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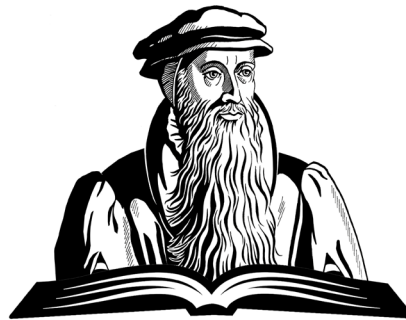
Communion Season

Sermons

An Introduction and 7 Sermons
by Rev. William Macleod



*An Introduction to the
Scottish Communion Season and
a Sampling of 7 Sermons of the
type that Might be Preached During
the Communion Season*



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Communion Season Sermons

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Communion Season Sermons

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Introduction

Turn with me to the Scriptures, to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 22, and we'll read verses 14 to 20: "And when the hour was come, he sat down"—that is, Jesus sat down—"and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Amen. May God bless to us the reading of his Word.

So, this series of sermons which follows will take the pattern of a traditional Scottish Communion weekend. Today's sermon will be a kind of introduction to the others. Some churches celebrate Communion every weekend or maybe every fortnight, or once a month. It's tagged on at the end of a regular service, and sometimes it has very little meaning. It's almost like a ritual. In Scotland, from the time of the Covenanters in the seventeenth century, a unique and blessed tradition has developed. Now, many traditions are bad, but not all. Some are very good, and profitable and helpful, and we believe that there is much that the modern evangelical church worldwide can learn from the traditional Scottish Communion.

First of all, we notice that Communion is an institution of Christ. We read together there in Luke chapter 22, of Christ instituting Communion. We could read it again, verses 19 and 20: "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

Now, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* is very helpful in the way it explains many of our doctrines. Question #92, in the *Shorter Catechism*, asks "What is a sacrament?" And the answer is: "A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers." That means that there's only two proper sacraments. The Roman Catholic Church, as you know, has seven sacraments. But Christ only instituted two: baptism, and the Lord's Supper. And these two correspond to the two sacraments of the Old Testament: circumcision, the sacrament of initiation into the people of God, the church of God; and passover. Really, there's only one church, Old Testament and New Testament. There's only one way of salvation, one covenant of grace, one Savior. The only way we can be saved is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. That was true in Old Testament times too. They had to look forward to the coming of Christ, and put their trust in the Christ who was going to die at Calvary, just as we look back to Calvary, and trust in his shed blood.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, who was under the Old Testament dispensation, “You must be born again. Except a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven” (John 3:3). That was true in Old Testament times too. We’re justified by faith. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight (Romans 3:20). No flesh can ever be justified in the sight of God by the works of the law. So, in Old Testament times, they were justified by faith, just as we are today.

Now, what is the meaning, then, of the Lord’s Supper? Again, looking at the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question #96—“What is the Lord’s Supper?” The answer is: “The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.” Perhaps I should repeat that, because it’s such an excellent definition: “The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner”—not simply by eating bread and drinking wine in an earthly way—“but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.” So that gives us then the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.

Next, how often should the Lord’s Supper be observed? As we said before, some observe it weekly. But notice that the first Lord’s Supper was instituted at the end of the Passover. It was very much joined to the Passover, and indeed, takes over from the Old Testament Passover. Now, the passover was a very special feast. It was held once a year. And the Israelites from all over the country were to come to Jerusalem, the place that God had appointed, and there, they were to celebrate the Passover. In the Passover, they were remembering their time in the land of Egypt when they were slaves. God would not allow Pharaoh to keep them in slavery, and sent Moses to them, saying, “Let my people go.” But Pharaoh wouldn’t let them go. So eventually God sent his plagues, and finally the destroying angel was to go through the land. The only way they could protect themselves was as God had appointed. A lamb had to be killed, and its blood was put upon the doorposts and lintel of their houses. And then they were safe inside the house, and they would eat that lamb—the lamb, of course, that was pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The destroying angel went through the land of Egypt. And God said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over that house.” Every other house that didn’t have the blood on the doorposts, the destroying angel entered and killed the firstborn. So, it was a wonderful deliverance. And that night, the children of Israel left the land of Egypt for freedom, and for the promised land.

How often should it be celebrated? Well, Passover was celebrated just once a year. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, in verses 25 and 26, Paul refers to the institution of the Passover, and he uses the words of Christ, “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” As oft as ye do it, or as often as ye eat, so it’s not specified how often we should hold the sacrament. The danger of holding it weekly is that it becomes meaningless. The Passover was held just once a year, so the Scottish pattern has tended to be to have the Lord’s Supper twice a year, but there’s no rule with regard to that. It’s as often as the elders feel that it’s edifying and appropriate.

Because it’s infrequent, it can be a very special event. And in Scotland, it became a kind of Christian conference that they held usually twice a year. Visiting preachers would be asked to come along and share in the preaching. Christians from neighboring congregations would gather, and they would stay in the homes of the congregation, and enjoy the hospitality of the congregation,

and also attend the services, and talk about the things of God and of Christian fellowship. So the pattern then often was to hold it two times a year.

Next, we notice that it's a holy ordinance. There should be a solemnity about it. Our God is holy, and we need more of a sense of the holiness of God in our modern churches; more of a sense of awe in God's presence. Remember Isaiah getting a vision of God: "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." And the holy seraphims above it, and each one crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God of hosts, so the whole earth is full of his glory." And Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me! for...I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:1-5). There's a great sense of the holiness, the awesomeness of God. Or we think of Revelation chapter 1, where the Apostle John is in the Island of Patmos, a prisoner of the faith. And there, on the Lord's Day, he gets a vision. He gets a revelation of Christ. He sees the risen Christ, and he tells us, "I fell at his feet as [one] dead" (Revelation 1:17). There's such a sense of the awesome glory of God. Our God is a consuming fire, and we are to worship him with reverence and godly fear. That's the way it's put in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 12, and verses 28 and 29. We need grace to worship God acceptably.

So we must remember that Communion is a solemn occasion; it's a holy ordinance. The purpose of it is to remember the Lord's death; to remember the awful suffering of Christ, that which he had to endure, in order that we might be saved. He had to go through hell, so that we might not suffer hell, but so that we might have heaven.

To remember, yes, and then the second thing is, to show it forth, to profess our faith in him, and to show that he is our bread and our drink. We depend upon him. We get our life from Christ. We feed upon him, and we are showing, when we take Communion, what his death means to us.

Now, next, what is the pattern then, for the Scottish Communion? Scottish Communion lasted from a Thursday till the following Monday. First of all, the Thursday was observed as a day of *Humiliation and Prayer*; a day of fasting, of humbling oneself before the Lord; focusing upon our sin, looking into our hearts, and seeing the pride, and the lust, and the hypocrisy, and the deceitfulness, and the idols; and confessing our sins, repenting before God. We have a duty to examine our hearts in the light of God's law, to see our own guilt, to see our unworthiness of coming to his Table, and to confess our sin, and to seek the blood of Jesus Christ to wash away our sins; so, grieving over our sins, and rejoicing in Christ, rejoicing that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. So, it's dealing, in a sense, with justification by faith alone in Christ alone. So, Thursday is the day of focusing on our sin, of repentance, confession, and forgiveness.

And then Friday—Friday was the day for *Self-Examination*. Who should come to the Lord's Table? It's not for everyone. It's a table for the Lord's people, the Lord's people who are walking with him. It's a day for self-examination. Do we belong to the Lord's people, or do we not? Have we been converted? Or are we just hypocrites following the others? Do we have a living faith in the living Savior? Do we have the marks of grace? Are we growing in grace? Are we the people of God? Are we the Lord's people in truth? The Lord's Table is only for the Lord's people. So the Friday, then, was for self-examination and looking for the marks of grace.

The Saturday was very much *Preparation*, thinking about Christ's love, and seeking to warm our hearts, and to stir ourselves up by considering Christ's love for us. A day of prayer and preparation, yes, and thirsting—hungering and thirsting for Christ and for his presence.

And then comes the Sabbath, *the Sunday morning*. The Sunday morning service, the sermon that we call *The Action Sermon*, we concentrate on the *Atoning Work of Christ*, his sufferings, what

he did for us. It would focus upon his death, upon that finished work on Calvary, and upon the fact that Christ was made sin for us. He was made a curse for us, to redeem us from the curse of the law. So, focusing on the reconciliation, the propitiation, the atonement.

And then, following the sermon, it would be the *Fencing of the Table*. Fencing of the Table would state clearly who should come to the Table, and who should not. It's for the Lord's people, and for the Lord's people who are not backslidden and living in open sin. And so, the Lord's people would be set out in their characteristics.

Then, the Lord's people are invited to the Table, and they come forward. And there, there would be a *Pre-Communion Address*. And in that pre-communion address, the focus would be upon Christ and his love for us—the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

And then, having eaten the bread and drunk the wine, comes the *Post-Communion Address*, which would encourage us to live as Christians ought to live in the world. We have made this profession of our faith, now let us live consistent with that profession—a challenge to be real Christians, and seeking to benefit from the sacrament. Christ is our food and drink. We go on in the strength of Christ our Lord, rising from the Table to live for him, as bright and shining witnesses in the world.

Then, on the Sabbath evening, the *Gospel would be Preached Fully and Freely*. Sinners would be warned of the danger of ending up in hell; the wrath of God proclaimed; but also the call, the call to come to Christ; the cross of Christ proclaimed; and Christ freely offered to sinners; “Whosoever will, let him come! Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” So it would be a sermon calling upon sinners to repent and believe in Jesus, and to be saved.

Then on the Monday, would be the *Thanksgiving Service*, giving thanks to God for his mercy, for his goodness to us over the weekend, for all of the blessings that we enjoy from his hand, but especially for the blessings of the gospel, for Christ the Savior, his finished work, his resurrection, his ascension up to heaven, his sitting at the right hand of God the Father, his making continual intercession for us. And yes, there would be a focus also on the second coming of Christ, looking forward to his coming, “For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). So there's a looking, yes, a looking back at Calvary, but also a looking forward to the second coming of Christ.

So that would be then the pattern of the Communion weekend. So finally, what are the benefits from such a blessed sacramental weekend? Well, there's benefits in feeding on Christ by faith, of course. There's the benefit of enjoying his special communion, looking for his presence, and seeking to experience his presence; not just going through the ritual, not just being taught, but seeking to know that Christ is there, and to feel that he is there. It involves being edified, remembering Christ's death, and also showing forth Christ's death to those who look on, to the world around, showing forth that Christ has died, died for us, and risen again, and we live in the light of his death. It's an opportunity for us to profess our faith in him, and to tell the world, and to tell the church too, that we are Christians who follow Christ, and trust in him as our Savior. The Scottish Communion weekend is a particular preaching feast. There is food for our souls. These different ministers come, and they preach these sermons on Thursday, and Friday, and Saturday, Sunday, and Monday—all these sermons, there's a feast for our souls. And then there's opportunity for fellowship, for fellowship in the church, with extra prayer meetings held over the weekend too, and there's the opportunity for fellowship in our homes, and welcoming the Lord's people from other areas to come and stay with us, sharing together in meals, and talking together of our Savior and what he has done for us.

So this series of sermons which follows takes a pattern then at the Scottish Communion. May God bless these sermons to you, and may you be edified and built up in your faith. Amen.

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #1

Pardon My Sins (Psalm 51:9–10)

Today I would like to preach to you from Psalm 51. So we'll read the Psalm together:

“To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.”

So today, I would particularly like to direct your attention to verses 9 and 10. Psalm 51, verses 9 and 10: “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” So here we have a prayer—a prayer of a real Christian. And indeed, it's a mark of grace, an indication that we are true Christians, when we realize that we are sinners. We are convicted of our sin, and are aware of the eye of God upon us. The psalmist fears the chastisement of God. God corrects us when we sin. But there's also a sense of shame. He feels sad at what he has done, and the disgrace that he has brought upon himself and upon God's people. He is also conscious that he has hurt the loving God that he serves. God is good to him. God has blessed him in so many ways, and yet, he has sinned against God. He's asking the question, “How could I do this?” It is good if we too can see our own sins, and we're asking the same question.

At Communion time, we draw near to God. We come to the Lord's Table. And as we come to

the Lord's Table, we are conscious of our unworthiness. And so it's right that in preparation, we should humble ourselves, confess our sins before the Lord, and seek to repent of them. In and of ourselves, we are unworthy, but worthy is the Lamb that was slain, "the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Jesus tells us about two men who went up to the temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee. He said, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, and unjust adulterers, or even like this publican here. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess. He felt justified in himself. The other man, the publican, stood afar off, beat upon his breast, and wouldn't lift up his eyes to heaven, but cried, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said that the second man went to his house justified, rather than the self-righteous Pharisee (Luke 18:9–14). And that's the attitude that we have here. We have to come before God in humility, with a broken and a contrite heart.

