

As I begin this morning, I want to engage your memory in a 60 second exercise: **I want you to think about a meal that you've experienced that was particularly memorable. What did you eat? Where did you eat it? And who were you with?**

If you have a memory to share, I want to encourage you to share it with someone seated next to you; I'll call you back in 60 seconds.

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A memorable meal...it's a difficult assignment in such a short period of time; I suspect that if you had the time you could name many memorable meals. And I suspect, that very few of you just named a meal in which the food was incredible, but, you were eating it by yourself. What makes a meal memorable is about more than *what* we're eating, but *where* we're eating, and *with whom* we're eating.

Last September I had a meal that really stands out but the peculiar thing is that I can't quite remember what I ate. The food was delicious, I remember that, but what made the meal so memorable is where I was, and who I was with. I was in Dakar, Senegal, at an oceanfront restaurant, at the most Western point of the continent of Africa, and the sun was setting. I was in Senegal to see a new missionary work that our denomination has begun among least reached peoples. The night, at the restaurant, I sat with our President (Dave Hearn) and heard his heart for God and for the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, 12.

**1. The Connection Between Eating and Spirituality:** Eating is so much more than simply a sensory experience, often it's a relational experience. It shouldn't surprise us to discover that the Bible draws a connection between eating and spirituality. I came across the following quote this week; Dan Bern writes, "These days eating Indian food passes for spirituality. I don't meditate, I don't pray, but I eat two samosas every day." This isn't exactly what I'm driving at; did you know that the Biblical story begins with food? After God created the world, Adam and Eve were invited to partake of the bounty before them.

Gordon Smith writes, "The first human parents were invited to eat, with the proviso that their eating was to be an expression of thankfulness, obedience, and dependence on God."<sup>1</sup> As you may know, ironically, it was in Adam and Eve's eating that they first chose to disobey.<sup>2</sup> Years later God formalized a covenant with their descendants—Abraham and Sarah—God's spoken promises took place at a meal.

As we make our way through the Old Testament, and come to the book of Leviticus, we find instruction regarding the sacrificial system. Leviticus outlines the various sacrifices that were offered to God, and while the majority were burnt up completely, others were presented to God but then eaten by the worshipper *in the presence of God—a holy meal.*<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps you remember the story of the nation of Israel, recently freed from captivity in Egypt, now journeying through the desert on route to the promised land. If you've ever been to a desert, you know how scarce food can become. Moses cried out to God on behalf of Israel, and God supplied food—bread from heaven—to nourish them in their hunger.

Thousands of years later, Jesus reinterpreted this event in terms of His own calling; He spoke of Himself as being the Person through whom God would meet the spiritual hunger of the world. In John 6:33, 35, Jesus said, *“the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world...I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”*

I've had the privilege of being on three different walking food tours—two in Vancouver, and one on the North Shore. It's a great way to eat good food and get to know a city. I think Jesus would have loved the idea; when you read the Gospel stories, wherever Jesus went, He was being invited to meals. Meals form the backdrop to some of His greatest miracles, and deepest teachings.

Jesus ate with friends, with followers, with outcasts, and enemies. Smith writes, “His meals were acts of compassion. He saw and met hungry people, and he fed them. Jesus responded to their most basic needs while always insisting that their fundamental needs were

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:26-28

<sup>6</sup> Notable exceptions include the Quakers and the Salvation Army.

greater than those represented by their immediate physical hunger. These meals were also acts of acceptance, forgiveness, and mercy.”<sup>4</sup>

The last meal that Jesus ate was a ritual meal—the Passover Meal. Once a year, faithful Jews gathered in Jerusalem to remember and celebrate the event in which God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. As Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, He reinterpreted this sacred meal in terms of His coming death on the cross.

Taking bread, He broke it, gave thanks to God for it, and then gave it to His disciples saying, *“Take and eat; this is my body.”* In the same way, after supper, *“he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*<sup>5</sup>

Jesus last supper has come to be known by many different names: The Lord's Supper, the Breaking of the Bread, the Mass, Communion, and Eucharist. But in spite of the different names and the different emphases in different church traditions, nearly all Christians agree that this is *A Holy Meal* and central to Christian life and practice.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next 6 weeks, we will be taking a closer look at this Holy

**Meal. Is this meal merely a ritual? Is it a remembrance of a past event? What is the meaning of this meal, and, what is happening as we eat it?**

Throughout this series I will be relying heavily upon the teaching of my former theology professor, Gordon Smith; Gordon currently serves as the President of Ambrose University and Seminary. If you are interested in studying along with me, I commend to you Gordon's book, *A Holy Meal*. In it, he outlines the Bible's teaching on the Lord's Supper and presents seven different strands of meaning. Each week we will explore one strand of meaning by way of a representative word. This morning we're going to look at the Lord's Supper as **Remembrance**.

