

Communing with Christ: Feeding on Him

Luke 22:1-23

Halifax: 7 March 2004

Introduction

Today we take up the third message in our first-Sunday-of-the-month series on Communion.

1. We began this series in January with a message entitled:
 - “Communion with Christ, His Earnest Desire.”
 - At that time,
 - I spoke to you about the strong desire our Saviour has to meet with us at His table and to feed us with Himself.
 - His great love is seen in that on the very night He was betrayed,
 - He gave thanks for His body that was about to be broken and His blood that was about to be shed.
 - And now that He has offered that sacrifice,
 - He calls us to assemble each Lord’s Day...
 - In that assembly,
 - He proclaims the good news that God has accepted His sacrifice for our sins and is satisfied...
 - He calls us to give thanks and sing praise,
 - He calls us feed upon His sacrifice in remembrance of Him.
 - What comfort it is to see Him, with fervent desires for us!
 - He longs to meet with us and to bless us.
 - Let us come and meet His desire with our own desire to commune with Him.
2. Then in February, we moved into Part 2 of the series entitled:
 - “Communing with Christ, A fulfilment of the Passover.”
 - In that message, I showed you that Jesus is our Passover.
 - At the communion table we feed upon Him between two great events:
 - We look back at the cross when He crucified and offered up as a sacrifice for us...
 - We look ahead to judgement,

- when God will visit the world in His holy wrath and judgement...
- but will pass over all those who are trusting in the Lamb that was sacrificed for us.

3. Today, we come to Part 3 of this series:

- “Communion with Christ, Feeding on Him.”
- In this sermon I want to concentrate in particular on the actions and words of Jesus in Luke 22:19:
 - And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

TRANS> I am sad to say that this verse

- (and those that are similar to it in the other gospels and in I Corinthians 11)
- have become the source of great controversy, confusion, and even serious error in the Church.
- And so, for this reason, I want to begin with the question:

I. **What does Jesus mean when He takes bread and says, “This is My body?”**

A. There are a few things that need to be clear in your mind from the start:

1. First of all, understand the context of these words.
 - Christ is **instituting** the Lord’s Supper for His church here.
 - “Do this in remembrance of Me” is a present imperative. The meaning could be emphasised by translating it:
 - “Continue doing this in remembrance of Me.”
 - Jesus is giving His church a sacrament to be continued in the church after He has gone away into heaven to be with the Father.
 - That is why we continue this now.
2. Secondly, understand that He is not instituting a new covenant **sacrifice** for the church, but a **sacrament**.
 - He is not commanding us to offer a sacrifice to God,
 - but rather to commune in the sacrifice that He was about to offer when He spoke these words,
 - and that for us was offered two-thousand years ago.

- This is like the peace offering in the Old Testament in which there were two events...
 - First, the offering of the sacrifice by the priest...
 - Then the feeding upon the sacrifice by the worshippers (the communion meal).
- The Church's communion in Christ's sacrifice from week to week is an ongoing feast in the one sacrifice that was offered by our Priest 2000 years ago.
 - We have communion in this same sacrifice every time we come to the table.
 - As Paul said,
 - "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."
 - We do not crucify Him again,
 - but we **proclaim** His death on the cross.
 - So it is not the **offering** of the sacrifice,
 - but the **rejoicing** in the sacrifice that has already been offered.
- 3. Thirdly, observe here that this sacrament (like all sacraments) has two parts.
 - These two parts are contained in the phrase:
 - **"This is My body."**
 - In these words we have **"this"** which was the bread that Jesus was holding in His hand...
 - And we have **"My body"** which is the thing signified by the bread.
 - So there is the sign (the bread) and the thing signified (Jesus' body).
 - These are the two parts.

TRANS> It is right here, at this point, that there is so much confusion in the church.

B. Confusion arises about the relationship between the sign and the thing signified.

1. The Roman Catholic Church erroneously teaches that there is no difference between the sign and the thing signified.
 - a. Instead of the bread being a **sign** representing Christ's body,
 - they teach that the bread actually turns into the body of Christ...
 - This is called the doctrine of transubstantiation.