Now, you'll remember the background to this Psalm. David was the king of Israel. His army was away fighting against the children of Ammon. He hadn't gone with the army. He was kind of lazing about. He was on his bed at midday, and he gets up in the afternoon, he struts around on the roof, and from the roof of the palace, he sees a woman bathing. And he lusts after her, sends for her, commits adultery with her. And then the woman, Bath-sheba sends to him, to say that she is pregnant. He has to cover up his adultery, and in doing that, he murders her husband—he arranges for the death of Uriah. And then he marries Bath-sheba, and they have their son. And he's going on, his heart is hardened, he's careless. And God sends to him Nathan the prophet. Nathan tells him a story, tells him about a man, a poor man who just had one lamb, and looked after this lamb as if it was his daughter. He feeds it, he cares for it, he has it in bed with him as his pet at night. And then one day, a stranger comes to visit a rich man who lives next door. The rich man doesn't take from his flocks and herds to cook for the traveler who's come to him, but takes the poor man's lamb, and he makes a meal out of that for the traveler. When David heard this story, he was very angry. He said, "That man must be put to death, that rich man. And he must restore fourfold, he must give back to the poor man four lambs. And then Nathan the prophet says to him, "Thou art the man. You're the man. You are the one who stole Uriah's wife, and then you killed Uriah. God has seen what you have done. And David feels his sin, confesses it, and repents (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12).

You and I are called upon, as we approach the Lord's Table, to repent of our sin, to look into our own hearts, and to see the things that are not right there, and to come before God in penitence, and confession, and repentance. So we have here then a Psalm of praise, and at the same time, a prayer of penitence.

What are the words that are here? First of all, "Hide thy face from my sins." We like to hide our sins from others, and sometimes we're quite successful in doing that. We can be very clever hypocrites. We pretend to be holy, and we're ashamed if somebody finds out. If people could read our hearts and see our pride, the lust, the anger, the idols, we would be so ashamed if they could see our thoughts. But what we forget is that God sees us. The eye of the Lord is upon us. He sees what is going on in secret. The darkness is light to him. He hears every word that we speak, and knows every thought going through our heart. But sometimes we forget this, and we become careless. And then some trouble comes our way. Maybe we have an accident. Maybe a sickness comes. A loved one is in trouble. And God is speaking to us through these things. We ask "Why? Why did this happen to me?" It's God's displeasure with us. God hates sin. He must correct us when we sin. Is there a sin in your life that you're trying to cover up?—some secret fault that you're hiding? some backsliding that has taken place? Remember the words of Psalm 139: "O LORD, thou hast

me searched and known. Thou knowest my sitting down, and rising up, yea, all my thoughts afar to thee are known” (verses 1–2, SMV¹). Or at the end of the Psalm: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (verses 23–24). As we find in Hebrews 4:13, we are “naked and opened in the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

So what about you today? Do you feel your shame, your guilt because of sin in your life? Now, of course, there’s none of us that are perfect, but we mustn’t make an excuse of that. We are to examine our hearts and our lives, to look into our life, to feel our sin, and to pray to the Lord as the psalmist does: “Hide thy face from my sins.” Do not condemn me, Lord. We are to be sorry for our sins and come to the Lord with them, confessing them. So that’s the first thing that we have here, a petition that God would hide his face from our sins.

Then the second petition is, “Blot out all mine iniquities.” Every sin that we commit is written in God’s book, and there’s a judgment day coming, when the books shall be opened, and we shall be judged everyone according to their works, whether they are good or evil. There are far too many sins in our lives, and all these sins written down in God’s books. These sins are like debts, and they increase with each passing day of our lives. And that’s why we cry out to God, “Blot out! Blot out all mine iniquities.” How can they be blotted out?—only by the blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin. In the past, with typewriters, we use to use Tipp-Ex to paint over a mistake. Well, the blood of Christ is far better than Tipp-Ex. Yes, it blots out our sin. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). How can that be? Simply because Christ has suffered for our sins. He’s been punished in our place, and his blood washes us white and blots out our sin. “There is therefore now no condemnation for them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). We can’t be condemned. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). As this Psalm says, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7). Blot out my sins. Forget them. Does God forget anything? Well, God can, of course, forget nothing. He knows everything. He knows everything there is to know. But yet, he treats our sins as if they were forgotten. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). But if we don’t confess our sin, he will not forgive us. We must confess. We must cry out to God and tell God what we have done wrong.

We must remember that God hates sin. And because God hates sin, we should hate it too. And we are to put our faith in Christ, who took our sins upon himself and was punished in our place. Our faith must be in him. Is your faith in Jesus Christ? Are you trusting in the blood of Jesus? Are you confessing and forsaking your sin? And we mustn’t make an excuse out of the blood of Christ and think we can go on sinning, just because our sins are forgiven. Paul says, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!”—away with such a wicked thought (Romans 6:1–2). How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein. If we have died to sin, if we’ve been born again, we cannot have an attitude of complacency towards sin. We must hate it and turn from it. “Blot out all my transgressions.”

And then, thirdly, the psalmist prays, verse 10, “Create in me a clean heart.” The psalmist doesn’t just want forgiveness, he wants a new start. A real change. He wants to be a new creation in Christ Jesus. He wants to be born again, as it were, almost like a second conversion. Remember Peter. Peter denies his Lord seriously and terribly three times. And Jesus said, “Satan hath desired

to have you that he might sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31–32). Peter denied the Lord three times, and then he was converted. There was a kind of second conversion, as it were, and he had learned greatly from what had happened. He was a much humbler man, and he was a greater blessing to the church.

I remember many years ago, a woman who came along to my church. She was an older woman, but in her teens, she had professed faith in Christ. And for a number of years, had lived as a good Christian. But then her husband died, and she was still quite young, and some time after that, she committed adultery with another man. And she was very conscious of her sin and guilt, and for years she had drifted away from the church. But then she came back, and she was restored. I remember asking her how she felt about things now, and how she would compare her situation now to when she was first converted, and she said, “Well, it’s almost like a second conversion, only this one is deeper, and this one is more real in that sense.”

And so it is with David. He’s saying, “Create in me a clean heart.” How could David do what he did? It wasn’t something that happened suddenly and unexpectedly. He’d obviously been drifting away. He’d been growing cold in his faith. He was failing to watch and to pray. He had begun to play with sin, allowing it a little place. And bit by bit, he was weakened, not watching, not praying, and then he fell. And how careful we must be that we are not drifting away from God, that we’re not backsliding. What a danger there is nowadays with pornography. It’s so available everywhere. Wherever you look on the internet, there’s pornography, and it’s addictive, and it’s destructive. Let us remember that little sins grow, and are very harmful. Don’t treat sin lightly. Remember, Satan tempts, and he says, “It’s just a little sin. It doesn’t matter. Nobody will know about it. Everyone else sins. It’s okay.” But it’s not okay with God. The eye of God is upon us. We’ve got to think of Christ on the cross. It was our sins that nailed him to that tree. It was our sins that kept him there suffering. We are to watch, and to pray, and to be careful. Be careful about going to certain places where there’s danger, or doing certain things that will leave us open to temptation. Don’t play with sin. Don’t make excuses. If God leaves us, what a mess we can get into.

David sinned terribly against God. As king of God’s people, what a mess he got into. He maybe was arguing, “Well, I’m the king. I can do this, I can do that, it’s okay. I’ve got liberty of conscience. I can go here and go there.” But now, he’s crying out, “Create in me a clean heart. I need to be different, I need to be careful. I need to watch.” And so we have this great petition: “Create in me a clean heart.” We all need a clean heart. How filthy our hearts are by nature. Lord, make me clean.

And then, the next petition we notice is, “Cast me not away,” verse 11—“Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me.” Cast me not away. God would be perfectly justified in casting David away, and in casting us away too when we sin. He could have left David to suffer. David had broken his law, and David was pleasing himself, and God could leave him to reap what he had sown. But we have to thank God for chastisement, and correction, and for pointing to our sin, and showing us our sin. God didn’t give him up, thankfully.

Think of Judas Iscariot. Judas had a wonderful start. He was one of the followers of Jesus. He was chosen to be an apostle. He was there, a preacher and a miracle-worker. And then God left him, left him to Satan—how horrible. And then he betrayed Christ, and after that, committed suicide—how desperate. We must beware!

Think of the Israelites who left the land of Egypt. God brought terrible plagues upon the Egyptians, and brought Israel out with a mighty hand. He led them through the Red sea as on

dry land, and drowned the Egyptian army. The Israelites were singing with joy, rejoicing in the deliverance that they had got from God. But then, in the years that follow, they sinned, and sinned, and sinned again, so that eventually there were only two of the adult men who came out of Egypt who entered the promised land. It's only those who persevere unto the end that shall be saved. Cast me not away, Lord. Let me not fall away. Strengthen me in standing for thee!

And then, the petition, "Take not thy holy spirit from me." King Saul was anointed by Samuel the prophet, anointed king—the Lord's anointed. When Samuel anointed him, the Spirit of God came upon him to enable him to worship, to enable him to rule. And to begin with, he was a very humble man. But bit by bit, pride came in. Samuel told him to wait for him, and that he would offer the sacrifice before battle with the Philistines, but Saul didn't wait, and offered the sacrifice himself. Samuel told him, instructed by God, to go and destroy all the Amalekites, and all their animals. But Saul spared the best of the animals, and spared Agag the king. Because he didn't carry out the Word of God and obey the prophet of the Lord, the kingdom was taken from him (1 Samuel chapter 15). The Spirit of God left him, and an evil spirit came upon him. He hated David, the Lord's anointed to succeed him. He murdered the priests of the Lord from Nob. He ended up consulting a witch and committing suicide. How horrible! David had seen this. He saw the Spirit taken from Saul, and so he prays, "Take not thy holy spirit from me." How much we need the Holy Spirit! We need the Spirit to make us holy, to keep us holy, and our prayer should also be, "Take not thy holy spirit from me."

And then, finally, verse 12: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." There's no joy like the joy of the true Christian. Worldly people have joy in drink, and drugs, and sex, and money, but these things are so empty, and there's often a sting in the tail. Drink and drugs sometimes lead to addiction. Sex leads to broken relationships. Money leads to worries and fears, and temptations too. But the Christian joy is pure. It's wholesome, and it's lasting.

When we're first converted, there's great joy. We've been convicted of our sin, and now we know that our sins are forgiven. And we have joy in the Lord, and joy in church and worshipping God, and joy in Sunday—the Lord's Day, and joy in the Bible, and joy in prayer, joy in the sacraments. But when backsliding comes in, there's coldness, and deadness, and hardness, and taking things for granted. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Help me to repent, to confess, to turn back, and to have a new experience of joy. Give to me, Lord, a new start, new joy.

And so, we have here great petitions. "Hide thy face from my sin." Look into your heart, see the sin that's there, and plead with God, "Hide thy face from my sin." "Blot out mine iniquities," "Create in me a clean heart," with clean thoughts, clean desires, clean ambitions. "Renew a right spirit within me." "Cast me not away from thy presence." Keep me Lord, and "Take not thy holy spirit from me." We need God's Holy Spirit.

Let's pray.

O Lord, our God, we thank thee that thou has given to us the Holy Spirit, converting us, convicting us of sin, and bringing us to repentance. Forgive us, Lord, for hardening our heart against the teaching of the Spirit, and of thy Word. Forgive us for our backslidings. Keep us from falling. Where we have fallen, where we have sinned, pardon us, Lord. Wash away our sin. Blot out our transgressions, and hide thy face from our sins. Create in us, Lord, a clean heart and a right spirit. Grant to us, O Lord, to be different, to seek thee, to serve thee, to follow thee with a new enthusiasm, and restore to us the joy of thy salvation. Grant, O Lord, that the Holy Spirit would stir up our hearts with joy in the Lord. Forgive all our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #2

Prepare Me for Thy Presence (Psalm 24:3-4)

Today I would like to speak to you from Psalm 24, and particularly, verses 3 and 4, but we'll read the whole Psalm.

"A Psalm of David.

"The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah."

