

I. Good morning. And welcome on this communion Sunday. As I was watching the transition video, two thoughts hit me:

A. Sometimes it seems, a lot of problems would go away, if we all got an extra hour of sleep every night.

B. They probably miss Pat – the Cubs fan. Well, have no fear, he’s on staff. In case you did not know, Pat is our Student Ministries pastor at the LF campus.

1. He bumped into someone who was quite shocked to meet him, and who assumed we had bought those videos. No. All in house. In fact, Pat shows up impromptu at some staff meetings – which is not always a helpful thing.

C. Last week, Anson did a great job of wrapping up our discussion about Blind Spots with a challenge to choose life. He shared a bit of his own life and decisions – all against a backdrop of Moses’s comments in Deuteronomy – and then said, “We have options. Choose the right ones.” And he set out three possible next steps. Almost a hundred of you signed up for one of them. Great. If you missed that message, it’s online. Do yourself a favor and listen – and take a next step.

D. Today we return to the Planted series. As has been noted, I am working on a book that covers the forty topics I think everyone needs a working knowledge of. In the book they will be organized in a systematic way. They are being sprinkled in here and there right – for instance, today is communion and we will be focusing on why we do this – and what is it we are doing.

E. One note before we go there. It’s been a while, but I need to say something about money. As many of you know, 18 months ago we launched REACH – a focused effort to Fuel a movement that Reaches People and Renews Communities. And as part of that we said: “we want to launch ten communities of grace, hope and love; we want 100,000 service hours outside the church walls, and we want to see 500 baptisms.

1. At the end of that campaign, we secured over \$16M in pledges that was charted to be received over two years. That was unfolding as \$11+ in operations and 5M for additional work.

2. There has been lots of progress: the church in Ghana is up and running – with 60 baptisms already, we have people working on the launch in both India and in the Middle East. Rev. 7:9 is up. The launch team for CCVH has started meeting, we are close to 80,000 volunteer hours, well over 200 baptisms.

3. And the funding has been in place on all of this. Thank you. But in the last few months we have suddenly seen a big downturn. Not sure what is going on, but I wanted to say: thank you to all of you who are giving and pressing forward on your commitments. And I want to gently prompt those of you who have fallen behind to catch up, and those still sitting this out to jump in.

II. In one of the more thoughtful moments in *The Lord of the Rings*, Pippin, one of the hobbit heroes, says that he weeps whenever he hears a horn blow, because it reminds him of his salvation.<sup>1</sup>

A. This is found in the third book in the trilogy – *The Return of the King* – and by the way, it’s not in the movie. Earlier, in a battle against the Orcs who are trying to overthrow Minas Tirith, it looks as if all is lost and that Pippin is about to die. The Orc Army has breached the wall. It’s all over. When they hear horns in the distance – it is the cavalry. The King of Rohan is riding to the rescue. And although the King will die in the battle that ensues, he saves the city and Pippin.

B. Later, Pippin reflects that whenever he hears a horn, he burst into tears, because it reminds him that though it cost him his life, the king died to rescue him.

C. The Lord’s Supper – one of two sacraments celebrated by the church - is a horn blowing in the distance. It reminds us of that great day in the past when, though it cost him his life, Jesus came to our rescue.

III. You may not have thought much – or enough – about Sacraments (the word is odd but easy to decode) these are sacred activities that are unique for a few reasons.

A. They were established by Christ.

1. Jesus’ public ministry began when he waded into the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist.

2. John was an unusual person. Sent by God to announce the arrival of the Kingdom.

3. Like Jesus, he was the subject of Old Testament prophecy. The last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament – Malachi – talks about the return of an Elijah figure. In Matthew 17,<sup>2</sup> Jesus notes that this is John.

4. Like Jesus, his birth was unique. It was announced by an angel, and though he was not conceived by the Holy Spirit as Jesus was, he was filled by the Holy Spirit while still in the womb. And Jesus would later note that he was greater than any of the other prophets.

5. We are told a bit about his life, especially in Luke’s Gospel.

a) Like other prophets, he tended to spend a fair bit of time alone with God – in his case, living in the desert.

b) But, at the appointed hour, he had marched into Jerusalem preaching a message of repentance. He reported that the Kingdom of God was about to unfold – it was almost “go time,” but the Jews were not ready. In order to prepare for what God was going to do, he said they needed to repent and be baptized.

