Word and Table — these are the "twin peaks" of Christian celebration. This morning we have gone up our first "peak" with the reading from the Holy Scriptures. And in a little while we'll go up again to the second of these "twin peaks" and, like the elders of Israel at Mount Sinai — like those disciples on the road to Emmaus — we will eat and drink in the Lord's presence.

- Why observe the Lord's Supper (Communion)?
- Meanings (names) of this act of worship
- How is Jesus present at the Table?

It's because the sharing in Holy Communion is so central in our worship that I want to spend this time with you discussing some of its different aspects and meanings. I'd like to do this by asking several questions. First, why do we observe the Lord's Supper?

Second, what are some different *names* given to this basic act of Christian worship, and what do these names have to teach us about what we're doing? And third, how is Jesus present with us when we meet him at the Lord's Table?

First, why do we have Holy Communion? In a faith based on spiritual realities, why are we dealing with something so *physical* as plates of bread pellets or tinkling little cups of grape juice? Eating and drinking can seem so earthly, so crass and materialistic — and anyway it's kind of a bother to pass those vessels or, if we go to another kind of church, to get up and walk down the aisle to be served. Or, because we do this every Sunday, it can become a boring ritual we don't think too much about.

Well, there's one good reason why we do this: *because Jesus told us to*. "Do this in remembrance of me." If we never go a step further — if we never comprehend what it means to observe the Lord's Supper, and if we never understand exactly how he could be "known to us in the breaking of the bread," as Luke says — we would still *do it* because Jesus told us to do it. In Acts 2:42, Luke gives us a picture of the life of the very first church in Jerusalem: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." We devote ourselves to *the breaking of bread* because our Lord would have it so. It's that simple.

Second, what can we learn about what Holy Communion means from the different terms Christians have applied to this act of worship? I have already used several terms: *breaking bread*, *Holy Communion*, *Lord's Supper*. There's another historic term, *Eucharist*. Each of these has its origins in the Bible. Let's look at them, one by one.

First, the *breaking of bread* was a meal shared by the whole church that included the blessing of the loaf and cup according to Jesus' instructions. We're not comfortable, are we, eating with strangers? Eating together, then as now, was a symbol of belonging together. As a persecuted minority, the early Christians found strength and hope in sharing at the table. Perhaps David's words came to mind: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Psalm 23:5). Breaking bread is a way of saying that we're bonded one to another.



Paul criticized the Corinthian Christians because they ate their common meal selfishly, each one taking whatever he could for himself. This violated their bond in Jesus the Messiah. Paul warned them not to forget others when sharing in the common meal. He said, "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without *discerning the body* eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Corinthians 11:28-29). Sometimes people take Paul's words to mean that we need to examine our lives for hidden sins before receiving the Lord's Supper. The sin Paul is talking about is not hidden: it's the sin of ignoring the needs of our fellow Christians as we break bread with them. As you come to the table today, a good question to ask yourself is, "How can I *discern the body* of Christ? How can I minister to the needs of those in my church family?" That's what it means to examine yourself at the Lord's Table.

Second, Paul uses the term *Lord's Supper* to describe the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:20). His point is that there is more to the ceremony than simply consuming food together. Through his death Jesus has brought into being a new community loyal to him as Sovereign. Sharing the tokens of his body and blood is a way of setting forth this basic gospel message, to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26) — in fact, we could take this expression, in the Greek, to mean that in the Lord's Supper we proclaim the Lord's death *so that he might come*. The Supper is the Lord's and he is present with us *now* as we share in the symbols of his life.

Terms (Meanings)

- Breaking of Bread (*Community Meal*)
- Lord's Supper (*Covenant Meal*)
- Communion (*Sharing, koinonia*)
- Eucharist (*Thanksgiving*)

At the Last Supper, Jesus blessed the loaf and cup as a sign of the covenant between God and his new people. He called it "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:29), just as Moses enacted God's covenant with Israel by sprinkling the blood of sacrifice on the people. In the Bible a covenant is like a treaty between a King and his servants, and such agreements were sometimes sealed by

sharing a meal, like the elders of Israel on Mount Sinai. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is *our covenant meal* through which we acknowledge Jesus' kingship and authority over our lives. The Greek words translated "Lord's Supper" might also be translated "Royal Banquet." Jesus himself is our host at the Lord's Table, receiving our renewed pledge of loyalty to him and his kingdom.

Paul offers another term when he speaks of the loaf and the cup as *koinonia*, in 1 Corinthians 10: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a *koinonia* in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a *koinonia* in the body of Christ?" This word has no exact English equivalent, but may be translated as *participation, sharing or communion*. The cup we bless is a sharing in the blood of Jesus, and the bread we break is a participation in his body. The term "Holy Communion" originates in this expression, and refers to the inner unity of believers one with another through their union in the Messiah. The Lord's Table symbolizes and even *brings about* that unity. As Paul says, "We, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

One more term, and that is *Eucharist*, or Thanksgiving. On the night before his death, Jesus celebrated a Passover meal with his disciples. During that meal, he performed a simple and common Jewish ceremony, *giving thanks* over the loaf and the cup. It was this act of blessing — not the Passover that's observed only once a year — that eventually became the Christian ceremony of the Lord's Table. That's how the term Eucharist, or thanksgiving, came to be applied to the Lord's Supper.