So today, I would particularly like to direct your attention to verses 3 and 4: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

In a sense, there's no more suitable verse for the first day of the Communion Season than this verse here. It's talking about preparation, and who is fit to ascend the mountain—the mount of ordinance; the mount of the Communion feast, as it were. Who is fit to come and to take and eat the bread and the wine?—these symbols of the broken body of Christ and his shed blood. Who can approach God? We all need preparation. We need to humble ourselves, to confess, to repent, to claim the blood of Jesus.

We have here a Psalm of David. We're not told when this Psalm was written, but generally, it's regarded as a Psalm which he wrote in connection with taking the ark of God up to Jerusalem. The first attempt to do this was a failure. Remember, that the ark had been in the land of the Philistines. The Philistines couldn't keep it because God's judgment was upon them. They brought it to the house of Abinadab, and it had been there for some time. And then David decided to take the ark to the center of his kingdom, to Jerusalem. But he showed a lack of care in the way he went about it, and the first attempt proved a failure. They took the ark, and they put it upon a new cart pulled by oxen, and the sons of Abinadab were driving the oxen. And at a certain point, the oxen shook the cart, and it looked as if the ark might fall off. And Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, put out his hand to

hold the ark, to keep it. He was afraid, lest it should land up in the mud. But he was struck down dead. It's dangerous to approach God, to approach him without the proper preparation. And so, David was shocked, and all Israel was shocked at the sudden death of Uzzah, and the ark was left at the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite.

But then, David thought again about the law of God and the commandments of God, and the way that it should be done, and realized his error. And so, they went the second time to take the ark up to Jerusalem. And this time, instead of putting it upon a cart, they did what God required: "See you do all things according to the pattern shewn you on the mount," God said to David. So, the Levites had to carry it, and to carry it upon their shoulders. And in this way, it was carried all the way up to Jerusalem, and in through the gates of Zion. And there was great joy and gladness.

This Psalm, traditionally amongst the Jews, was a Psalm sung on the day after the Sabbath. And if we remember that the ark of God was a symbol of God's presence, the ark of God is a type of Christ. And we'll remember how, on the day after the Sabbath, Christ rose from the dead. And also, on the day after the Sabbath, he ascended up to heaven forty days later. And so, it's a very appropriate Psalm to sing in this context, and it directs our mind to the Lord Jesus Christ and his ascension into heaven.

So first of all, the Psalm begins by focusing our minds on *The Greatness of God*. He is the Creator: "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods" (verse 1). God made the world. We look around, we see water everywhere—the oceans. And it seems like the earth was founded upon the seas. The Lord has made all these things, and it all belongs to him. He has created the world for his own glory. He's the great Potter, and you and I are the clay (Romans 9:19–21). He shapes and forms us into vessels for himself, and we are to give glory to his name. He's the sovereign Lord, who made man in his own image, and entered into a covenant with him, promising to Adam and Eve eternal life, if they were obedient, but also threatening them with death if they were disobedient, if they ate the forbidden fruit. You'll remember how Satan came along, came into the garden, and said to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die. That won't happen to you. God is too loving to do that. He won't do that to you" (Genesis 3:4). And so, Eve ate the fruit, thinking that it would give to her some special knowledge, and then passed it on to Adam, who also ate. And at the moment they ate, they died. They died spiritually, died to God. They felt separated from God. Death means separation. They felt naked and ashamed in God's presence. And natural death began to work in them at that stage—natural death that would be followed, without conversion, by eternal death.

Our God is a consuming fire, and we are to worship him with reverence and godly fear. Even the very angels veil their faces in his presence. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity (Habakkuk 1:13). We need to have more of a sense of God—his greatness, his holiness, his glory, his hatred for sin. This is something that's largely missing today in so many churches. Indeed, it's missing with us all. We need more reverence in the presence of God. Too many Christians have a god that's just a little bit bigger than themselves—a small god, with whom they can be chummy. But our God is a great, majestic, magnificent, holy God. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God of hosts: the whole earth is filled with his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The temple shook at the presence of God. The earth trembled before him, and we too must worship him with reverence and godly fear. Our God is glorious. He sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are as grasshoppers before him (Isaiah 40:22). Our God is the God who killed Uzzah, because he stretched out his hand and touched the ark. He wasn't a Levite; he wasn't a priest; and he had no right to touch the ark of God.

And we are to fear before him. So that's the first thing that we have here then, the greatness of God.

The second point I'd like to draw your attention to is, *Who Can Approach this God?* We're told, "He that hath clean hands." Do you have clean hands? Our hands are that with which we act. We do things with our hands. Have we sinned with our hands? Are we sinning with our hands? Sin clings to us, and the guilt of sin. Have we acted in anger, bad temper, resentment. Have we acted in lust? Have we been guilty of stealing? of Sabbath-breaking? of greed? All of us have sinned in different ways. Indeed, all of us have filthy hands. Sin is easy. It's natural. It's something that we do every day. And yet, it's abhorrent to God. Who can approach God?—the one who has clean hands.

And then the second thing that's mentioned here is "a pure heart." Jesus talks about purity of heart in the Sermon on the Mount. He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). But who is pure in heart? Are any of us pure in heart? Do we not have deceitful hearts? lustful hearts? proud hearts? unclean hearts? "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Do we not have idolatrous thoughts passing through our hearts? lustful daydreams? and even blasphemous thoughts at times? doubting God, and resentment? and covetousness and greed? Filthy hearts—who has a pure heart? None of us have clean hands or a pure heart. Jesus said, If you so much as look upon a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery already (Matthew 5:28). If you're angry with your brother without a cause, you're a murderer (Matthew 5:22). How ashamed we would be if our neighbor could see into our hearts and see the thoughts that are there. But what we have to remember is, that God sees into our hearts, and he knows what's there.

The third thing that's mentioned here is, "who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity." "Vanity" means emptiness. It means "an idol." And Israel so often lifted up their soul to vanity, so often they were guilty of idolatry. I remember, as a child, reading through the historical parts of the Scriptures. For example, the book of Judges, and the books of Kings, and reading there about Israel, how they prospered when they worshipped God; and how everything went wrong when they turned to idols. And yet, time and time again, they would turn to idols, and then the nations around them would invade them, and oppress them. And they had so much misery until they repented and turned to God. And I used to think how foolish they were, how they were so constantly turning to idols. Now I know that idolatry is very natural to us all. We're still idolaters today. An idol is anything that comes between us and God, anything that distracts us, takes away our attention from God, anything that's too important for us—a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a spouse, a child, our home, our job, a pleasure, our looks, our music, our film. Whatever it is that finds too big a place in our hearts, and our desires, and it becomes an idol. Do you have any idols? "Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity."

And then, the fourth thing is, "nor sworn deceitfully." To swear deceitfully refers to sins of the tongue, of the speech. It's so easy for us to make promises and not keep them. We promise to do this or that, and then we forget. We promise even to pray for somebody, and then we don't pray for them. How easy it is for us to make vows. How easy it is for us, in our worship, to say what we're going to do, and what we're not going to do, and to promise God in our sinning, that we're not going to do this, or we're not going to do that, and yet we don't do it. How easy it is for us to gossip, and to be guilty of backsliding, pretending to be loving and kind, and yet failing. Hypocrisy is so natural to us. We're all guilty of it, and it's horrible in God's sight. God hates deceitfulness and pretense, and sham. So this Psalm is saying, you approach God if your hands are clean, if your heart is pure, if your soul is not lifted up to idols, if you have not sworn deceitfully. But all of us are unworthy. We're all of us condemned by these words.

But then, in the third place, we see the provision that God makes, in verse 5: “He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” Our God is the God of salvation. He could so easily condemn us, and there’s so many reasons why he should condemn us. But instead, he’s the God who saves us; who gives us a blessing; who gives us the greatest blessing of all, and that blessing is *Righteousness*—something we all need, to be righteous—on a right standing with God. We all need a Savior—a Savior to bear away our sin, and to give us his righteousness. And that’s what God gave us. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). And the Son of God came into this world, and took our sins upon himself, and suffered the punishment due to us for sin. He suffered it on the cross. “Behold, the Lamb of God,” said John the Baptist, the forerunner. “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). How wonderful! Jesus, the sacrificial lamb—he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He suffered and died—“Wounded for our transgressions...bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). “What must I do to be saved?...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30). We are justified by faith.

So none of us have clean hands or a pure heart, and yet, when we put our trust in Jesus, our hands are clean, and our heart is purified. God gives clean hands to us and a pure heart. He imputes to us the righteousness of Christ, so that although our sins be as scarlet, they are as white as snow. He is the one that blotteth out, as a thick cloud, our transgressions, and as a cloud our sins. He pardons our iniquity, and we’re washed in the blood. At a very high cost, he gives to us righteousness, salvation. He gives to us the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, to equip us and prepare us, to impart to us the righteousness of Christ, not just to impute it to us, but to change us, and transform us, and sanctify us. And we need that. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands”—Lord, clean my hands! Work in me by thy Holy Spirit—“clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”

But then, finally, we find here our duty, in verse 6: “This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob”—O God of Jacob. This is the generation that seek him. You and I must seek the Lord. “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, for he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6–7). “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Seek to be reconciled to God. Seek the face of God, the smile of God upon you, so that God will look upon you, not in wrath, not in anger and judgment, but in mercy.

“This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob.” Why is he called “Jacob”? Well, “Jacob” means “the deceiver.” Jacob was the one who told lies. In order to get the blessing of his father, he pretended to be Esau. He told lies. Then you’ll remember, he left home. He had to flee from the face of Esau. He came to Bethel, and there, a Bethel, he met with God. Later on, you’ll remember Peniel, how he wrestled with God: “I will not let thee go except thou bless me” (Genesis 32:26), and he was blessed. Jacob, the God of Jacob, the God who is merciful and gracious, even to the one who tells lies; even to those who are supplanters and deceivers. Those who seek him shall find him.

Remember David, how he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51:10). We need that clean heart, and not just the imputed righteousness of Christ. But we need holiness of

life as well, to keep on repenting of our sin, keep on turning to the Lord. “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners...purify your hearts, ye double minded” (James 4:8). Paul said, “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13). But if you don’t mortify the deeds of the body, you shall die.

So we are to take this as a positive encouragement to us to repent, as we seek to prepare ourselves for the Lord’s Supper. If you, through the Spirit, through the help of the Spirit, depending upon the Spirit, seeking the blessing of the Spirit, mortify, put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live. Put away your idols from you. Turn away from your sins. Wash in that fountain that was opened for sin and for uncleanness. Remember how the Lord Jesus washed the disciples’ feet before they partook of the Passover and of the first Lord’s Supper. Peter said, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus said to him, “If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with me.” And then, Peter said, “Well, don’t just wash my feet, wash my hands and my head!” And Jesus said, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet and is clean every whit” (John 13:9–10). We have been washed when we were converted, and we were born again, when we were washed with the washing of regeneration, but we still need our feet to be washed. We need that ongoing washing. And so, in coming to the Lord’s Table, let us seek again to wash ourselves, to cleanse our hands, to purify our hearts, to seek the God of Jacob, so that we will be able to approach the Lord and his Table, and do it in a way that is glorifying to God, and not bringing judgment upon ourselves.

Let’s pray.

Gracious God, we thank thee that there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. And we pray that we would come to that fountain—the fountain of the blood of Christ—and that we would be washed there. Give to us a greater hatred for sin. Help us to turn from it with full purpose of, and endeavor after new obedience, determined to follow thee, to serve thee, and to love thee. Keep us, O Lord, from offending thee and whatever is offensive in us, in our thoughts, in our words, in our deeds, help us to turn from these things, and to approach thee in sincerity and in truth. Bless us then, O Lord, and help us to come humbly to thy Table, rejoicing in Christ Jesus our Savior, in the one who loved us and gave himself for us. in Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #3

Examine Yourself (1 Corinthians 11:28)

I'd like today to address you from 1 Corinthians 11, and verse 28. But we could read from verse 17:

“Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.” Amen.

Now, particularly, I'd like to draw your attention to 1 Corinthians 11:28, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” Traditionally, in the Scottish Communion, Thursday was a day for humiliation, confession of sin, repentance. And Friday was a day for questioning and examining ourselves—examining ourselves whether we be in the faith, proving our own selves; and then Saturday, a day of preparation. On the Sabbath morning, the Word would be preached concerning the atonement and the suffering of Christ; the gospel preached in the evening, and then a thanksgiving service on a Monday, that would tend to look forward to the second coming of Christ.