6. No one had ever suggested that a Jew needed to be baptized before.

a) Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism were instructed to undergo a ritual bathing. But that is as close as it got, and that was for Gentiles not Jews.

b) And the Jewish religious leaders - the Temple authorities – were scandalized by this suggestion. For starters, they did not like this uneducated crazy man gathering big crowds of their people and telling them that they should do to be right with God. Secondly, they were scandalized at his suggestion that they needed to be baptized. Why couldn’t the people see that: they were God’s spokesmen and that anything that needed to happen happened at the Temple.

7. But the people were complying, and so did Jesus. Though he was without sin, he was baptized.
8. The scene is quite memorable. As Christ walked out to meet John in the Jordan, John replied, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” He had earlier noted that he was not worthy to untie Jesus shoes, let alone baptize him. So he tried to get Jesus to baptize him. But Christ insisted that John baptize him. And so, he did.
9. And then, as Jesus comes out of the water we have a great Trinitarian moment: Jesus is present on the shore, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and God the Father spoke audibly from Heaven, saying, “You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.”<sup>3</sup>
10. Following the baptism, Jesus was then led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days of fasting and testing. When he emerged, he immediately called the twelve and began the three-year march towards the cross. This involved:
  11. Loving and caring for others, especially the poor and disenfranchised;
  12. Modeling what life with God looked like.
  13. He served. He taught with unmatched authority. And He made it clear that He was God, the Messiah and our savior – and He died in our place. He substituted his life for ours. Jesus took your sins upon himself on the cross.
  14. Well, though not always highlighted, Jesus did something else: he established two sacraments.
    - a) Just prior to his crucifixion, “on the night that he was betrayed,” Jesus gathered his disciple together in an upper room for the Passover Meal. During that evening – the Last Supper - he repositioned the 1,400-year-old Passover into Holy Communion (the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist,<sup>4</sup> the Table of the Lord, the Breaking of the Bread, etc.).
    - b) And then a bit later, just prior to his ascension into heaven – which takes place forty days after the resurrection - Christ issued the Great Commission, which included instructions to make disciples of all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”
  15. Holy Communion and baptism are the two sacraments – two sacred activities, sacred rhythms – that are important and unique and designed to teach and shape us.

B. Second: They are events – some would say visual sermons – designed to: 1) remind us, 2) of Christ’s death; and 3) focus us on the Gospel.

1. Baptism is a one-time event that marks the beginning of our journey with Jesus. The Lord’s Supper is something repeated over and over to help us continue on.
2. In I Corinthians 11:24, Paul repeats Christ’s words from the Last Supper: This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In Jewish culture, this command is not to a mere recollection. It was not simply a mental activity. It is re-enter the event – which is why, during the Passover celebration, the Jews say “we” rather than “they” when they retell it.<sup>5</sup>
3. And the event to relive is Christ’s death. Both sacraments point to it.

a) Going under the water not only suggests washing our sins away, it symbolizes dying and be buried with Christ. Coming out of the water is then equated with rising with Christ.

b) Eating the bread and drinking the cup remind us of Christ's death as the Passover lamb, and the also profile our desperate need to be sustained by Christ.

c) These are not events designed to point to themselves – they are designed to point to Christ's death and the Gospel. What He did for us.

d) People have many ideas about who Jesus is and why He came to earth. Let's not forget what He said about who He was and why He came. He claimed to be God and said He came to "seek and save what was lost."<sup>6</sup>

e) The sacraments lose their power if they become religious ritual or point to themselves.

4. Baptism is a onetime event that reminds us of Christ's death. Communion is an ongoing event that continually reinforces the saving work of Christ. They blow the horn again, reminding us that though it cost him his life, the king rode in to save us.

C. Third: They are mysterious.

1. Sacrament may seem like a foreign word, but it's not hard to decode. It is used to describe a sacred event, a sacred rhythm for our life. It refers to an outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible spiritual reality.

2. As you may know, Christians have found ways to fight over many things, and this is not an exception.<sup>7</sup> Some claim that both baptism and communion are memorials only – that is, nothing supernatural happens during them – they are simply remembrances. (Usually those in this camp refer to baptism and communion as ordinances, a play on the fact that Jesus ordained them).<sup>8</sup>

3. Others claim that these events are full of supernatural power even to the point of making one a Christian.

4. I want to stress that we are not "saved" by being baptized or taking communion. We are reconciled to God on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone, not by anything that we do, even good things like these. As Paul writes, "If water could wash away our sins then Christ died in vain."<sup>9</sup>

5. But I believe the sacraments are more than memorials. There is some mystery here. Baptism is more than a religious activity where we get wet, and communion is something more than eating a piece of bread and drinking a bit of juice (or wine). Something happens – some sort of blessing is accrued, they are not a means of saving grace, but they are a means of grace (*media gratiae*) – and we need to lean into it. Why would you not?