**2. Understanding Symbols:** But in order to explore the meaning of the Lord's Supper, we first need to first understand the way symbol and metaphor works.

When Jesus held out a piece of broken bread, saying, "*This is my body, broken for you,*" no one responded saying, "*That's not your body, that's a piece of bread.*" In the same way, when Jesus held out a cup of wine saying, "*This is my blood shed for you,*" no one responded, "*No it isn't...that's wine Jesus...I just saw you pour it out of that jar.*" They understood that Jesus was speaking metaphorically, the bread and the wine are symbols that point to a deeper reality.

Gordon suggests that one of the most helpful ways to understand symbols is to contrast them with a sign, and a photograph.

**(a) Signs** are important; we see them around us everyday—without them, many of us would be lost. Imagine trying to navigate through Vancouver without street signs or stop lights. Gordon writes, "Green means 'go,' we say. What we actually means is that a green light indicates that one can proceed safely. Green does not mean 'go' any more than red means 'stop.'... The link between the sign and that which is signified is arbitrary."<sup>7</sup> It only works because we've decided in advance that when it comes to a street light, green will mean "go."

**(b) Photograph:** But when you look at a photograph, the connection between the picture and the thing signified is not arbitrary. In fact the link between the two is so close that I could show you a picture of my kids or my wife and say, "*These are my kids; this is my wife.*"<sup>8</sup> Language allows us to make this close connection and no one confuses my family with glossy, two dimensional, characters.

**(c) Symbol:** Gordon writes, "Like signs, symbols point to another reality, but their meaning is more intangible and significant. They are not as clear and unambiguous as 'greens means go.' Like photographs, symbols represent something, but in contrast to an image on paper, they do not necessarily resemble what they communicate. A symbol is an external, visible, and tangible object or action that represents an internal, intangible reality."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, 22.

Anyone who minimizes a symbol, saying, “*it’s just a symbol,*” doesn’t know what they’re talking about. In one sense, the ring I wear on the fourth finger of my left hand is “just a symbol” and yet it speaks to an important and powerful reality in which I participate, namely, the reality of marriage. Anyone who sees this ring on my finger knows that I am spoken for, that I’m meant to be a one-woman-man—it communicates that the deep truth that I belong to my wife.

If a flag was “just a symbol,” no one would bat an eye if we burned it, spat on it, or used it for a common dish rag. Instead, most people are outraged when their nation’s flag is dishonoured. Why? Because in one sense, it is more than a piece of cloth, it is a symbol of the nation itself. To dishonour the flag is to dishonour the nation it represents.

The bread and the cup, while symbols, are never *just* symbols; they point to a spiritual reality, and they are a means through which we participate in the ongoing reality of God’s presence and action. And so we come back to the question I asked earlier: *what is the meaning of these symbols—this Holy Meal—and, what is happening as we eat it?*

**3. Remembrance:** Now that I’ve laid the groundwork for our series, let’s press on to the first meaning of the meal, marked by the word “remembrance.”

The key text for this particular word can be found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The Apostle Paul writes, “*23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it*

*and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”*

If you have grown up in an evangelical church, be it Mennonite, Baptist, or Alliance, it’s quite likely the theme of remembrance is the primary—if not singular—meaning that you attach to the Lord’s Supper. I grew up going to an Alliance Church and quickly understood this holy meal to be a memorial meal.

We celebrated the Lord’s Supper once a month, the bread was diced into individual pieces, grape juice was poured into small, thimble sized plastic cups, and these elements were stacked high in shiny metal containers. I grew up in a blue-collar church and while people dressed nicely, suit and ties were out of place. But on those Sundays we celebrated the Lord’s Supper, the elders who served the bread and cup always wore a suit and tie, just like one might wear to a memorial service.

And while we referred to our eating of this meal as a “celebration,” no one walking in off the street would have confused what we were doing with a celebration. We were quiet, reflective, and sombre. We were invited to remember Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we were reminded that it was our sin—the sin of the world—that put Jesus there. *So what does it mean to eat this meal, in remembrance of Jesus?*

The ability to remember—to recall an event from the past—can be a wonderful thing. To cherish a memory from the past, can warm the heart in the present. Of course, if we spend too much time cherishing past memories, we tend to live in the past...we find ourselves wishing we were somewhere else, or that we could be who we once were.

I have known people who have a nearly photographic memory in one specific regard, namely, the ability to recall every wrong, criticism, or injury done to them. They remember with such clarity because they rehearse these wounds over the years. Their acts of remembrance have chained them to the past, and crippled them in the present.

I am not advocating the denial of hurt or pain, but surely we recall past hurt in order to get it out into the open, so that we can be healed. Smith writes, “We choose what from the past is worth remembering and must be remembered to enable us to live in faith, hope, and love.”<sup>10</sup>

There is nothing so central to Christian faith and practice as the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every time we eat this meal, we remember Him.