So today, our subject is *Examination*. The church in Corinth is a fascinating church. It was a big and busy congregation. It was very successful. There were lots of spiritually-gifted people

among them—prophets, tongue-speakers, interpreters of tongues, healers, etc. But it had also got serious problems. Verse 30 here tells us, “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” There were many who were sick, unwell, weak, and indeed, some who had died. The chastening of the Lord had come upon the church. And why was that? It was because they were eating unworthily. How were they doing that?

Well, verse 18, tells us that there were divisions among them: “I am of Paul...I am of Apollos;” I am of Cephas; I am of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:4). Communion is meant to be a time of coming together, of unity, of harmony, of love. And there were these divisions, and that’s not right. And then, each one, verse 21, was eating his own supper. Some were coming with lots of food, and others were hungry. And that can’t be right. The Lord’s Supper is eating the Lord’s Supper, not our own supper. And it’s very wrong if some have nothing and others, others even were drunk at the Lord’s Table, which is hard for us to understand how they could be so far gone from what they should be at the Lord’s Table. And then verse 33 tells another problem. They were not waiting for one another. They were coming together, and one would have communion, and then later on, somebody else would come in, and they would have communion. And that can’t be right. It should be done together, the whole congregation together. But the worst thing of all is, in verse 29, they weren’t discerning the Lord’s body. They were callous, cold, lifeless, and spiritually dead. Paul says, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat.” Question yourself. Question, and see what’s wrong. Put it right, and so come and eat. It’s not, it doesn’t say here, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him not eat of that bread;” but examine himself, and having put right was is wrong, and having repented of what’s amiss, so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

So today, I would like us to examine ourselves, and particularly, to ask the question, Who should come to the Lord’s Table? For whom is the Lord’s Supper? In one sense, none of us are worthy. But then, our worthiness is in Christ. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:12). But yet, the Lord’s Table is not for everyone. It’s not for the heathen. It’s not for the ungodly. It’s not for the immoral. It’s for Christians. It’s for those who love the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him. And yet, it’s not for Christians under discipline. It’s not for just those who are strong in faith. No, it’s for Christians who are weak in faith as well. And indeed, it’s a means of grace, and a strengthening to us. So I would like us to ask, Who are those who should come to the Lord’s Table? And I would hope to get a number of marks of the Christian, so that we can ask ourselves, “Are these things true of me? And if they are, then I can come to the Table.”

So first of all, coming to the Table, *We’ve got to be Believers*. “What must I do to be saved?... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:30). The Lord’s Table is for those who look to the Lord, who trust in the Lord Jesus, who want to remember the Lord’s death, who delight in the sacrifice of Christ offered on Calvary’s cross. We’ve got to have faith in the broken body and the shed blood. And all who truly look to Jesus, delight in him, and in the work that he has done. And these are the ones who are to this in remembrance of him; for whom Christ is their bread and their drink. So the first great mark is *Faith—are you a believer in Christ?* Are you trusting in your own good works, or trusting in Christ alone for salvation?—Believers.

The second mark is *Penitence, Repentance*, and we must stress this. Some people think you can believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, but not have him as your Lord; you can believe in Jesus as Savior, and do what you like. But that won’t do. No, we must believe in Jesus, yes, and follow him. We must have him as our Master. We must not continue in sin that grace may abound. “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?...Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. As you at one time yielded your members

“as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,” even so now, yield your members, your bodies, “as instruments of righteousness unto God.” (Romans 6:2, 11, 13). You’ve got to stress the importance of repentance, and the importance of keeping God’s law.

Some people think that it’s legalism to stress God’s law. But legalism is to trust in the law of God for salvation. But when we are saved, we want to keep his commandments. We want to live for him. And you’ll remember that the whole context of the Ten Commandments is God having saved his people. The preface to the Ten Commandments is, “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” Therefore, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image” (Exodus 20:2–4). So, we are to be penitent, repenting of sin. That’s another mark of the Christian.

A third mark is *Love for Jesus*. And this is very important, loving the Lord. In a sense, Christianity is love. It’s a relationship. It’s not mere beliefs. It’s not mere ritual. There are beliefs, there are things we are to do, but first and foremost, a Christian is somebody who’s in love with Christ. And we love him because he first loved us. “Do this in remembrance of me. If you love me, if you delight in me, you will want to remember me. If you appreciate what I did on the cross of Calvary, you show your love for me by coming to my Table; and at my Table, remembering that I am your food and drink; remembering that it’s through me that you have everlasting life.” So we love Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. And Communion, the Lord’s Supper, is, in a very real sense, a love feast. And we are celebrating his love for us, and we are expressing our love for him. Do you love Christ? Such an important question. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema” (1 Corinthians 16:22). Let him be accursed—Maranatha. The Lord is coming. We must love the Lord.

And then, too, it’s *Loving the Father*; loving the Father who planned our salvation; loving the Father who sent his Son to be our Savior; who sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts; loving the Father who called us with an effectual calling; loving the Father who adopted us; loving God, the God who cares for us every day of our lives. “The lions young may hungry be, and they may lack their food: But they that truly seek the Lord shall not lack any good” (Psalm 34:10, SMV¹). “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). He protects us; he provides for us. We love God. And those who love God are to come to his Table.

And then, fifthly, *Loving the Holy Spirit*. How amazing to think that the third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, should come and live in our hearts, should make our bodies his temple, dwelling in us. He applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ. He empowers us in prayer and praise and worship. He helps us to pray. “We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit helps us to pray, helps us to praise. The Spirit sanctifies us. We love the Spirit, and his presence fills us with joy, and peace, and delight. He enlightens our minds in the knowledge of the truth. He assures us of salvation. We are sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ, assured by the Holy Spirit. So there, another mark, a recognition of the Spirit, and a love for the Spirit.

A sixth mark is *Loving the worship of God*. We love to sing his praises, to sing those Psalms that he has given us, those hundred-and-fifty inspired songs, perfect and inerrant. We love to sing them, to honor him, to glorify him, to edify ourselves, to teach one another as we sing these Psalms. We love to pray, to pray to God, it’s so important to us. We cannot go through our day without prayer—prayer in secret, in our closets, alone on our own; prayer in our families—family

worship; prayer in public with the Lord's people; the prayer meeting, and in the church services. We love to worship God. We delight in the services. "I joyed when to the house of God, Go up, they said to me" (Psalm 122:1, SMV). Do you love to worship God? That's a mark of the Christian.

And do you *Love your fellow Christians*? That's another mark of those who should come to the Table. We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). So love for one another is a great mark of a Christian. Who do you love most? Whose company to love most? Do you delight in the fellowship of the Lord's people? That's a good mark. Do you care for the Lord's people? Do you help them in their needs? Do you bear one another's burdens. "Charity shall cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8)—love. How does love cover a multitude of sins? Is it that love atones for sin?—no, of course not. The only thing that atones for sin is the blood of Christ. How does love cover a multitude of sins then?—because love excuses our fellow Christians when we sin. We cover up their sins and their faults in love, and so, we love our fellow Christians.

And eighth mark is *Loving the Bible*. It's God's Word. We read it, we think about it, we meditate upon it, we apply it to ourselves. We ask, "What is God saying to me here? What can I learn from this? How can I practice this? What promises are here? What exhortations are here? What things am I to avoid? What direction is God giving me in life?" We love the Bible. We love books that expound the Bible, that help us to understand it. We love sermons that teach us about the Bible. Do you love the Bible, love God's Word? That's another mark of the Christian.

A ninth mark is, *Love for God's Day*. It's strange sometimes today now Christians can sometimes not value the Lord's Day as they should. They think it's perhaps legalistic to keep the Sabbath. They think it's something Old Testament. But the Sabbath was there before the Old Testament. The Sabbath was there in the garden of Eden. And actually, God himself kept the first Sabbath. He created the world in six days, and then he rested on the seventh day. And he was setting down a pattern for us; a pattern for Adam and Eve. They needed it. In the garden of Eden, when they were perfect, they still needed a day for special worship, and for thinking about God, and leaving aside the cares of the work that they generally did, and focusing upon God.

We certainly, in our fallen world, need a Lord's Day—a day to come apart from all the cares of the world, and the pleasures of the world, the things that rightly take up our time on other days. There's nothing wrong with so many of these things that we do; it's right, and it's good, and we have to earn our daily bread. But yet, to be able to come aside, and to give to God that special place in our lives, and to think about him, and to read his Word, and to worship him, and to spend it in public and private exercises of worship. The Lord's people love the Lord's Day. They love the Sabbath, and they see it as a foretaste of heaven.

A tenth mark is that God's people *Love the law of God*, all of the commandments of God. Jesus said, If you love me, you'll keep my commandments (John 14:15). Our desire is to please God. And how can we please God? Well, the Ten Commandments describe for us the character of God. And we want to keep his commandments. We long to keep them, to keep them better than we've done in the past. We love the Lord, we love his law, we love his ways, we love everything that belongs to him. We grieve that we sin, and we ask God to help us to keep these commandments. "If you love me, keep my commandments." And if we're not keeping his commandments, is that not a sign that we don't love him, and should not be at his Table?

An eleventh mark is that we *Love the unconverted*, seeking their help. And Jesus taught us even to love our enemies. Be like your Father in heaven, who causes the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust, the sun to shine upon the righteous and the wicked (Matthew 5:45). Love your

enemies. But we love the unconverted in the sense that we want to see them saved. We don't want to see them lost, ending up in hell. We want to see them converted, born again. We're concerned for them. We think of Jesus. We remember him on the Mount of Olives, weeping over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). You will not come to me that you might have life. Jesus wept because he could see the judgment coming upon Jerusalem, because they had rejected him. As Christians, we long to see people converted. We try to witness to them. And when we see somebody converted, it gives us great joy. We delight in people being brought into the kingdom, being saved, and everyone that is added to the church. So we love the lost.

And then, and I add, the twelfth mark is that *We love the cause of God and the church of God*, and we want to see the church grow. We long for revival, to see the church alive and on fire, preaching with power, the power of God's Holy Spirit. We want to see the kingdom of God extended on earth, to see the conversion of the Jews, and life from the dead reaching to the Gentile world. We pray, "Thy kingdom come, Lord," because we love to see people being added to the church, and the church growing, and Christ glorified on the earth. So that's another mark of the Christian.

And the final mark is *A love for heaven, and a hope of heaven*, and a delight that God has prepared this place for us, looking forward to being with Christ; not from any sensual kind of idea. The Muslims have a very sensual heaven, with feasting, and sexual immorality, and so on. But that's not the idea that we have. Our idea of heaven is being with Christ, worshipping him, praising him, glorifying him, delighting in him, listening to him: "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 7:17).

So here today, we've looked at some of the marks of God's people. Examine yourself in the light of these. Are these marks to be seen in you? Some will be more clearly in you than others, but we must have something of these marks in us, in order to qualify as those who should come to the Lord's Table. The Lord's Table is for the Lord's people, those whom the Lord has saved—saved from a life of sin and wickedness, and brought into a life of salvation that we might serve him.

Let's pray.

O Lord our God, we thank thee that thou hast given to us the Scriptures, and in the Scriptures, so many marks of God's people. We thank thee, Lord, for these marks. Help us to examine ourselves, and to see that these marks of grace are there. And if they are not there, to repent, and turn from our sin, and believe in Jesus, and seek the saving power of Christ to transform us and make us into the people of God. Grant then thy blessing, Lord, to be upon us. Help us, and as we discern these marks in us, grant Lord, that more and more we would seek to be thy people, to be devoted to thee and dedicated to thee, and living out our lives to the glory of God. Forgive all our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #4

Mary's Great Love (Mark 14:3)

Today I would like to speak to you from Mark's Gospel, chapter 14, and verse 3. We'll read some verses, from the beginning of the chapter:

“After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people. And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” Amen.

So, thinking particularly from verse 3 and onward: “And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.” It's Communion time, and so I would like to speak to you today about something which happened just two days before the very first Communion. It's recorded for us in three of the Gospels. And in fact, as we notice, in verse 9, Jesus says, “Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” Here we are, thousands of miles away from Bethany, and 2,000 years after this woman had anointed Jesus, and we're still remembering what she did. It was so beautiful, something so lovely in itself, so God-glorifying, and such a challenge to us too.

So we have here, first of all, *A Woman with a Great Love for Christ*. John tells us, in his Gospel, chapter 12, that it was Mary, who anointed Jesus—Mary, the sister of Martha, and they had a brother, Lazarus. In chapter 11 in John's Gospel, we're told how that Lazarus was sick and then died. And how Jesus came along four days after, and called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him from the dead. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were disciples of Jesus. They loved Jesus, and Jesus loved them. They lived in Bethany, a little town two miles to the east of Jerusalem, on the far side of the Mount of Olives. And Jesus often stayed there. It was a house where he felt very welcome.