6. Some equate these events with putting on a wedding ring – i.e., you can be married without a ring. And the ring itself doesn't make you married. But the ring symbolizes a commitment that has been made. I appreciate the analogy, though I believe what happens at baptism and communion is stronger than wearing a ring.

D. There are some other things to note:

1. They are ways of publicly identifying with Christ:
    - a) Baptism is not a private event. When John was holding baptisms, he did so at the Jordan River – not far from the center of things.
    - b) And so, as a church, we have tried to make baptism as big an event as possible, sometimes holding it at a public beach.
    - c) The Christian life is full of decisions about identifying with Christ – this is one of the bigger ones.
  2. They are the pattern of the early church.
    - a) The Sacraments are unique because: they were set up by Christ, they are designed to focus us on his death, they are visual sermons, they are ways of publicly identifying with Christ, they are commanded, and they are the pattern of the early church.
    - b) We did not make this up. These sacred acts – these rhythms of grace – have been central to Christian faith for 2,000 years.<sup>10</sup>
- E. I want to emphasize a fourth: They are Commanded
1. Jesus doesn't set these before us as suggestions or good ideas. "Hey, if you get around to it – and it's convenient, you might want to..."
  2. No, these are things we are told to do. They are things expected of us.
  3. God meets us where we are and draws us to himself. The path we follow has a thousand unique twists and turns. Some connect with God best in silence, others in groups. Some through study and others through service. That is OK, however, there are some things everyone must do.
  4. And note, with the exception of the thief on the cross, the suggestion is that every person who decides to follow Christ is baptized.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the New Testament does not have a category for a Christ-follower who has not been baptized. If this describes you, make plans now to be baptized at the next opportunity.
  5. We are going to be focusing on communion, because we are about to celebrate it together. But let me say to those of you who have not yet been baptized. Because, we have a baptism coming up early next year – and I am on a mission to get some of you to take this next step.
  6. As I have noted on many occasions: we are not saved by being baptized. But, the New Testament does not have much space for someone who says they are a Christ-follower who has not been baptized. The thief on the cross is it.
    - a) In Acts 8, after Philip explains the Gospel to the Ethiopian Eunuch, he is immediately baptized
    - b) In Acts 16, after Paul leads his jailer to faith, it says that he and his family were immediately baptized.
  7. I understand people putting off the decision to be baptized if they are trying to decide if they are serious about becoming a Christ – follower. And I can live with someone saying, "I am waiting for the Spring Baptism because my Mom is going to be visiting," or whatever. But I have talked to others who have said, "I'm not going to get baptized because I don't look good with wet hair."

a) Jesus didn't look great after he had been stripped, whipped and nailed to the cross for our sins.

8. Now there are a few other questions here. We have a paper on this that you can access – and a class as well.

a) Does it have to be immersion to count? I think immersion is what the NT talks about, but on a couple of occasions<sup>12</sup> – both times with people who were elderly – I have sprinkled.

b) If I was baptized as an infant, does that count. I do not think that is the pattern. The arguments for infant baptism are complicated. They link it with circumcision as a sign of the covenant. I do not spend time trying to talk people out of it. We dedicate infants and I was rebaptized after coming to faith.

IV. Let's turn now to Communion – to this act of worship that pivots around this ceremonial meal that is focused on Christ's death.

A. Earlier I said, let me take a half step back and we looked at Christ's life. In order to understand communion, we have to step back a lot farther than that.

B. We start at the beginning of Genesis with the initial instructions – you're free to do pretty much anything. But do not eat from this tree (do not try to become me). If you do, you will die.

1. They do – and they fall. They become broken and are banished but instead of immediate death, a pattern of sacrifices is set up, whereby innocent third parties die so guilty people can go free.

2. We see this in the sacrifices offered with Cain and Abel. We see it in the very strange event in which Abraham is told to offer Isaac. To take your son. Your only son – the one you love – and sacrifice him.

3. It's a horrible, unthinkable request that Abraham is not ultimately allowed to do – but it sets up what will happen with Christ.

