

November 7, 2010
Bethany UMC
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Sermon: Coming to Remember
Scripture Lesson: I Corinthians 11:23-26

One of the greatest gifts of God, and one of the dearest joys in life, is the capacity to remember. Memories constitute some of our most prized moments: memories of loved ones no longer with us; memories of family vacations and other fun times shared together; memories of special days like the birth of a child, a wedding, a graduation, and so on. We thank God for the ability to remember.

Today we come to this place to remember. First, we come, as we do the first Sunday of each month to remember the self-giving love of Christ as we share in the memorial meal we call Holy Communion. I am sure that many of you have noticed that almost all communion tables have an inscription across the front, saying, "In Remembrance of Me." These are, of course, the words of Jesus spoken on the night of his arrest as he shared the Last Supper with his disciples. As he broke the bread and passed the cup, he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." So, we come to remember.

But on this day, the day we call All Saints Sunday, we also come to remember our loved ones, friends and family, who have gone on before us to their eternal reward. The relationship between these two celebrations is significant. We call them celebrations even though both Holy Communion and All Saints have a somber aspect in that both are designed to remember of life and death of those we love. Death is a sad fact of life but as Christians we believe that it is not the last word. So today we come to the table to remember the life and death and resurrection of Jesus; and because of his resurrection we also come to celebrate the saints who have gone on before us.



Let us consider just a few of the ways we celebrate Communion and then let me suggest that in each case it is also an appropriate way to celebrate All Saints Sunday.

We come to remember with joy. Coming to the Lord's Table is a joyous occasion. This is why we often announce a Sunday in advance that the next Sunday we will celebrate Holy Communion. The Lord's Day was a day of celebration for the early Christians. On every Sunday, they would come together to rejoice in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The disciples of Jesus soon adopted the day as a day of worship and celebration. That is why we worship on Sundays, the first day of the week.

When they came together on Sunday, or the Lord's Day, they would read and expound on the Old Testament scriptures that they believed spoke of Jesus. They would also have a meal together, and then conclude by sharing the bread and the cup as they recited the words of Jesus in the upper room.

We do much the same thing almost every time we conduct a funeral here at Bethany. With the wonderful ministry of our Caring Team and Bereavement Committee we gather here to sing

songs, read the scriptures and celebrate the life and witness of the deceased. When the funeral service is concluded we gather in fellowship hall to share memories, and encourage one another for the journey ahead

We also come to remember with thanksgiving. In fact, some churches refer to Holy Communion as the Eucharist, a word that means thanksgiving. As we gather around this table we give thanks for the life that Jesus lived and for the great teaching that he left us. We give thanks that in Jesus we see the purest manifestation of God the world has ever known. We give thanks for the sacrificial death of Jesus and the fact that he died for what he believed in and for the principles he held dear. In the death of Jesus we hear the Word that God forgives our sins, in Jesus' uttering while on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But above all, as we gather around this table, we give thanks that Jesus did not stay dead. Death could not hold him. On the third day, the Lord's Day, he rose again. And his presence is with us always, even to the end of the world. Therefore, many believe in what is called the "spiritual presence of Christ" at the Lord's Table. As Christians we believe that God is present everywhere. And we are just as certain that in every place where Communion is truly observed Christ keeps his promise and is spiritually present.

Likewise in our remembrance of the saints we come with thanksgiving. Not long ago, we conducted our annual Charge Conference. One of the reports we submit to the Bishop and Superintendent is a list of "Pastoral Acts" including the funerals we have conducted in the previous year. As I looked at the list for 2010 I found myself offering a brief prayer of thanksgiving for the legacy of the persons listed there and whose name we shall read in just a little while. Their gifts to us, as family, friends, congregation and community are innumerable.

We come to remember with dedication. Further down in the chapter from which we read, the apostle speaks of the need for self-examination. The Lord's Supper calls us to examine our lives and correct any waywardness or shortcomings. We are called to confess our sins, to seek and embrace God's forgiveness. Coming to the Lord's Table should serve as a new beginning for us as we are pardoned. We are not to eat the bread and cup nonchalantly or carelessly.

In the same way our remembrance of the saints should serve as a time of rededication. We remember the lessons they taught us, the values they demonstrated and the faith they witnessed and we are encouraged to redouble our efforts to honor their legacy by living in the fullness of God's image and the prayers of the saints.



So, as we depart from the Table, we also depart with a commission to share the good news of what God has done in Christ in the world. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Through our words, deeds, and lives we become living testimonies to the world of our faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ and the witness of the saints down through the centuries. The Lord's Supper calls us to rededicate our lives anew to Christian discipleship and service in the world.

I invite you to the table of Remembrance.