And here he is then in Bethany, but today he's not in the house of Mary and Martha, but he's in the house of Simon the leper. Now, lepers generally lived in colonies by themselves. The lepers

would live outside of Jerusalem. Wherever they went they said, “Unclean! Unclean!” People kept away from them. So obviously, Simon here has been healed of his leprosy. And no doubt, the meal that he is providing at this time was a meal of thanksgiving, and expressing his appreciation to Christ for having healed him of his leprosy. Jesus healed many people of different diseases, and many indeed of leprosy.

Mary loves Jesus, and she wants to show her love to him. So how is she to do it? You can imagine her thinking to herself, “What can I do for Jesus? How can I show my love to him?” Do you love Jesus? And do you ever think, “What can I do for Jesus? How can I show my love for him?” And there’s many ways, of course, in which we can show our love to Christ. And one way is by coming to the Lord’s Table and remembering his death till he comes. “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Mary thinks, “Well, I want to get a gift for Jesus, a really special gift.” So she goes to Jerusalem, to the marketplace there, and she buys perfume, very expensive perfume. We’re told here that it would cost more than three hundred pence. Now a pence here is a Roman coin, a denarius, a small silver coin. It was what a laborer would earn for working for one day. So more than three hundred pence would be the equivalent of a laborer’s wages for a year. So in modern terms, that would be thousands of pounds. So perhaps this was her life savings. We’re told that it was spikenard. Spikenard came from the region of the Himalayas, in northern India, Nepal. And it would have to be carried all the way across Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, down to Israel. So no wonder it was expensive.

And she didn’t just give to Jesus a spray of the perfume, or a splash of the perfume. We’re told that she broke the box and poured it on his head. The whole jar was poured over him. It was lavish. You can imagine how the whole room was filled with the perfume, the scent, the beautiful smell of it all. She wasn’t grudging in any way, but she gave everything, as it were, to Christ. Do you love the Lord Jesus? And do you show your love? We’re told that even to give a cup of cold water to someone in the name of Christ is noted in heaven, and brings a reward with it. We have to show our love to him. We should really love Christ, and show it more and more as the days go by. And one way we show our love, of course, is at his Table.

The second thing that I want you to notice is that she was *A Woman with Great Understanding*. Jesus explains her action in verse 8: “She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.” That’s amazing. She had anointed Jesus for his burial. No one else seemed to be thinking about the burial of Jesus. Peter and John were, no doubt, great theologians, but they don’t seem to have any idea of Christ dying and being buried. Mary, it would seem, is the greatest theologian of them all. In Luke chapter 10, verses 38 to 42, we’re told of Jesus visiting the house of Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. Before Jesus came, obviously great preparations were being made. They were preparing a meal for Jesus, for his twelve disciples; maybe for other people too. So there’s lots of work to be done in preparing. And Mary was busy, and Martha was busy. And then Jesus comes, and he sits in the house, and he starts teaching. He’s speaking, and Mary can’t carry on working. She stops. She sits at his feet. She’s listening, and she’s learning. And Martha comes along and complains, and says to Jesus, “Do you not see that my sister is not helping me. Tell her to help me. I need help. There’s so much to be done.” And Jesus says to Martha, “Martha, Martha, Mary has desired the one thing needful, and it shall be given her. Martha, Martha, you are cumbered about with many things: One thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her.” So Jesus was pleased. He was delighted with Mary sitting there listening to him.

And she wasn't just listening. It wasn't going in one ear and out another. She was listening, she was taking it in, and she was understanding it, and she was believing it. She believed, when Jesus told them how he was going to be betrayed, handed over to the Romans, and crucified, and that he would be buried, and after three days he would rise again. And she knew she would have no time to anoint him with a view to his burial, and so she comes to anoint him now. She shows wonderful insight, taught by Christ. We think of Lydia, in Act chapter 16. We're told that God opened the heart of Lydia, so that she gave heed to the things that were spoken by Paul. God opened her heart, she understood, and she was saved. She was converted. We think of Priscilla and Aquila. Priscilla, Aquila's wife, obviously had a great grasp of the truth because we're told that when Apollos came along with defective knowledge—he had only heard about the baptism of John and the teaching of John—Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and taught him the way of God more perfectly. Priscilla is mentioned because she was able fully to explain the gospel to Apollos, and she herself perhaps had a deeper and fuller understanding of the truth than her husband, Aquila. In the Old Testament, we have several like that. We think of Deborah, the prophetess, and how she led Israel, and how Barak wouldn't go to fight against the Canaanites without Deborah being there to help him. We think of Manoah's wife—Manoah, the father of Samson—and how Manoah's wife seemed to be much more spiritual and perceptive than her husband. We're told also about Huldah, the prophetess. In Jesus Christ, there is neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, neither Jew nor Gentile. There is that essential oneness, although different roles are given to men and women within the church and within the family; and men are given a leadership role within the church and family. But here's this woman then, Mary, she has great understanding; her eyes have been opened to the truth, and she anoints Jesus with a view to his burial. Has the Lord opened your mind, and given to you understanding of the gospel?

Thirdly, we see here *A Woman who was Horribly Criticized*, verse 4: "And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?" What a waste! More than three hundred pence just gone like that, the scent, the perfume all poured out and lost. This money could have been kept and used to feed the poor. No doubt there were many poor people in Jerusalem. There would be hungry people, there would be beggars, who had very little in the way of clothes. And it seems that Judas Iscariot was particularly involved in criticizing her. We're told that in John 12. John tells us it wasn't because he had any great love for the poor, but because he was a thief, and he carried the bag, the purse for Jesus and the disciples. When he got what was put in the purse, he would take some of it for himself, and he was thinking of what he could have got here. And we notice in verses 10 and 11 of this chapter that immediately after this event, "Judas Iscariot...went unto the chief priests to betray him...And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him." The love of money had ahold of Judas.

So they're complaining about this woman because of this waste of money, this extravagant gift that she has given to Jesus. What would you do for Jesus? Christians can sometimes be terribly critical of others, when they see others who love the Lord more than them. They can be jealous and critical. But it's very wrong of us if we are jealous of those who are more godly than ourselves. We think of Cain and Abel, who Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God, and Cain's was rejected. And he was so angry that he murdered his brother—the sin of jealousy. So here, a woman who did a lovely deed, but she's horribly criticized by the disciples, and particularly, Judas.

Finally, we have here *A Woman that Jesus Loves*. Jesus is delighted with what she does. He liked the smell of the perfume. He was truly human. He had an appreciation for beautiful things,

and for lovely smells, and no doubt, delightful food, and all these things, good things in themselves, he enjoyed. But it's particularly, because he could see her heart, and he could see, in her deed, the love she had for him and the devotion she had for him. And therefore, he's delighted. He notices her theological perception, how she was anointing him with a view to his burial. But he also says, "The poor you have with you always"—verse 7—"and whensoever ye will, ye may do them good: but me ye have not always." She had done what she could. We're not asked to do any more, really. She had done what she could. She did everything she could. "She has come aforehand to anoint my body for the burial."

"The poor you have with you always." When my parents were young, more than a hundred years ago, the people on the Island of Lewis where they lived were very poor. Sometimes they were short of food. They lived in black houses made of stone and turf; very primitive; clay floors. But today, people seem so much wealthier, and yet we find people today in our society complaining that they must choose between heating and eating. So in that sense, yes, the poor are there always. We see beggars in the street begging for money. How often, it's drink and drugs that bring them into that situation, because there's universal credit, social security, and so on, for people. But no doubt, there are genuine cases too. But in other countries, we see very poor people. And it's our duty to help the poor, to do what we can to help them. But what we have here is love—love for Jesus. And Jesus sees the loving heart. He sees her faith in him; her appreciation for him. She knows that she's a sinner. She knows that she deserves hell, and she knows that Jesus died for our sins, and she's rejoicing in the Savior—the Savior who's on his way to Calvary to suffer on her behalf. She has forgiveness through Jesus Christ. And appreciating his atoning work as the Lamb of God, she comes and she anoints him.

Jesus says to us, "*This do in remembrance of me...*As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:24 and 26). What great love Christ has to us, and how we should love Christ in return. We love him because he first loved us. We come to his Table loving him and wishing to show our love to him, and our devotion to him. And as we sit there at his Table, partaking of the bread and the wine, we think of that body that was broken, and the blood that was shed—his sufferings on our behalf, and our salvation that we now enjoy, and we look forward to the day when Christ will come again. Our hearts have been touched by Christ. Mary's heart was touched. Has your heart been touched? Do you love Christ? If you do, then, you are to come to his Table joyfully, remembering his death, and rejoicing in the sacrifice that he made for you. Today, we have eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We love him. We love him, because he first loved us. We love him with all our heart, and we want to show our love to him.

Let's pray.

O Lord our God, we thank thee for thy love towards us. And we thank thee that from all eternity, thou didst love us and choose us to be thine own. We thank thee, Lord Jesus Christ, that thou hast come from heaven's glory into this cursed world, and thou didst take all our sins upon thyself, and thou didst suffer and die in our room and place. We thank thee, Lord Jesus, for dying for us, and we pray that we would live for thee, that we would give ourselves, give our best to thee, and give our bodies a living sacrifice to God, to do thy will continually, which is our reasonable service. Bless us then, O Lord, each one. Be with us in all our ways. Help us to remember thy death till thou come, and forgive us for all that is wrong in our lives, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #5

The Awful Cup (Luke 22:39) and The Communion Table Address

This morning, I would like to direct your attention to the Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. We'll read Luke's Gospel, chapter 22, and at verse 39: "And he came out"—Jesus came out—"and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

Now, it's particularly verse 42 that I would like to direct your attention to, the prayer of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." Today, we hope to take Communion together. And in that Communion service, the cup is central. There's the bread, and there's the wine. But our cup, our cup of wine is very different from Christ's cup. Hopefully, those of us who take the cup do so with reverence and godly fear. There's a seriousness as we approach the Lord's Table. There's an awe there. But there's also a joy. It's a blessing. For us, it's a cup of salvation. But Christ's cup was an awful cup. He pleads for it to be taken away. He's trembling there in the garden of Gethsemane. And, in fact, an angel is sent from heaven to strengthen him, verse 43. It's amazing that the Creator of heaven and earth needs to be strengthened, and indeed needs strengthening from a creature that he himself has made. In verse 44, we read of him being in an agony. He prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. So there was blood mingled with his sweat. The veins, as it were, were bursting. His human nature was stressed to breaking point. Why? What was in that cup? That's what I'd like us to look at first today. What was in that cup?

Well, first, there were his physical sufferings, and his physical sufferings were immense. You'll remember how he was blindfolded, and how they punched him in the face, and said, "Who punched you?"—how they plucked the hair of his beard; how they placed a crown of thorns on his head, and then a reed in his hand, and they took the reed out, and they would hit him on the head and the crown of thorns with this reed. And then also, you'll remember the scourging, the terrible scourging—brutal, the leather with bits of bone stuck in it, tearing his back; and then carrying his cross out to Calvary; and the nails hammered through his hands and through his feet; and he himself lifted up on that cross at nine in the morning, and left on that cross until he died at three in the afternoon. It was a slow, painful death, and very hard to endure. And there was all the mental

suffering too, of being forsaken by his disciples; being mocked and ridiculed by everyone around him; laughed at as he was going through his sufferings. And yet, many others have suffered similar things. We know of martyrs who've been tortured; torn by animals; burnt alive in the fire; some of them crucified. Yet, they faced their crucifixion or their burning in the fire, they faced it fearlessly, and indeed, to some extent joyfully.

So why is Christ so troubled? The reason is, of course, that Christ suffered the wrath and curse of God. Think of what Paul says, in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and verse 21: he who knew no sin was made sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Christ was the sinless one, the holy one, the one who hated sin with a perfect hatred. He is so pure, and sin is so vile to him. From all eternity, he was in the bosom of the Father. He loved his Father so much. He loved righteousness. Holiness characterized him. And he hates sin; hates it with an infinite hatred. And yet, our sin was laid on him. And we are told he was made sin, whatever that means. It's a mystery. He was made sin, not just that he was made a sin offering, which, of course, was true—he was the offering for sin—but made sin. Of course, he had no guilt—he didn't sin himself. William Huntington puts it like this: "It's as if the contents of a toilet were poured over him." How horrible! Indeed, it's like sewage poured into his mouth; worse, poured into his very soul. He hated sin. He hated it perfectly, infinitely. And yet, he is made sin. He is covered with all this filth, which he detests.