C. We then get to the development of this idea in the book of Exodus with the Tenth Plaque that sets up the first Passover

1. The Jews have been living in captivity as slaves. God sends Moses to liberate them. He gets into tense negotiations with the Pharaoh that leads to 9 Plagues designed to demonstrate God's power.

2. And then the tenth plague is different. The angel of death is sent into Egypt to claim the life of the first born male, except those homes where an innocent, unblemished, male lamb has been killed and its blood painted over the door. Where there has been a substitute death, the guilty people go free. The angel of death "passes over" that home.

D. This not only leads to the Pharaoh to allow the Jews to go free; and it not only transitions the Jews into the sacrificial system – which will further develop the law, and establish priests and codify a sacrificial system whereby the people will always been offering sacrifices when they sin. Where the idea that sin equals death but an innocent third party can die in their place.

1. From this point on, a bloody story will get even bloodier – as over and over again the Jews will need to rehearse the death of a third party so they can be forgiven.

E. The first Passover also sets up an annual remembrance. Under God’s direction,<sup>13</sup> every year they will repeat the Passover meal they had on the night they killed the Passover lamb. A very well-established ritual will happen for the next 1,400 years.

F. Until we get to the Last Supper

G. The trek that Jesus and his disciples made into Jerusalem – which was just like the one he did with his parent when he was twelve (back in Luke 2). And it was timed to correspond to the Passover. They arrived in Jerusalem a week early to prepare themselves spiritually for the Passover Meal.

H. And in addition to all of the other things that happen that week, Jesus gathers with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal, but at the Last Supper, Jesus changed the 1,400 year old ceremony – which was not lost on the disciples. They were expecting a very well-rehearsed meal that had been eaten in the exact same manner.

1. The Patriarch of a family presided over it. And they would begin the meal by saying, “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the wilderness.”

2. However, at the Last Supper, Jesus – presiding over the meal - shocks his disciples by changing the traditional phrase.

3. Rather than repeating the old mantra, “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the wilderness,” Jesus says, “This bread is my body.” He makes it clear that everything is changing because he has arrived and it will later be clear, that the ceremony had always been about him.

4. Some suggest that at this point, the disciples should have gotten up and walked out. This was sacrilege. But, as the rest of the story and the Bible will make clear, the Passover Lamb was always only just a placeholder waiting for him to arrive.

I. The same is true of the way in which Jesus shockingly alters the tradition of how wine was served at a Passover Meal. Ever since the Exodus, four cups of wine were passed around to represent the four great promises in Exodus 6:6-7.

1. The first promise is, “I will take you out of Egypt”; the second is, “I will deliver you from Egyptian slavery”; the third is, “I will redeem you with a demonstration of my power”; the fourth is, “I will acquire you as a nation.”

2. Jesus, rather than going through the ritual of four cups of wine that celebrate these four promises, raises a cup and says in Matthew 26:27, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

3. Once again, in striking fashion, Jesus is saying, “This is a new day. I am reworking the Passover meal. I am fulfilling it. I am completing all of the sacrifices ever made in the Temple. It is all happening through my blood (which is code for, through my death). Drink this cup and know that you are forgiven, once and for all, through my sacrifice.”

J. And by the way, the surprises and symbolism were not over, because, it turns out there is no lamb. There is no main course. The Passover Meal was supposed to reach it's crescendo with the main course, the lamb. But it was conspicuously absent because Jesus is the lamb of God.

1. Which is exactly what John the Baptist had said earlier, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

K. On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus changed the Passover celebration into Holy Communion. Giving us a sacred event to repeat over and over, and also giving us a reminder of the Great Meal to come, which is the great wedding feast of the Lamb.

1. Revelation 19:9 says, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"

L. The Sacrament of Holy Communion looks back to the Passover and it looks forward to the Great Banquet in Heaven – all which are about Jesus.

V. As with baptism, there are lots of questions.

A. How often should we do this?

B. Who should partake?

C. What specifically happens to the bread and the cup during the service – a question driven by the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation. I am not going to answer the last one other than to say, "see my notes online."<sup>14</sup>

D. I will say, this table is open to all Christ followers, provided that they are willing to examine – again – their heart.

E. Another way of saying that is, this table is not open to the unconverted of the unrepentant.

VI. CAMPUS PASTORS

A. As you have heard, this is a sacred activity – one designed to nourish us, to move us, to engage us.

B. This table is designed to focus us on Christ and his death on our behalf.

1. One way of framing what we are celebrating here is to note that in Genesis 3, the serpent turned to Eve and said "take and eat." And that lead to death.

