

I'm quite sure that most of us had breakfast before we came to worship this morning. People enjoy different foods for their first meal of the day. There's oatmeal, fruit smoothies, bacon & eggs, protein drinks. Haven't we all heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day . . . food to provide the nourishment that our bodies need. That may be true. But we all know that at some time later in the day, we feel the need to seek additional nourishment; there's a gnawing in our stomachs; we feel empty. Our physical bodies need to be fed. Without nourishment, our physical bodies will eventually die. But what about our spiritual needs? What is it that satisfies that emptiness; the craving to be spiritually fed?

Today, we have gathered in this place to celebrate at the table of our Lord – Holy Communion – the bread and the wine prepared to be shared. Do we come to the table just to partake of a small piece of bread and a cup of wine or juice, the physical elements of communion? Or do we come to the table seeking Christ; to be united with him; his spiritual presence among us? That's what we're going to explore today – what some refer to as the real spiritual presence of the Lord in communion.

The meaning of the "spiritual presence" concerning the Lord's Supper is that Jesus is spiritually (but not physically) present at communion. There are other views regarding the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Pastor Karl, in a previous sermon, spoke about the Roman Catholic view – something called transubstantiation or often referred to as the "real presence" view. According to this view, when the priest pronounces the words "this is my body" over the bread

and elevates the cup, the elements are actually changed into the physical body and the blood of the Lord. The change is not discernable to the senses; the bread and wine still look and taste like bread and wine, but they are really, according to this view, the body and blood of the Lord and are to be honored as such.

Most Protestants including Presbyterians today hold to the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. The elements of bread and juice do not change or become the body and blood of the Lord in any way. We know what the elements mean. But there is more. These two common elements are more than just symbols of something that happened long ago. Yes, we recall those familiar words that "the Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this is remembrance of me. Remembrance. Does that mean that we should identify the sacrament as a memorial? When we remember Christ in His supper, we don't just recollect the story; our minds go much deeper; we think about the significance of his death and what it means for us. Our observance of the Lord's Supper welcomes Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, his spiritual presence in this place. It isn't just a memory of Him that is present; He is here among us; in the midst of these people who have joined to be not just in communion with each other, but in communion with their Lord. His presence is not confined to the elements of the table. The bread and the cup serve as a link or a connection, between Christ and the benefits of his saving work on the one side, and God's people on the other side. Grace!

As we read the text for this morning's message, the wording may have been somewhat confusing and may have made us a bit uncomfortable. Imagine, if you

will, the crowd that Jesus was addressing when he spoke these words; they, too, were, in the same way probably confused and uncomfortable. Those who were gathered were being invited to eat His flesh, which he shall give for the life of the world. This is not a cannibalistic reference. Jesus, as the living bread from heaven, was offering his human flesh, a sacrifice for all on the cross, the true Paschal Lamb, who will be slain that the world might be given life. You may recall that the crowd that Jesus is addressing in this passage is made up of many of those same 5000 people who were just recently miraculously fed with two loaves of bread and 5 small fish; physical food. But Jesus isn't speaking of physical nourishment. He wants those who follow after him to know that He is the living bread that came down from heaven; the living bread which a man may eat and not die. Perhaps many in the crowd recalled the manna that Israel had eaten in the time of Moses. And so Jesus makes the comparison for them. "Your ancestors, Jesus said, 'ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they eventually died. But here, I am offering you the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.'" Like manna, Jesus gives life; but unlike manna, which sustains for only a day, the life that Jesus promises lasts for eternity. This bread will be given for the life of the world, eternal life. Because of their lack of understanding many in that sensation-seeking crowd turned away from him. They could not comprehend the message Jesus was delivering to them. Even his disciples were unsure of his message.

But friends, we have the details; we know what happens next. We know about the cross; we comprehend the anguish of a dying man, the torn flesh and the spilled blood. We know of the sacrifice and the significance of His death. We believe,

with faith that his body was pierced and his blood was shed for us, for you and for me.

In 1 Corinthians 10:16, Paul writes, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” Communion or participation (in the Greek, translated as *Koinonia*) is exactly what happens when we as believers, eat the bread and drink the wine at the table of the Lord. We are sharing in the benefits of the body and blood of Jesus Christ; benefits that are surely present to us by faith. The physical elements, the bread and the cup, bring us to be in the presence of our risen Lord and Savior and he, spiritually present with us.

The spiritual presence of the Lord brings him into our very being. William Barclay summarizes it like this. He writes that so long as Jesus remains a figure in a book he is external to us; but when he enters into our hearts we can feed upon the life and the strength and the dynamic vitality that he gives to us. Jesus said that we must drink his blood. He is saying: “You must stop thinking of me as a subject for theological debate; you must take me into you, and you must come into me; and then you will have real life.” This is the spiritual presence of Jesus in the bread and the cup offered to you.

For some, it may be that the sacrament of communion has lost some of its meaning. Maybe it has become a memorial where we participate by eating a small piece of bread; drinking a sip of juice, remembering the death of Jesus. But the physical elements bring us to the table so that we can share in the benefits of Jesus’ body and blood. These benefits are truly present to us by faith, as summarized in the Westminster Confession: It says,

*“Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses (29.7).*

So, coming to the table is to feed upon Christ. Just as physical food nourishes and sustains our bodies in our daily lives, the spiritual food offered to us in the Lord’s Supper provides grace to face trials and temptations. The presence of the Lord is here. Jesus is the host of the supper. It is he that does the inviting; Jesus prepares the table and offers himself to be a living presence in our lives; not just at this table but in every part of our lives, every hour of every day until that day when together, as his family, we feast at the table in his Kingdom. Come and partake of his body and blood and be filled with his presence.