Think of the awfulness of sin. We are so used to sin, we sin every moment of every day, and indeed, we think very little of it. But try to see it from God's point of view. Think of a loving, kind, merciful, gracious God. And this God, we sin against him. We hurt him. We grieve him. Think of how God poured every blessing upon Adam, placed him in a garden, in a paradise indeed. Everything was so lovely, so good. There was no pain, no suffering, no death. It was beautiful. And there was just one sin possible for Adam to commit, to take the forbidden fruit. And yet, enjoying all this goodness and love from God, Adam took the forbidden fruit and ate it. And in some ways, we would think, "Well, that's a very small sin, to steal, say, an apple, and to eat it." And yet notice the consequences of this sin. Think of all the suffering that there is in the world; all the death that has taken place since the days of Adam; all the pain, the misery, the sickness, the war, the violence, the hatred, the quarrelling, the spite. And it all flowed from just one sin, one sin so horrible, bringing such wrath and curse upon men and women. And now think of all the sins of one person; and then think of all the sins of all these people. Every moment, we sin. Every Christian is a sinner. And we sin millions and billions of sins. And all these sins were laid on Christ. They were reckoned to him. He stands before God, and he stands before God covered in all our filth, his holy, loving soul submerged in all this sewage of sin. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." What a cup of sin it was! And he drank it. Not that he sinned, but this sin was accounted to him.

In Psalm 75, verse 8, we're told about a cup in the hand of God. It's full of red wine, and we're told the wicked shall drink of that cup. They will wring out every drop. What is that cup that the psalmist speaks of that the wicked will drink? It's a cup of the wrath, a cup of the fury of God. God is a just God, a holy God, a God of justice, a God who must punish sin. And this cup is a cup of red wine, not mixed, not diluted, no water added—the full wrath of God. And the heathen, in this life, begin to drink that cup of God's wrath, but then they drink it to the full in hell, in the next world.

Here, we have Christ treated as a sinner; treated indeed as the chief of sinners; treated as the one who carries all our sins. In Proverbs chapter 17, verse 15, God's Word says, "He that justifieth the wicked...[is an] abomination to the LORD." If somebody justifies an evil man; if somebody lets a wicked person, a terrible criminal off without punishing him, a judge, to do that, would be

doing something terribly wrong. They're an abomination to the Lord. But how then can a holy God justify you and me, who are wicked? The only way he can justify us is by laying our sins upon Christ, his Son—laying our sins on him, and then punishing him in our place.

In Revelation chapter 14, and verses 19 to 20, we have a picture of the end of the world. And we're told about the grapes of the earth being gathered and put in the winepress and trampled there. And these grapes of the earth are the wicked, the sinners, the ungodly. They are placed in the winepress. They are trampled. And the blood of the grapes spreads out, as it were, up to one thousand, six hundred furlongs from the winepress. That's two hundred miles. It's a picture for us of hell, and of the wicked suffering in hell, and the awfulness of their suffering. While here, we have Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, and he's trampled in the winepress. We have Christ on the cross of Calvary being crushed—crushed by the wrath of God.

We think of hell. What is hell? It's eternal misery, forever and ever suffering. How could Christ endure the eternal misery of all his people in just six hours on the cross? The only way he could do it is because he is God as well as man, and because he is upheld by the Holy Spirit. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him" (Isaiah 42:1). He was baptized with the Holy Spirit without measure. He suffered an intensity of pain beyond our wildest imagination. Remember, it wasn't just a sample of punishment that came upon Christ. He was punished with all the punishment that you and I deserve.

In Luke chapter 23, verses 44 and 45, we read that a darkness came over the earth for three hours, as Christ was on the cross. It was a physical darkness. Remember how a plague came on the land of Egypt—the ninth plague? It was a darkness, as it were, that could be felt; a terrible darkness. They couldn't move, they couldn't see anything because of this darkness. But the darkness that came on Calvary wasn't just physical darkness. It was also spiritual darkness. Some people suffer mental depression, and that's a horrible thing, a terrible illness. They speak about this black dog on their shoulder. They speak about the horrible darkness in their minds. In a sense, hell is like that. It's depression and darkness—darkness forever; darkness without any light at the end of the tunnel, without any hope of deliverance. Hell is called "outer darkness." And here is Christ going through the hell of darkness for us. Christ endured the darkest of darkness as he drank that cup. What a cup it was!

But there's something else there—there's God-forsakenness. Christ, on the cross, cried out, "I thirst" (John 19:28). And no doubt, he was suffering from great physical thirst. The last drink he had was the night before at the Passover. And here he was, enduring this night of sweating and suffering, and torture, and then the next day, hanging on the cross with the sun beating down upon him—"I thirst." But his thirst was more than physical. Physical thirst is hard to bear. But his thirst was also a spiritual thirst. Jesus tells us a parable of the rich man and Lazarus; the rich man who fared sumptuously every day, who lived in a palace, clothed with purple and scarlet; and then, the beggar, Lazarus, who was at his door looking for the scraps that fell from his table. Lazarus died and the angels carried him to Abraham's bosom. And the rich man died and was buried, and in hell, he opened his eyes being in torment. And he looks up, and he sees Lazarus in Abraham's bosom in heaven, and he says, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus with a drop of water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." What a terrible thirst that spiritual thirst must be in hell, tormented in this flame. If only he could get even one drop of water, what a comfort it would be! (Luke 16:19–31). And here is Christ on the cross crying out, "I thirst." And then, he cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1). "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?"

What is hell? Some people have defined it as a place where God is not. And yet, the psalmist,

in Psalm 139, says, “If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (verse 8). Rather, hell is a place where God is absent as a God of kindness, a God of benevolence, a God of mercy, a God of grace, a God of salvation. But God is present in hell; he’s present as a God of anger, and wrath, and fury. Sometimes it is said, “God loves the sinner but hates his sin.” And yet, that’s not totally accurate. Sin doesn’t exist apart from the sinner. God hates the sinner because he sins. Psalm 5, verse 5: “Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.” God hates sinners with a perfect hatred. Does God hate Christ? Well, we cannot say that, because even on the cross, this is his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased. But yet, ye pours upon him his full wrath, and curse, and fury, and indignation against sin. He is his beloved Son; he’s always his beloved Son. In one sense, never was he more his beloved Son than when he was dying on the cross, and yet Christ can have no sense of that love of God towards him. There’s no smile from the Father towards him. The Father has turned away his face from him, and all he can see is the wrath, and curse, and anger, and indignation of God. And so, he cries out his cry of dereliction, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”—a sense of God-forsakenness. Who can understand what pain that was to Christ, who, from all eternity, had been in the bosom of the Father, who loved his Father with a perfect love, and enjoyed his Father’s love. But this is the cup that he must drink, the cup of wrath, so that you and I will have a cup of blessing. He had a cup of suffering so that we might have a cup of joy. He had this terrible cup of red wine, so that we might have a sweet cup of Communion.

Let’s pray.

Gracious God, we thank thee for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank thee that he came from heaven’s glory, and he came into this world, and he died on the cursed cross of Calvary, in our room, and in our place; that he bore our sins in his own body on the tree; that he was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. We praise thee, Lord, that he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. So, Lord, help us to love Jesus with all our heart. And help us to come joyfully to the Lord’s Table, rejoicing in him. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

THE COMMUNION TABLE ADDRESS

We come now to the *Fencing of the Lord’s Table*. The purpose of fencing the Lord’s Table is just simply to state who should be at the Lord’s Table, and who should not be there. The Lord’s Table, obviously, is for the Lord’s people. It’s for those who appreciate Jesus Christ; those who are saved by his sufferings and by his death; who look to him, who feed upon him and trust in him. The gospel table, of course, is open to everyone. Whoever you are, you’re invited to come. “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). The gospel table preaches the gospel to everyone in the world. But the Lord’s Table, the sacrament, is only for the Lord’s people; those who have repented of their sins, and believe in Jesus; and those who are living consistent Christian lives. Some Christians are not allowed to come to the Lord’s Table because they’re under church discipline. They have done something very wrong. Perhaps they’ve been involved in some crime, or maybe they’ve been committing adultery and the church has had to discipline them. And so they are forbidden to come. But those who are the Lord’s people are invited to come. And when we are fencing the table, we very often read a passage in Galatians, Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 5, and verses 16 to 26. So I’ll read this passage.

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.” Amen.

So this passage makes a very clear division, a division between those who do the works of the flesh—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, and so on. We are told, of which things “I tell you before as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” So if we are doing these things, openly doing these things, sinning against God in these ways, we are not coming to the Lord’s Table. These are the works of the flesh. But as Christians, we have crucified the flesh, and we are fighting against the flesh, and resisting the flesh. There is, indeed, a war going on inside us, and that’s a great mark of the Christian. At one time we were dead in sin, but now there’s a war going on. We’re on the side of the Spirit, fighting against the flesh. And we seek to bear now the fruit of the Spirit. And these things mark out the Christian. The fruit of the Spirit is love.

The Christian, the person who should come to the Lord’s Table, is somebody who loves God, who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and who loves his fellow Christians. Joy, we have joy in our Savior, and rejoicing in salvation, and rejoicing in forgiveness of sin, we come to his Table. And we have peace too—peace in our conscience; peace with God; longsuffering—bearing with the trials and tribulations of life because we know it’s for our good. These trials are to purify us, to correct us. Gentleness—not harsh; goodness—doing that which is good; faith—being faithful; meekness, that is, humility. The Lord’s Table is not for the arrogant and the proud. We have to repent of such attitudes. And then temperance, or self-control—not getting carried away with earthly things. Now, no Christian is perfect, but as Christians, a change has taken place. We’ve been converted. We’ve been born again. And that means that now we hate sin. So we are to be daily repenting of our sin, daily trusting in Christ, and rejoicing in the cross. And so, the Lord’s people, in whom this change has taken place, and who are seeking to live for the Lord, and delighting in the broken body and the shed blood, should now come to the Lord’s Table.

We shall now read our *Warrant for Dispensing the Lord’s Supper*. A sacrament is an ordinance appointed by Christ. So we’ll read our warrant from 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and verse 23, where Paul says, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”

So the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it. So, let us follow his example and give thanks:

We give thanks, O Lord, for the great gift that thou has given us, God's unspeakable gift, of thine own beloved Son. We thank thee that the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven's glory into this cursed world, that he suffered, and that he died for us; that he was made sin for us. We thank thee that he lived a holy life. But then, as the perfect, spotless Lamb of God, he suffered as our sin offering. We rejoice in Calvary. We rejoice in the broken body and the shed blood. We rejoice in the finished work of Christ. And we praise thee that thou dost give to us this sacrament—the bread symbolizing the body, and that body broken, and the wine symbolizing the blood—the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross. Help us, Lord, to eat and to drink to thy glory. Help us to remember the Lord's death, and to show it forth till he come. So, bless us around thy table, and forgive all our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And while we're sitting at the Lord's Table, I would like to direct your attention to words that we find in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, and verse 3: "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."

The Apple Tree Among the Trees of the Wood. The Song of Solomon is a love song, a love song that portrays for us the relationship of God to his people, of Christ to his church. Christ loves his church like the bridegroom. He came indeed from heaven in order to get a bride. And one day there will be the wedding feast of the Lamb. The bride, the church, loves Christ. And this love relationship is portrayed for us in the Song of Solomon. And here, we're told particularly about the apple tree. We think of somebody traveling through the desert, through the hot desert. The sun is beating down upon them, they're sweating, they're tired, and they come under the shadow of the apple tree. There they are shaded from the hot sun. The apple tree bears the hot sun, and they have protection. And that's a picture for us of Christ. Christ, the apple tree, shading us from the wrath of God. The wrath of God beats down upon him; it's poured out upon him. He suffers the flaming rays, as it were, of God's wrath. But under the shadow of his wings, we are protected. We find a hiding place there, a hiding place from the storm, a covert from the tempest, a shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Christ is our hiding place. We come under his shadow.

