

Pepperdine, Day 1

Introduction

- I. Last spring I became particularly annoyed with our Communion service at Southwest Central.
 - A. I listened to the Lord's Supper prayers, and they all sounded alike.
 - B. We were doing more singing during the Lord's Supper, and I heard more and more complaints about how the singing was disturbing people's ability to think about the Lord.
 - C. Even the Lord's Supper meditations seems to have a familiar ring to them.
- II. So I began to give the subject some thought.
 - A. About that time *Leaven Magazine* arrived with a special issue on the Lord's Supper.
 - B. On the Internet, there was also a lengthy discussion of the Supper that whetted my appetite.
- III. So I decided to do a sermon series and some teaching on the Supper.
 - A. The Sermon series consisted of 10 special weeks where the supper was emphasized, frequently with the supper in the middle of the sermon.
 1. I have come to think that nearly any topic is related to the Lord's Supper.
 2. It has become common at Southwest Central for me to speak several times during a service instead of one 25-30 minute oration.
 3. I often break up my comments with singing, scripture, or the supper.
 - B. I did some teaching on Sunday nights during this time. The Sunday evening assembly that I teach is more of a class than a sermon, and I used this time to address questions like.
 1. How much shall we copy the original Passover.
 2. Must we use unleavened bread?
 3. Should we use red wine or grape juice?
 4. Is there any justification to the discussion of cups and loafs.
 5. Must one be baptized to take of the Lord's Supper.
 6. Can member's children partake?
 7. How often may I take or must I take the Lord's Supper?
 8. Does the order of the bread and then the cup matter?
 - C. I asked the brother who organizes our Lord's Supper servers to select his prayer leaders a week in advance and ask them to plan their prayer carefully, even write it out if that would help them be thoughtful.
 1. Occasionally when the supper is integrated with the sermon, I give them a call and suggest a theme or direction of the prayer.
 2. I am amazed at how surprised some of them are about all of this.
 - D. I began to be very specific when I asked someone to do a meditation. I would give them a passage and an idea to discuss. I might give them a book and ask them to read a specific chapter and relate that to the supper.
 - E. In the handout that you will receive is a bibliography of some materials that I have found especially helpful.
 1. I did not try to include standard commentaries, dictionaries, etc.
 - F. One of my goals with these three hours is to give you enough ideas that, if you are a preacher, you can go back home and develop a series of integrated worship services for your congregation.

- IV. Have you ever analyzed how your congregation teaches about the Lord's Supper.
- A. When I was growing up back in northern Louisiana, the only lessons I ever remember on the Lord's Supper were those that said we ought to take it every Sunday and those that defended multiple cups.
 - B. The way I really learned about the supper was through the prayers said on Sunday at the Lord's Table.
 - C. And the way you learned to pray those prayers was by listening to others pray.
 - D. So there developed a single focus and a single set of stock phrases.
- V. Rob McRay who preaches for the Bering Drive Church in Houston, formerly of the Northtown Church of Christ in Milwaukee, wrote in *Leaven* about his childhood experiences at the Lord's Table. I wonder if this sounds familiar.
- A. "In the weekly memorial service for Christ, the sanctuary was filled with the sad, almost mournful strains of "Night with Ebon Pinion" or "'Tis Midnight and on Olive's Brow." The slow rhythm of the pallbearers' feet reminded me of the men who march silently down the aisle during the final verse of the song and stood at the table in front. The room was quiet and solemn as those gathered reflected on the tragic death of the one in whose honor the memorial service was held. A familiar liturgy was recited as the congregation had heard it recited often before:
 - B. "In like manner, Heavenly Father, we give thanks unto Thee for this cup, the fruit of the vine, which so vividly represents to us the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which was shed for us on the cruel cross of Calvary. May all who partake of this cup do so in a manner which is well-pleasing in Thy sight."
 - C. "The atmosphere was intended to resemble a funeral; after all, this was called a 'memorial service.'"
 - D. "I was taught that during the supper I should bow my head and close my eyes and picture Jesus on the cross. I should think about his pain and agony. I should remember that it was my fault that he suffered and died. I should examine myself and repent of my sins that I might take the Lord's Super in a worthy manner, for if I failed to partake worthily, then I would surely be lost."
 - E. "I believe this fails to capture the intended meaning of this great Christian observance. Chiefly, it fails to reflect the intended nature of the remembering and thanksgiving that was part of the Lord's supper in the early church. The Lord's Supper was intended to remember Jesus, not in a 'memorial service,' but in a commemorative festival. The atmosphere was not one of grim mourning, but of joyful thanksgiving."
- VI. I think McRay has hit the nail on the head. I am not saying that it is wrong to picture Jesus on the cross and to count the cost of our sin, but that is but one image of the Lord's Supper, and certainly not the primary one.
- A. Has this been your experience?
 - B. Look at the songs listed in the back of the song book under "Lord's Supper."
 1. "Here before Thee Savior...Grant this bread now broken, may a symbol be of thy precious body bruised on Calvry's tree."
 2. "I gave my life for thee, my precious blood I shed, ...I gave my life for thee; what hast thou given for me."
 3. "When My love to Christ grows weak.. There behold his agony, suffered on the bitter tree; see His anguish, see His faith, Love triumphant still in death."
- VII. My hope these three days is to help you see other images of the Lord's supper