

“A Time for All People”

Matthew 26:17-29

This past month as I was searching for inspiration for sermons in the months of January and February, I admit, I really didn't get very far. With the focus being on the Advent and Christmas season it can be hard to look past probably the most celebrated time of year. What do we do after all of the decorations have come down, after all the presents have been opened, and after all the food has been consumed? Well, with the food I know it goes to my midsection, but the rest just kind of fades into memory.

So in this journey of searching out a sermon series, I decided to take a walk around the building to allow my mind to think about various things. Through my walking I found myself standing here in the sanctuary looking around. Finally I started to look around at the windows and it hit me. Windows! There is a story in the windows and it was right there in front of me.

Growing up in my home church of Coffeyville, Coffeyville First was known for its stained glass windows. I remember the images of Jesus walking into Jerusalem, Jesus rising out of the grave, the window with all of the pastors of the church and a host of other images. The church building was quite large, so there was one side of the building where the windows were over two stories in length. It is something that I took for granted growing up, but those windows stand out in my mind from an early age.

So therefore growing up with these windows, I then take notice of windows and the stories portrayed in them. Here at Faith Church, the windows represent elements of the Christian faith that we interact with. Starting with the communion window off to the side, we see the probably one of the most important elements to our faith. In the coming weeks will take a look at

all of the windows and see how they play a role in our faith community, both here and in the greater Christian community.

So this leads us to the thought that we are working with symbolism. So what do windows represent for us? Looking at all things academic on Wikipedia, it defined windows as “A transparent opening in a wall or door that allows the passage of light and if not closed or sealed, air and sound. Windows are usually glazed or covered in some other transparent or translucent material like a float glass. Windows are held in place by frame, which prevent them from collapsing in. Many glazed windows may be opened, to allow ventilation, or closed, to exclude inclement weather.”

So that’s the Wikipedia definition of window. I must say that it is pretty clear on what a window does and what a window is. It defines a category of objects that we can collectively look at and call a “window.” However this definition does not include other things, like Microsoft Windows. How does a computer program fit into that definition? It definitely stretches it, but do we still have a window to work with?

One important element that this consideration of what a window does is missing from all of this discussion. That is the ability for the window to inspire us. The windows here at the church are to inspire us in our faith and represent the things that we hold dear. I think as a community of faith it is important that we have symbols that we can experience and use as inspiration in our faith.

So here we come to the first window that we will take a look at, the window of communion. The window here has the picture of bread and a cup, the two elements that are present at the service of communion. But where do we get these pictures? What part of our faith comes from this act of communion? Why do we hold it so dear to us?

Communion is an important part to the life of the church yet throughout Christianity there is no one way to interpret or even perform this act of Christ. Some churches, like the Methodist Church along with the Orthodox, Catholics, Episcopalians and others feel that this act is a sacrament, or a way that we receive grace from God. Some other churches such as the Baptists, Mennonites, and other more evangelical churches feel that it is an ordinance, or an act of remembrance. This is just an example of how diverse this moment of Christ can be understood in the church.

The act of communion comes to us first from the scriptures. Straight up looking at the scriptures we see that Christ introduced an element to the Passover meal that was distinct from the rest of it. Matthew tells us that during the Passover that Christ offered up bread and a cup of wine to the disciples with some key words that have had a profound impact from the moment they were spoken to us. Christ states that the bread stands for his broken body offered to us and the wine represents his blood of the new covenant that is between God and the people. These words and acts recorded in scripture are a pillar of our faith.

Yet considering all of this, there are some basic questions that remain. Why bread? Why wine? How does Christ use these elements in our faith? These are real questions that are important to us this very day as Christians in the 21st century.

At the basic elements present at communion, bread is the first element that is received and is typically the first thing mentioned when discussing communion. Bread has had a significant presence in the faith of the Israelites since the beginning of our faith history. The various forms of bread have changed, from what know of as bread with yeast, to the famous unleavened bread, bread which has not been given the opportunity to rise at all.