And then also, *His Fruit is Sweet to Our Taste.* There, under the apple tree, we reach up and we take an apple from the tree, and these apples are the promises of God. And how many sweet promises come to us? Think of these things, how the Lord Jesus Christ has earned these promises for us. The greatest promise of all is, of course, the Holy Spirit—the Spirit who makes us holy; the Spirit who unites us to God; the Spirit who fills us with love, and joy, and peace, and longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. We think of all the promises. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5; Deuteronomy 31:6). How wonderful that is! "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:9). "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither the covenant of my peace" (Isaiah 54:10). Or think of these beautiful words in Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to them that love God." What a sweet promise it is. When we feel confused; when we feel everything's against us; when we're tempted by Satan to despair, remember, "all things work together for good." And when we're struggling

against the attacks of Satan, we remember that promise, “Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5). How wonderful it is, that it’s not really us who keep ourselves, no, but we are kept by the power of God. We couldn’t keep ourselves. If it was left up to us, we would be lost. But “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation”. We have “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (verses 4–5). So take these promises. Think of the promises of Scripture. And as you sit at the Lord’s Table, rejoice. Rejoice in the shadow of the tree, and rejoice in the sweet fruit that comes from the tree.

“*This is my body broken for you.*” These were Christ’s words. We take the bread, we break it. “This is my body broken for you. This do in remembrance of me. And after the supper, he took the cup. “This is the cup of the New Testament in my blood. Drink ye all of it. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show the Lord’s death till he come.” Remembering his death, showing it forth, and looking forward till he come.

And after the Supper, just a few words, from this same passage, the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 4: “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” *Brought into the banqueting house.* Yes, we have been at the banqueting house at the Lord’s Table. It’s a feast. It’s a love feast. Christ himself is at the table with us. He has been giving to us the symbols of his body and his blood, so that we might feed by faith upon him. We have been enjoying Christ, delighting in our Savior, feeding on him by faith.

Let us now more and more think about this love of Christ. He brought me into his banqueting house. Think of the banner: “His banner over me was love.” Let this love constrain us. As we rise from the table, let this love constrain us to new obedience, to be different, to live a more holy life, a more godly life, to be more beautiful Christians. Christ said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). He loved us. We love him, because he loved us. Let us now show our love in our holy life, and in standing for Christ. He says, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), and then, he says to us, “You are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14 and 16). He says to us, No one can come after me; no one can be my disciple unless they deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Be different. Be a follower of Christ in the midst of a dark world. Don’t be ashamed of Christ. Love Christ and love one another. “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another” (John 13:35). So let us rise from the Table of the Lord, determined more and more to be like Christ, to love him, and to show forth his love in the midst of a dark world.

Let’s pray.

We thank thee, Lord, for thy goodness to us. We thank thee for the sacrament. And we thank thee for being enabled once again to partake in this sacrament, and to remember the Lord’s death, and to think back to Calvary, and to the agony our Savior endured, and that he said, “Not my will but thine be done.” He was willing. He submitted himself, and he drank that terrible cup of suffering, of wrath, of fury, of indignation of the Lord, in order that we might have a cup of blessing. We thank thee for it. And we pray that we would be enabled more and more to be different—different from the world around us, indeed, different from what we have been in the past; that this Lord’s Supper would be a means of grace to us, and that in going from the Table of the Lord, we would

go with new determination to follow the Lord; to stand on his side; to be different from the world; and to be a light shining in the midst of the darkness, pointing men and women to Christ. Help us, Lord, to be obedient, and forgive us for all our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #6

Salvation for Pharisees and Prodigals (Luke 15:29-30)

Tonight, I would like to speak to you from the parable of the prodigal son. We'll read this chapter together first of all—Luke chapter 15:

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

“And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and

dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of his Word.

So I'd like today particularly to direct your attention to verses 29 and 30: “And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou has killed for him the fatted calf.”

I'm sure that you have all heard many sermons on the prodigal son. Today I would like us rather to concentrate on the elder brother. It's more likely that we will find the elder brother here in the church rather than the prodigal son. And actually, it's on the elder brother that Jesus puts the emphasis. The account of the elder brother comes last in the parable. It's the climax. Also, it's important for us to notice the context. Jesus tells this parable in response to the murmuring of the scribes and Pharisees: “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” So, Jesus is telling this parable as a response to the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes.

Well, the first thing I'd like you to notice is the sad, lost condition of the elder brother. You might say, “Surely the elder brother was not lost. Does not the father say, in verse 31, All that I have is thine.” But what we have to remember is that this is a parable—an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And not every detail in the story is to be interpreted. It's not God who says, “All that I have is thine,” it's just the father in the parable. The elder brother here shows no marks of grace. He hates his younger brother, and he's angry with his father, and he's very self-righteous. He feels he deserves better than he gets. And look at the context. The publicans and sinners drew near to Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes murmur, “This man receives sinners.” Yes he does, and isn't that wonderful? Isn't that brilliant, that Jesus receives sinners? God welcomes sinners to himself.

But the scribes and Pharisees think that they're not sinners. They deserve to be received—that's what they think. They're so self-righteous. Really, they're just hypocrites, and sadly, there's too many hypocrites in the church today. Are you a hypocrite? Do you think you deserve heaven? Or do you realize that, if God were to deal with you as you deserve, you would end up in hell. All of us are sinners. All of us break God's commandments. We've all made a mess of our lives. Or are you proud, and thinking, “I'm quite good. I'm better than others. I haven't done anything really bad. I'm maybe not the best person around, but lots of people worse than me. I try my best. What more can I do? Surely God couldn't possibly send me to hell.” Is that your attitude?—an attitude of self-righteousness.

There's an interesting parable told to us in Matthew chapter 20. A man who had a vineyard, and he goes out to the marketplace to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. He went out first thing in the morning at 6:00 a.m., and he agreed with laborers, day laborers who were there, he agreed that they would work all day for a penny a day, or a denarius. That was the usual rate for a laborer. Later

on in the day, at midday, he went out, and he found some other people idle in the marketplace. And he said to them, "Go and work in the vineyard, and I'll give you pay at the end of the day." He went out at 3:00 p.m., and similarly found others. And even at 5:00 p.m., he went out and there were people there in the marketplace. And he said, "Why are you spending all day idle? Go and work in my vineyard, and I'll give you what's appropriate." So then at 6:00 p.m., he said to his manager to go and to pay the workers, and to start with those who had just worked for one hour, and to give each one of them a penny. They had hardly done anything, and yet they were given what somebody would normally be given for working a whole day. So that was a huge amount. And then, those who had worked all day, they came, and they expected that they were going to get more. And when they were only given a penny, they began to complain. And they said, "That's not fair. We've worked all day, and we've just got a penny." But then he turned to them, and he said, "Did you not agree with me to work all day for a penny?" And, of course, they had. "Well," he said, "take what is yours, go your way. I can do what I like with my own." But you see, those who had worked all day, they were the scribes and the Pharisees. They thought they deserved more. But the wonderful thing about the gospel is that those who worked just one hour receive the same heaven. It's not a matter of our work or our merit. It's a matter of God's free grace; God's kindness; God's generosity.

We think of the thief who died beside Jesus on the cross. He had no time to do any work for Jesus, and yet Jesus said, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." The real Christian delights in big sinners being saved, but the hypocrite thinks that he can earn salvation and get to heaven because of his good works. So what about you? Are you like the scribes and the Pharisees, thinking you're earning your way to heaven; that you're quite good; that you're not bad enough to be condemned? Or are you a poor beggar like these men working in the vineyard, who just worked for an hour, and yet receive this great reward.

In the second place, I want you to notice how God loves to save prodigals. The Pharisees criticized Jesus because he receives sinners and eats with them. But that's a wonderful truth. He sits and eats with publicans and sinners. He came not to save the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance. Those who are whole, who are healthy, don't need a doctor, a physician, but those who are sick. Jesus came to help the sick, not those who think they're okay. If you're a sinner, come to Christ! You're welcome! Whatever sins you've committed, you're welcome. You're like the lost sheep. The ninety-nine who didn't go astray, they're left behind, and the shepherd goes looking for the one lost sheep. And there's more joy over the lost sheep than there is over the ninety and nine who never went astray. There's great joy when he found the lost sheep. He laid it on his shoulders and came home rejoicing; came home and gathered his friends and neighbors together, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I found the sheep which was lost." Likewise, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

Think too of the woman, the woman who had the ten pieces of silver. She loses one piece. She hunts high and low. She sweeps the house. She looks everywhere till she finds the lost coin. And then, when she had found it, she is so happy. She calls her friends and neighbors in, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece that was lost." And so, in verse 10, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." What's the presence of the angels of God? That's God himself. The angels are in God's presence, and God is rejoicing before the angels in the sinner who repents. God loves to receive sinners. He welcomes them. This is a wonderful truth, the great truth of the gospel. You can't earn salvation. Christ has earned it for us. Christ came to save sinners.

And then, we read about the prodigal son, how he went astray; went so far astray; how he asked for the portion of goods that would fall to him; and couldn't wait till his father died; he wanted it now. "Give me my share," he says. And the father seems terribly lenient. He divides his resources between his two sons, and soon the young son takes his money, and away he goes. And he spends his time in a far country in pleasure, eating, drinking, making merry; dancing, parties, drugs, prostitutes, and so on. And he had lots of money, and because he had lots of money, he had lots of friends. And he's got no sense. He spends his money. But then, once his money is all spent, where are his friends? They soon disappeared. That's what they're like, these worldly friends. And then, to make things worse, a famine comes. There's a downturn in the economy. There's no work available. He's hungry. Eventually, somebody sends him into a field to feed pigs, but doesn't give him any pay. He's almost eating the swill that the pigs eat, he's so hungry. He's in such a low condition. For a Jew, the very worst job possible was looking after pigs. Pigs are unclean animals. But there he is, looking after the pigs, and not getting paid for it—hungry. And he comes to his senses. How did he come to his senses? Well, the Holy Spirit convicted him; made him aware of what a fool he was. And so he decides to return home. "In my father's house there's plenty. Hired servants there have food enough, and to spare. I'll go back to my father and confess, and say to him, I've been a fool. I've made a mess of my life. I'm no more worthy to be called your son. But make me as one of your hired servants. Allow me to work, and then I'll have food to eat.

So he sets off home, and the father sees him. He's obviously been looking out for him; sees him while he's still a long way off; recognizes him, and he runs to meet him. And he puts his arms around him, covered as he was with all the filth of the pigs. You can think of the stink that there was of him, in his rags, in his filth, in his mess, the father embraces him and kisses him. He says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, I'm not more worthy to be called thy son." But the father says to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger. Put shoes on his feet. Kill the fatted calf. We'll rejoice and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Amazing grace—how wonderful God's unmerited favor. The father makes a feast for his son who has returned. He's got no merit, he deserves nothing, but he's given all.

And that's the way God is with you and me. We're all, by nature, prodigal sons. Do you see yourself as such? And how wonderful the welcome you will receive, if you come back to God. Whoever you are, whatever you've done, come to Christ. Seek him, call upon him, ask him into your heart and life. All will be forgiven, and you'll be made a new person, and you'll be blessed with all the blessings of this life, and the blessings of heaven to come. God loves to save prodigals.

And finally, *Sinners are welcome*. What a wonderful parable that we have here that pictures for us the real God, who's rich in mercy, who loves to save. There's joy in heaven over every sinner who repents. You can't earn salvation. You don't deserve it. We think of those workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20. They had just worked for one hour, and yet they get as much as others who had worked the whole day. The thief on the cross converted after a life of criminal activity, deserving to die on the cross, but being given a place in heaven.

Who gets to heaven? If you were to go out onto the street, and ask people who gets to heaven, they would say, "Good people get to heaven, and bad people go to hell." But that's not true. It's the other way around. Who gets to heaven?—bad people, bad people who don't deserve it. God hates hypocrisy, and there's nobody that's good. The self-righteous don't get to heaven. Those who think they're good don't get to heaven. When you have done everything, Jesus says, call yourself an unprofitable servant. When you have done your very best, you're unprofitable; you've only done

your duty (Luke 17:10).

But then, there's hope for the sinner. Harlots and publicans will enter heaven, and the children of the kingdom be shut out. I wonder, could that happen to you? Are you somebody who is born into a Christian home, grown up in a family, living in a Christian family, being good living all your life; knowing the Bible and attending church, and at the end of the day, ending up in hell? Remember, every one of us, in God's eyes, are great sinners. You're a sinner, and so am I. God is perfect. He demands perfection. And none of us are perfect. And therefore, we've got no hope in ourselves. In our own righteousness there's no hope. There's no hope for the elder brother. Unless you come to see your own sin, repent, and be converted, you cannot be saved. But whatever you've done in the past, nothing should exclude you. Whoever you are, whatever your past involved, come to Christ. You are welcome. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22). No matter where you live, no matter who you are, no matter what you've done, look to Christ! Call upon him. Pray to him, and you will be saved. We have a wonderful Savior.

Let's pray.