*Who is Jesus?* God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, took on flesh and blood and was born as baby. John 1:14, 18 tells us that God the Son “*became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God, but the*

*one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” In Jesus we meet both God and Man.*

In His death, Jesus took the sin of the world, the brokenness of the world, the sickness of the world, and He bore it on the cross. His death was substitutionary in the sense that He died for us, instead of us—He bore the penalty for sin (death). Charles Wesley, in remembering this great act, once wrote, “*Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me!*”

“*To reconcile*” literally means “*to exchange, to bring into a changed relationship.*” The cross addresses the broken relationship between God and humanity—God has acted in Jesus Christ to reconcile humanity, and the rest of the cosmos, to Himself.

The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus has changed everything. Each time we eat this meal **we look to the past** and remember what He has done for us, and we remember who we now are as a result: loved; forgiven; rescued; we are named sons and daughters of God. Each time we eat this meal **we look ahead** to the time when He returns for us, and to the heavenly banquet that is being prepared. One day, we will sit down to eat with Him and the pain of today, the losses we have experienced, the grief, the hardship, will all be healed.

This meal prompts us to look to the past—to what Christ has done—and to the future—to what Christ will do—but *what does this meal*

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, 38.

*say to us in the present? Is this meal a memorial only? What is happening as we eat it in the present?*

**illus:** Yesterday morning we held a memorial service in our church for Gareth Morgan, a dear friend, and long time member of this church. In the picture behind me, you can see Gareth (beside me) and our entire staff team. When Gareth was a pilot for Harbour Air, he surprised the staff team with a gift and flew all of us to Chatterbox Falls—that day was filled with fun, adventure, and beauty.

We gathered yesterday to remember Gareth's life; stories and tributes were offered that described the kind of man he was, and spoke about his love for the Lord Jesus. But we gathered to remember Gareth precisely because he is no longer present among us. One day we will see him again, but if Gareth had walked down this centre aisle yesterday, the entire memorial service would have been in an uproar.

There is a clear difference between eating this meal in remembrance of Jesus, and, the remembering that takes place at a memorial service. When we gathering around this table we're not talking about a past event that has no bearing on the present. Nor are we remembering what Jesus did, behind His back so to speak. For Jesus is not absent, He's present. We come to this meal longing, and *expecting*, to meet with the One we remember.

Gordon writes, "Christ is our host at this meal. He is present, and by his Spirit he enables us to live in the grace of God... We are not, then, reliving or reenacting a past event... We are, rather, allowing a past event to shape and inform the present."<sup>11</sup>

In the preaching of the Word and the celebration of this holy meal, we remember Christ, proclaim Christ, and come to meet with the Living Christ.

**Conclusion:** I began this morning's sermon with an exercise; I invited you to call to mind a meal that was memorable. In just a moment we are going to partake in this holy meal, but before we do, I want you to remember the One that we celebrate in this meal is present among us by the Holy Spirit. This is His meal, He is our Host, He is here to meet with us.

I want you to think of this meal in terms of having received a dinner invitation from Jesus. If you can imagine sitting down beside Jesus at a dinner table, what would you want to say to Him? Which needs would you lay before Him? What would you want to thank Him for?

And what might He want to say to you? To give to you?

Perhaps you are well accustomed to coming to this table and remembering what Jesus did; this morning, as you remember the cross, remember also the empty tomb. Jesus is present among us by the Spirit and it's His desire to meet with you.

At this time I want to invite the worship team to come and join me on stage, and as they do, allow me to offer a few, brief instructions.

In just a few moments the band is going to play instrumentally, and I'd like to invite each of you to remain seated. Take the next few

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, 39-40.

minutes as an opportunity to remember what Jesus has done for you, for the world.

Because Jesus is present among us, by the Holy Spirit, this act of reflection is more than an intellectual exercise; open your heart to Him. *What do you want to say to Him? What do you want to thank Him for? And what might He want to say to you? To give to you?*

After a few minutes of instrumental music, Paul and the team will begin to sing, at that time those who are serving will come forward and take their place. We will have three serving stations up front, and one/two in the balcony. I'm going to invite people to come forward, row by row, beginning with the back row. As each row is served, the next row can come forward to receive.

As you wait for your turn to come forward, feel free to reflect on Jesus, or to listen for what Jesus might say to you. You can also feel free to sing, or, to receive prayer from one of our prayer ministry teams located at the back of the sanctuary or in the balcony.

As you come forward to receive, the servers will invite you to tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and then eat with thanksgiving.

At this time, I'm going to turn things over to Pastor Paul, and invite you to take the next few moments to reflect on, and listen to, Jesus.

## **Worship**

## **Benediction**