In our society today, bread is considered a staple. It's a basic part of our diet that we often don't think much of. The bread that I buy every week at Safeway costs me approximately between \$1.99 and \$2.99 a loaf. There is very little fanfare in selecting that loaf of bread either. It hasn't always been this way though. I know that many of you are accomplished bakers and can make artisan bread that is above and beyond what I consume for my grilled cheese. Great care can be taken in the creation of great bread and the results are often that excellent.

Today I chose a scripture in Kings that discusses many elements that are present in the temple. If you remember all that was stated, they are primarily elements that are made of gold, silver, or other hard materials. They are objects that a craftsman, Hiram, produced so that they temple would be filled with objects that were worthy of the beauty of the Lord. These objects were held in high esteem by those who would have entered the temple and saw all of the adornments present.

In the midst of all of those objects mentioned, amidst all of the seemingly random objects placed in the scriptures, there is one "soft" object present in the passage. That is the Bread of Presence. The Bread of Presence would have been there to remind the people of the Passover, of the Exodus, and all of the other events that would have occurred in Israelite history. The Bread of Presence would have been a symbol of the great stories that would have been passed along from generation to generation. Some have even argued that the Bread of Presence is the beginning of the symbolism of Christ and the work that he would do on this earth.

It is no surprise then that an element that is held in such high regard by the Israelite people would find its way into our current practice. Bread is indeed a symbol of God that can be present. Christ's body is represented in Bread. The body of Christ the most holy person to walk on earth is symbolized by this most basic of dietary foods.

But we know that we cannot only have the bread at communion. Present at communion is another element and that is the wine. In our current practice as Methodists, the wine is symbolized by the unfermented juice of the grape. Still, the symbolism of wine is just as rich as that of bread. It's the part of the communion that provides drink to the service. It is the component that completes this holy meal.

Wine is a drink that has been consumed for centuries by people throughout the Ancient Near Eastern world. Wine production dates back far into antiquity. It was a common part of life in the ancient world. It would have been a common part of any meal at the time. It is often understood that wine was used in place of water at many meals, because the quality of water could not always be guaranteed. It could be thought that this beverage would be as common to us today as soda or iced tea.

Wine itself has a symbolism that would have played a part in the world that Jesus would have lived in. Greek religion which had an impact on the land used wine in many ceremonies. Wine was consumed as a drink of the gods. Greek mythology had many instances when gods would use wine as a part of their lore and stories. So it was a drink that was already shown to be a part of the divine aspect of life.

In the Roman Empire, wine was considered an imperial drink. If you look at the boundaries of the Roman empire it was predominantly in a wine producing region of Europe and the Mediterranean world. Wine was considered to be a drink of the elite or a drink of celebration. Other drinks were considered to be barbarian or inferior to wine. It was a symbol of the oppression that the people of Judea lived in. The Romans had wine, and the Romans ruled the people mercilessly.

Jesus had several interactions with wine throughout his ministry, notably changing water into wine in one of the parables that we find in the gospels. I find it highly interesting and inspiring that Christ took this drink, wine, with all of its historical and cultural assumptions and all the pagan and imperial thoughts imposed upon it, he took it and stated that it was his blood. It was the mark of the new and everlasting covenant between God and the people. It was the symbol of everlasting life and a future where there would be no more hardship, no more imperial powers, and a life complete. By Christ taking this symbol of a new life, we see Christ do what he was best at and best known for-taking the world that we know and showing us the true way to life and a better future for all people. It represents a better time for all people, a time better than the present that people live in.

Some of what I have spoken of may be quite intellectual and a bit heady for a sermon. I believe though that in all of us, it is important for us to recognize the rich history that we have in this act of communion. All of the elements present, all of the words spoken in the Gospel, are there to show us the way to Eternal Life. They are there to show us the Grace that we can receive through Christ and the new life that he promises.

This is just the beginning though. Communion is not a final act of the church. It's the beginning of a new life for all of us. Today as we celebrate communion, take note of the elements and the ritual and imagine the wonder and glory that awaits through the act of receiving the Bread and Wine of Life. Amen.