

**Main Attraction: As Often as You Do This**

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

<sup>24</sup> 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."

<sup>25</sup> 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."

<sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>27</sup> Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

<sup>28</sup> A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

<sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

There is a story told of a little church that had an unusual ritual every Sunday morning. When they sang the Gloria Patri they stood, turned to the right facing a blank white wall and sang. Every Sunday without fail they did this. A newcomer to the church was puzzled by this and asked, "Why do you do this?" No one knew. The only answer they could come up with was, "we've always done it this way." That answer did not satisfy the newcomer.

Other people were asked the same question. Finally an elderly man who had gone to church longer than anyone else remembered the reason. It seems that at one time they didn't have hymnals and the words to this song were painted on the large white wall. Everyone stood, turned to the right facing the wall and sang. Over the years the words faded and the wall was repainted numerous times yet no one remembered the significance for standing and turning toward the wall.

As we celebrate 120 years of existence as a congregation, I have to wonder if certain aspects of our congregational life have entered the same mode of automation without us fully comprehending and understanding the significance.

I have a sense that we highly value the Lord's Supper. Each month we serve communion to the congregation in a very precise ritual. We do it a certain way and sometimes when we vary from that particular way, it feels like we did something wrong. When members become aged and unable to participate in worship, our deacons have been trained to take communion to them in their own home or the nursing home.

I thought that on this 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we would examine this common thread that has come down to us since the founding of this church – and really, since the establishment of the New Testament Church. It dates to a single moment when Jesus was with his disciples in the upper room and he served them their Passover meal. He referred to himself as the bread and the wine. He used this imagery to illustrate his own demise and his own eternal significance.

The early church celebrated the Lord's supper when they came together. In some of the earliest writings known as the *Didache* (teachings), written around 100 A.D., it gives this instruction: **“Assemble in common on the Lord's own day to break bread and offer thanks; but first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.”**

Jesus said, **“As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me.”** As OFTEN. This has been interpreted by some as *every* time we come together. Typically as Baptists, we celebrate the Lord's supper monthly. Some other denominations celebrate it every Sunday. There is absolutely nothing biblical to suggest that any of these traditions are the correct way to do it.

What does the Lord's supper mean to us today as we look back over 120 years of tradition for this congregation? Inscribed on this communion set are words that give poignancy to the importance of the Lord's Supper in the historical context of this church. It reads, “Presented, East Lincoln Baptist Church. B. Frank Rush. Jan. 1, 1909.” This inscription gives historical depth to the significance of this ritual in this congregation.

Just what is the significance of communion for us in the 21st century? In the upper room experience, Jesus illustrated his death with that which the disciples were already familiar: The Passover. It was the means of forgiveness and atonement under the Old Covenant, but Jesus' death on the cross seals a New Covenant between God and people. The Old Covenant involved forgiveness of sins through the blood of animal sacrifices. In the New Covenant or agreement between God and man, Jesus, Himself, would become the Lamb of God and die on the cross in place of sinners. His blood would be effective in removing the sins of all who placed their faith and trust in Him because He is God. Jesus sacrifice would not have to be repeated over and over again. It would be good for all eternity.

We find these words in the Old Testament from the prophet Jeremiah. **“The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt”** (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

Jesus retained the emblems of the bread and the wine by giving them a brand new meaning. He said **“this represents my body which was given for you.”** He took the cup and said, **“this cup is the New Covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.”**

What is the significance for Me?: Jesus is saying **“every time you take the bread and the cup I want it to remind you of me and of what I did for you.”** Typically we don't stop to think about

our atonement and salvation. A celebration like a church's anniversary has specific purposes in mind. First, a celebration is for the purpose of celebrating a *MILESTONE*. For example, we can take courage in knowing that others forged a path to bring us to the point where we are today.

We have something to celebrate as we recall those who sacrificed for the gospel of Christ to reach the hearts of people over the past 120 years. Jesus too, was celebrating a milestone in the history of the world. That milestone was the cross. The cross transitioned from the old covenant to the new. Up until that time, atonement required a blood sacrifice of an animal. Yet Jesus became the lamb and his sacrifice was made complete by his death on the cross. This was a milestone moment for the whole world as the price of redemption was paid.

Keep in mind that the Catholic church calls communion "THE EUCHARIST." The word means THANKSGIVING. I love that. When you consider that Christ's death on the cross brought our redemption, our response should be one of thanksgiving. If we are not thankful for the gift of salvation, then I'm not sure what else could be worth of our thankfulness. If you've never been one to reflect during the Lord's supper, let me challenge you this morning to simply sit and give thanks. Reflect on what Christ did for you.

We celebrate a special occasion *TO REMEMBER*. The communion table is inscribed with the words, "This do in remembrance of me." (Lk 22:19) A memorial service is most often for someone who has passed away. They are gone from us but all we have left is our memories of this person. That is NOT the case with the Lord's supper. Christ is present at this table and his spirit is alive within us. What we are remembering is not his life, but his death. We are remembering his act of atonement on our behalf. We are remembering that the very purpose for the existence of this church is because Jesus died and rose again so that we can be saved.

When this table loses its significance and we begin operating merely as an organization to perpetuate our heritage. When we exist for the purpose of showing up occasionally to hear a good word of encouragement – then we have lost our way.

Since the beginning of the Christian church at Pentecost until this very moment, the CROSS, the EMPTY TOMB, and the TABLE have been the focal point of the church. Let's never forget its powerful meaning. Finally, this table has another meaning that is significant to the life of the church.

Finally, a celebration is a place to gather. The Lord's table is a GATHERING PLACE for the body. This table signifies our existence as the body of Christ. Family life experts have written articles and chapters in book about the importance and the demise of the family table. These experts have drawn conclusions that in the past couple of decades, families eat together less and less.

Fathers come in late from work, children rush off to practice with a sandwich in hand. Families have begun eating in front of the television. Experts have said that this directly effects the life and function of the family. Families are encouraged to begin the old custom of eating meals together. The result is community (being together as a family and experiencing laughter and relationship), communication (hearing each other's joys and sorrows, knowing what is going on in the lives of other family members.)

The same is true in the church. This table is the gathering point of the body of Christ. Families have exited the church (every church) like no other time in the history of this country. Families and individuals are pulled away from worship by misplaced priorities and disinterest. The result is that families have become weak and shallow in their faith and struggle to find meaning and contentment in life.

They are like a ship that is set adrift to weather the storms of life. They have no anchor, no harbor, no peace. This table signifies that you've arrived home. There is an element of safety here. You are among brothers and sisters at the family table. You will be blessed and honored. You will find forgiveness and a sense of belonging and community.

That is the meaning of the Lord's supper. That is why it is so vital for the church. It is a *milestone* as Christ became the atoning sacrifice for the world. Communion is a time of *remembrance* of what Jesus did and that he is alive and within us as we face the storms of life. The table is a *gathering place* for his body where we become the family of God. It is a place in which to return when we lose our way and wander off into the world. It is rich with meaning as it point to our own salvation by Christ's body and blood. Amen.