O Lord our God, we thank thee that the Lord Jesus is stretching out his arms to us. All day long, he says, I have stretched out mine arms to a disobedient and gainsaying people, to rebellious people, to those who refuse me and reject me. We thank thee, O Lord, that thou dost welcome sinners to thyself. And we pray that we would come, not in our own goodness or our own righteousness, not thinking we deserve this or that, but that we would come as poor and needy sinners before thee, crying for mercy, and putting our trust in the blood of Jesus. Bless us then, O Lord, each one, and forgive us for all our sins, and help us to put our trust in Christ as our Savior, in whose name we pray, amen.

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #7

Christ is Coming Again (Revelation 22:20-21)

As we come to the end of our Communion Season, I would like to address you from the last two verses in the Bible—Revelation 22, verses 20 and 21. We'll read this whole chapter together.

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly, blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

“And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

Particularly, these last two verses, Revelation 22, verses 20 and 21: “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

Here then we have the last two verses in the Bible. With this, the Divine Canon closes, the canon of Scripture. God has spoken through the prophets, through the apostles, and through his Son. And here are the final words before the great shout that will announce the return of Christ. He will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with of the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And then shall we forever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). So, at the end of a Communion Season, it’s appropriate for us to consider these words together.

First of all, we’re told here that *Christ is Coming Again*. “Surely I come quickly.” And this is a vital truth. The world is not going to go on forever. Neither is it going to end with a nuclear holocaust, as some think or fear; neither will it end with a climate catastrophe. Christ is King. He is set on God’s right hand, and he will reign there till his enemies are made his footstool. He has been given a kingdom of power over this world—kingship, and a reign over this earth. He’s head over all things for the benefit of his church.

When Christ came the first time, he came to save. He came in a state of humiliation, born in poverty, laid in a manger. He grew up in obscurity. He worked for a time as a carpenter, and then he was baptized, and he began his public ministry. For three and a half years, he went around preaching and teaching, performing miracles, declaring the kingdom, calling men and women to repentance. He says, “I came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give my life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He came to take our sins, and take our place; to be punished in our room and stead; to endure hell on the cross, so that we would have heaven when we die. He died that we might live. He says, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26)—that is, never die eternally or in hell.

Christ died on the cross; he rose again on the third day; he ascended up to heaven; he sat at the right hand of God glorified; and he is there making continual intercession for us. He’s still our Prophet, our Priest, and our King. He’s the Prophet who spoke by his Spirit through the prophets in the Old Testament times, and through his apostles in the New Testament. And he still speaks by his Holy Spirit, taking the words of Scripture and applying them to our hearts, enlightening our minds, as we read the truth, so that we can understand it. He’s our Prophet, our Teacher, revealing the truth to us. He’s our Priest, who offered the great sacrifice for us on the cross of Calvary, and then took his own blood and entered into heaven, and sprinkled it upon the mercyseat, upon the throne of God in heaven, so that throne of God is, for us, a throne of grace, where we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. And he’s also the King. He’s the King and Head of his people. And he’s also King over the world, over heaven and earth. He’s King of all for the benefit of his church.

Remember when Jesus ascended up to heaven from the Mount of Olives? Two angels appeared to the disciples, “You men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him depart” (Acts 1:11). He’s coming again. He’s coming in the same way. He’s coming bodily, and he’s coming to judge the world. There’s a day of reckoning ahead for us all. Are you ready? Ready for the judgment day? Where will you be on that day? Will you be calling on the mountains to fall on you and the hills to cover you from the face

of him who sits upon the throne? Or you will be welcoming the return of Christ. Christ is coming again.

Secondly, *The Church Prays for Christ to Come*. “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus,” says the church. We have here a longing, a prayer. Is it your longing, and your prayer that Christ would come, that he would come soon? Surely, it’s a mark of the church that we are in love with Christ, and we long for his return. And why do we long for his return?

We long for his return, because it will be the completion of his exaltation. His exaltation began with his resurrection from the dead; and then, forty days later, his ascension into heaven; his sitting at the right hand of God; and it’s completed with his coming at the end of the world to judge the world. He will judge every man and woman who ever lived. So it’s a completion of his exaltation.

It’s also the glorification of Christ, and we want to see that. We love Jesus, and we want to see him fully glorified, that every eye would see him, and acknowledge him, and see his glory, and bow before him.

We long also to see the destruction of Satan, and the demons, and the wicked, and all the enemies of God. We long to see all those atheists, and agnostics, and followers of false religions, and followers of cults, who deny Christ—we long to see them bow the knee before him; if not converted in this world, then crushed into submission. We long to see Satan, the archenemy of God, on his knees before Christ, and his demons with him. The destruction of the devil and all God’s enemies.

But also, we’re looking forward to that day, because we wish to, and long to stop sinning ourselves. We long for our lust, and our pride, and our idolatry to cease. As Christians, we all sin, but we hate sin. We are the enemies of sin. We hate the devil, and we love Christ, and we would wish to please him. Because we love him, we want to keep his commandments, so we’re looking forward to that day when we’ll never sin again.

And we’re looking forward to that day when our warfare will be over. In this world, we’re always struggling, and fighting against sin, fighting against the world, the flesh, and the devil. But then, we’ll be victorious.

We’re looking for an end to the pain and the suffering in this world. And some people, some Christians suffer greatly, and there may be many years in their lives suffering with weakness, and disability, and pain. But all that will be over when Christ comes again.

And we long to be at home at last; at last with the family of God; at last with our Father in heaven; with our beloved Lord Jesus Christ; with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; with Peter, and James, and John; with the Reformers, Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, the great men and women of God in the past; and those fellow Christians that we have known who have departed to be with the Lord; we long to be at home with them.

And we long for the ushering in of the eternal kingdom of righteousness, where there’ll be no pain, no suffering, no sin, no misery, no temptation, no wickedness; but a perfect heaven and earth—a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

And we long particularly to see God; to behold him; to behold our God; to look at the Lord Jesus Christ; to look into that face, that face that we spat upon, that face that we mocked and ridiculed, the face of the one that we nailed to the cross and mocked as he died, the one who loved us and gave himself for us. We long to be with Jesus, looking at him, rejoicing in him, and delighting in his presence and fellowship.

Thirdly, *Christ is Coming Quickly*. He says here, “Surely I come quickly.” That is what he said

2,000 years ago. But there's a problem—2,000 years; why has he not come already? Well, what we have to remember, what Peter tells us of, in 2 Peter chapter 3, is that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years” (verse 8). In the light of eternity, what is a thousand years? It's just like a day. It's nothing. In the light of eternity, 2,000 years is just a moment. He's coming quickly.

Peter also deals with those scoffers who would come, and he says, “Well, think back to the days of Noah.” There was Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and he was telling the people of his day that because of their sins, they were going to be destroyed. God was going to send a flood upon the earth. And the flood didn't happen for a hundred and twenty years. Noah was busy building his ark, preaching to the people. Why did God not bring his flood for a hundred and twenty years? It was because God is longsuffering. He was giving people time to repent. They had days, weeks, months, years to repent. Time and time again, they heard Noah preaching, but they wouldn't listen. In the end, they saw Noah entering into the ark, and the animals with him, but they still wouldn't come and join him. They looked on, perhaps cynically and mocking. But then, the water—the rain began to fall, and the floods began to rise. And they came rushing to the ark, and knocking upon the door, but God had shut the door. And when God shuts a door, it can't be opened.

The hundred and twenty years was a period of grace. Why has Christ not come today? Because he's giving time to sinners to repent. He's longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. So the delay should encourage you, whoever you are, to turn to the Lord, to seek him to make your peace with him.

“Behold, I come quickly.” He comes quickly too, in the sense that death comes quickly. Even if we're not alive when Christ returns, one thing we can be sure of is that Christ will come to take us by death. And death can often come very quickly, sometimes as a thief in the night. Life is short and uncertain. A person can have a brain hemorrhage, a heart attack. They can be knocked down and killed by a car. How quickly our life can be over! Are we ready? “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found”—he can't always be found—“call ye upon him while he is near”—he won't always be near (Isaiah 55:6). Number your days and apply your hearts unto wisdom (Psalm 90:12). Seek him. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). And live every day in this world as if it were your last. Christ is coming quickly. Let us prepare.

And then, fourthly, *Could Christ Return Any Day?* Could he come back today? The Thessalonians thought that that was possible, and they were expecting Christ to return anytime. And some of them, because of that, gave up their daily work. They stopped working, and they were just sitting around worshipping, serving, waiting, expecting, looking for Christ to come. But Paul rebukes them for this. He tells them it's wrong. If a person will not work, neither should he eat. Get back to your work, and work away each day in this world, earn your living, provide for your families (2 Thessalonians 3:10). He tells them, Christ cannot come except there be a falling away first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:3–10).

Both these things could have happened, and have happened, really. A falling away, well, after the time of the apostles, in the early church, there was a falling away into the medieval church, with its darkness and superstition. Then came the Reformation, and there was another falling away after the Reformation. We could say today, there's a terrible falling away, and the love of many has grown cold. People are very worldly, and sensual, and devilish, really. And the man of sin be revealed?—well, the antichrist, the man of sin, the pope of Rome has been, down through the centuries, one who has set himself up in the temple of God, as if he was God; claiming power to forgive sin, and all sorts of this that belong only to God; claiming to be the head of the church, whereas, there's only one Head, and that is Christ. That man of sin, that antichrist has been revealed.

But there is one thing that still hasn't happened—one thing that's prophesied in the Scriptures. In Romans chapter 11, we're told that one day, the Jews are going to be converted. The Jews, who for the last 2,000 years have largely been blinded, following their own empty traditions, rejecting Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. One day they're going to be converted. In some ways, we think that it could be very near. They have now returned to their own land, and they have prospered in their own land, despite all the opposition that there is against them. But we're still waiting for their spiritual eyes to be opened. The majority of them are in unbelief.

There are some great promises in the Old Testament. For example, Psalm 72, "Yea, all the mighty kings on earth before him down shall fall; And all the nations of the world do service to him shall" (verse 11, SMV¹). Well, that's never happened up to now. "All nations whom thou mad'st shall come and worship reverently"—Psalm 86 (verse 9, SMV). That hasn't happened. There are these prophecies of a time before the end of the world when the nations shall come and bow the knee to King Jesus; not just a tiny minority in the nations, as has happened up till now. Also, Revelation chapter 20 speaks of Satan being bound for a thousand years. That has not happened—bound so that he will deceive the nations no more till the thousand years be fulfilled. Well, Satan's been busy deceiving the nations. He's deceiving men and women with Roman Catholicism, with Islam, with liberal Protestantism. He's deceiving the nations with evolution, with all kinds of false religion, with atheism, and secularism today. Satan's been busy deceiving the nations. But we're told that one day, he will be bound so that he can deceive the nations no more, and during that time, the church of God will flourish.

So, we believe that there's still some time till Christ will return. But watch and pray. It's our duty to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation (Matthew 26:41). Don't sleep as do others.

And finally, we notice how *We Are to Be Sustained as We Wait for the Return of Christ*—verse 21: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." This is a great promise; a great benediction—the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is grace?—God's unmerited favor; God's blessing; God's salvation. These are the words of John, but they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. We need grace—grace to help in time of need; grace to overcome sin and temptation. Christ earned grace for us on the cross, and that grace be with you. Whatever lies ahead, we do not know. We rise from the Lord's Table, we leave our Communion behind us, we go out into the world, we seek to live in the world, but as we go about our daily work, and as we seek to live as Christians in the world, we have the promise—the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will never leave us nor forsake. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." (Isaiah 43:2). We think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, but they had a fourth person with them, the Son of man. The Lord is with us, and will be with us. And we will be kept—"kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:5). Keep going, fellow Christian. Keep running the race, fighting the good fight, trusting in the Lord. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Let's pray.

We thank thee, Lord for thy goodness to us. We thank thee for the blessings that we enjoy. We thank thee for Communion Season, and for the revelation that we have of the love of the Father, in giving his Son, and the love of the Son, in coming to save us, and the love of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell in our hearts, and to apply redemption to us. We pray, Lord, for thy blessing to be

1 Scottish Metrical Version.

upon us, as we go on from here. Do thou go with us. May we be going along, as it were, arm-in-arm with Christ, trusting in our beloved Savior, leaning upon our Beloved more and more. Lead us, guide us, keep us. Keep us from sinning against thee. Watch over us in all our ways. May our lives be God-glorifying. And grant, O Lord, that one day we will be with Christ in heaven to enjoy him forever. Grant, O Lord, that we would never fall away and bring shame upon thy cause. Pardon us all our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.