2. Here, Jesus turns to his followers and says, "take and eat" and it leads to life.

C. The table at Christ Church is open to all Christ followers.

D. If you are not yet that, let me encourage you either to let the elements pass you by. Or let me encourage you to receive Christ right now. That you pray something along the lines of:

1. Heavenly Father, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever understood or believed, but that through your son Jesus, I can be more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you that he lived the life I should have lived and paid the debt I owed. Receive me now for His sake. I turn from my sins and receive Jesus as my savior.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Tim Keller for this illustration.



<sup>2</sup> Matthew 17:12f

<sup>3</sup> Luke 3:22

<sup>4</sup> Eucharist is from the Greek word for thanksgiving.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Skye Jethani’s devotionals – in and around Oct. 12, 2018 - for these insights.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 19:10.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to disagreement over whether there is mystery here (a sacrament) or just a memorial (an ordinance). There are three other prominent areas of disagreement: 1) Roman Catholics contend that there are seven sacraments, whereas Protestants recognize two; and 2) there is disagreement over what happens to the elements (the bread and cup) during communion, with Catholics arguing that they turn into the real body of Christ, and Protestants saying they do not; and 3) there is disagreement over how necessary they are, with Catholics arguing for a greater effect, and occasionally sounding as though we become a Christian via baptism.

<sup>8</sup> I believe something supernatural transpires here, but to be fair, those in this camp would contend that the breaking of bread is a “chronology-transcending, community-uniting, life-changing event, by which we are riveted to our redemptive events.” (Michael Lloyd, *Café Theology*, p. 197.)

<sup>9</sup> Baptism is a visible witness of the washing, but not the physical washing that takes away our sin. If we could wash away sins with water, the goal would simply be to get everyone wet, regardless of their faith! (See Essays in Honor of Timothy George, *Worship, Tradition and Engagement*, edited by David Dockery, p. 27).

<sup>10</sup> One way to note this, is to cite the references in Acts to the sacraments. Another is to note their presence in the various Confessions. The Westminster Confession reads: Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord’s Supper, to be observed in his church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death; the sealing of all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further encouragement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body. (Westminster Confession XXIX.1).

<sup>11</sup> This exception is important because it proves that we are not saved by the water but by Christ. But the fact that it’s the only exception also says something important.

<sup>12</sup> In his article, *What is Baptism and How Important is It?*, John Piper writes: The word *baptism* in Greek means *dip* or *immerse*. And most scholars agree that this is the way the early church practiced baptism. Only much later does the practice of sprinkling or pouring emerge, as far as we can tell from the evidence. There are a few other pointers to immersion besides the meaning of the word and the imagery of death and burial. In [Acts 8:37–38](#), the Ethiopian eunuch comes to faith while riding with Philip in his chariot and says, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Philip agrees and it says, “He commanded the chariot to stop, and they both *went down into the water*, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.” That they “*went down into the water*” makes most sense if they were going down to immerse him, not to sprinkle him. Similarly it says in [John 3:23](#), “John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because *water was plentiful there*.” You don’t need plentiful water if you are simply sprinkling. You just need a jar.

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 12:17 reads: “Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.”

<sup>14</sup> In *The Lord’s Supper*, J.I. Packer writes, At the time of the Reformation, questions about the nature of Christ’s presence in the Supper and the relation of the rite to his atoning death were centers of stormy

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controversy. On the first question, the Roman Catholic church affirmed (as it still affirms) transubstantiation, defined by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Transubstantiation means that the substance of the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the substance of Christ's body and blood so that they are no longer bread and wine, though they appear to be. Luther modified this, affirming what was later called "consubstantiation" (a term that Luther did not favor), namely, that Christ's body and blood come to be present in, with, and under the form of the bread and wine, which thus become more than bread and wine though not less. The Eastern Orthodox churches and some Anglicans say much the same. Zwingli denied that the glorified Christ, now in heaven, is present in any way that the words bodily, physically, or locally would fit. Calvin held that though the bread and wine remained unchanged (he agreed with Zwingli that the is of "this is my body... my blood" means "represents," not "constitutes"), Christ through the Spirit grants worshippers true enjoyment of his personal presence, drawing them into fellowship with himself in heaven (Heb. 12:22-24) in a way that is glorious and very real, though indescribable.