Giving thanks means more than simply expressing gratitude. In the Bible, especially the Psalms, to *give thanks* means to confess that the Lord is our King and God. That's why Paul finds the refusal to give thanks to be such a fundamental act of rebellion and sin against the Creator (Romans 1:21). When we gather at the Lord's Table we give thanks to God as a way of pledging our loyalty to him and our reliance on his covenant with us.

Now we move on to our final question: Just *how is Jesus present with us* when we meet him at the Lord's Table? He did say, "This is my body . . . This is my blood." But how do we understand these words? Christians have tried to answer this question in a variety of ways. Catholics believe that through the prayers of a priest God changes the bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ, even though they still look and taste like bread and wine. That's called *transubstantiation*. Lutherans believe that Jesus is *present with* the elements

but not identified with them. That's called *consubstantiation*. Reformed Protestants and most evangelicals believe that the bread and wine are symbols, or emblems, that help us to remember that Jesus gave his life for us, for Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

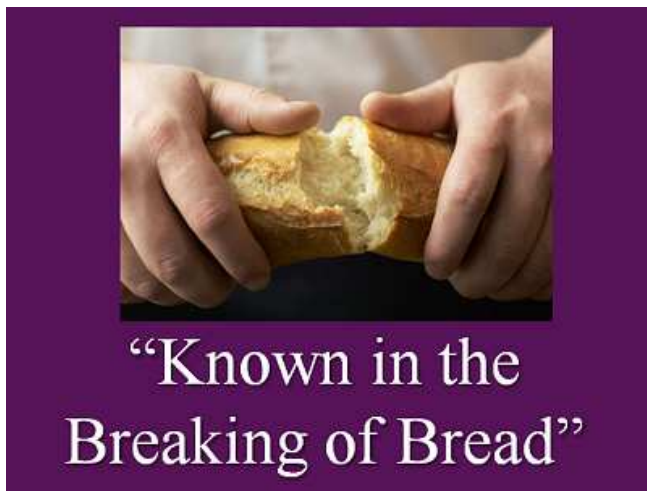
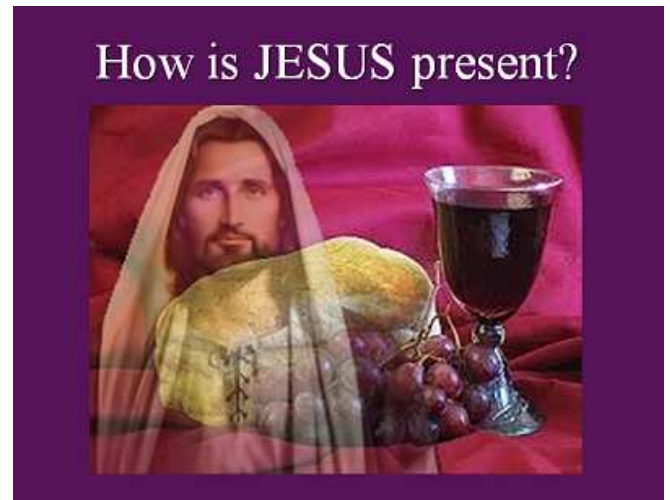
What do *you* believe, Dr. Leonard? Well, maverick that I am, I come at it from yet another angle. If the Lord's Supper were only a *memory aid*, why would Paul have been so concerned about receiving it unworthily? But if Jesus was still with his disciples in the flesh when he said, "This is my body . . . This is my blood" how could the bread and wine also be his body and blood? Besides, when Paul says the bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ, it's clear from the context that the *body* he has in mind is the *body of believers* who are sharing, and not the loaf on the table.

And yet, Jesus did say "This is my body . . . This is my blood." There has to be a sense in which Jesus makes his presence known to us in just these particular things he gave his disciples: bread made from the harvest of the field, wine or grape juice made from the fruit of the vine — those very down-to-earth gifts he gave his followers at a particular time and place in history. It would not do to try to have the Lord's Supper with coffee and doughnuts. Only the very things Jesus gave us can connect us with our Jesus who died once for all for our sins, and was raised again for our salvation. The symbols of his life, in other words, are more than symbols as we usually understand symbols. These symbols *partake of the reality* of that which they represent — or *re-present* — for us today. But how can they do this?

My cell phone rings. I reach for it and put it to my ear. The voice I hear is that of a dear friend, or a relative, perhaps a thousand miles away. We have a wonderful visit, a tender conversation touching the deep things of life. We say our goodbyes and I put the phone down thankful that I've met with my friend and we've shared our lives with each other. I've heard the voice of someone important to me. *But wait a minute* — I didn't really hear his voice, after all! It was only the vibration of a diaphragm in the phone, activated by electronic signals from some kind of transmission tower. I was fooled — it wasn't my friend I heard, after all, just a lifeless machine! How stupid of me, to think that I actually had a conversation with my friend when it was only a vibrating metal disk!

Do you see my point? The phone call didn't *remind* me of my friend, it actually let me converse with him. Yet the cell phone wasn't my friend's actual voice, only a transform of it. Still, through this medium my friend and I were present to each other, and involved in each other's lives.

How is Jesus present in the Lord's Supper? How does he make himself known to us in the breaking of bread? We can't capture this in some obscure theological formula or analyze it with some "scientific" explanation. But when we give thanks over the loaf and the cup, and share in these symbols Jesus gave us, we know that we've heard his voice and met with him in a way unlike any other. We know that our Friend is present, ready to save and comfort and heal and encourage. Like the elders on Mount Sinai, we eat and drink and so behold the Lord. Like the disciples at Emmaus, our eyes are opened and we come to know Jesus "in the breaking of the bread."



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Breaking of Bread”

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