- b. However, because even a child can see that the bread on the communion tray does not turn into human flesh,
 - and because the communicants can perceive that it still tastes like bread and has the texture of bread,
 - they run to Aristotle for rescue and argue that the essential nature of the bread is what changes, the accidents (or outward characteristics) of the bread remain unchanged.
 - The absurd result is that we have something that looks like bread and feels like bread and tastes like bread,
 - but in **essence** is really not bread.
 - It is claimed that there is no other way to understand the words:
 - “This is my body.”
- c. But there is no warrant for insisting that the words “this is my body” must mean that the bread really changes into something else.
 - The Jews often spoke this way.
 - In the Passover service they say,
 - “this is ‘the bread of affliction’, which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.”
 - They did not mean they thought it was the same bread, but that it resembled and represented that bread.
 - Even children understand this kind of language...
 - Children, if I hold up a picture and say,
 - “This is me,”
 - would any of you think I had suddenly turned into a shiny piece of paper with an image on it?
 - No, you would know that the picture was only a picture of me.
 - It represents me the same way the bread was appointed to represent Jesus’ body.
- d. The doctrine of Transubstantiation has led to the grave error of idolatry!
 - Because the bread and wine are believed to turn into Jesus,
 - the bread and wine on the table are worshipped...
 - the bread and wine are instead of the Lord Jesus who is reigning in Heaven.

- The very elements that were given to direct our attention and our faith to Him end up directing the worshippers to themselves.
 - This is like someone who goes to McDonalds and sees one of those pictures of a nice juicy hamburger and can't take his eyes off the picture to enjoy the real thing.
 - The sign has failed to accomplish its purpose as a sign and has itself become the object of affection.

TRANS> Transubstantiation is a serious error, and we ought not to receive the mass in the Roman Church...

- It is idolatrous.
 - But neither should we run to the other extreme...
2. The second error concerning the relationship of the sign and the thing signified is an overreaction to transubstantiation.
- a. This reactionary view is sometimes called **symbolic memorialism**.
 - In transubstantiation,
 - there is **no difference** between the bread and body.
 - In memorialism,
 - there is **no real connection** between eating the bread and eating Christ's body.
 - b. In other words, when you eat the bread,
 - there is no corresponding reality in which the body of Christ is received...
 - There is no real feeding upon Him, only a remembrance of Him.
 - From this perspective, there is no real difference between hearing the Word preached and receiving communion...
 - And no corresponding difference between believing and eating.
 - There is a memorial stating that Jesus gave Himself for us...
 - But there is no communion with the body and blood of Christ outside the mind.
 - There is no recognition that He actually nourishes us when we come to the table.
 - c. This view has become very common today among evangelicals, but has, I believe, impoverished the church....

- either it has impoverished the church or shows that the church is impoverished.
- By denying that Christ gives His flesh to us to eat,
 - There has been a tendency to try to connect with Him in other ways.
- And these other ways are often more of a hindrance to discipleship than a help.
 - They are all around us today!
 - Christians want to be connected to Christ,
 - but rather than looking to Him to nourish our souls at His table,
 - They try to connect in other ways...
 - through singing repetitive songs with tantalising music...
 - or through looking for signs from God about which kind of car to buy...
 - or by hearing a voice from heaven.
 - The result is a focus on the Spirit and on a warm feeling of ecstasy rather than on feeding upon Christ as He is revealed in the word.

C. The Bible teaches that there is indeed a real communion in the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

1. When Jesus offers us the bread and the wine on the communion table,
 - it is not an empty sign, but a sign that points to something real.
 - a sign that points to what Christ actually does.
 - He really and truly gives His body to us to nourish us, which corresponds to the sign of eating bread.
 - He truly gives us His flesh to eat to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.
 - The Westminster Confession summarises this doctrine saying,
 - "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in the ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses."

- I don't know if quoting all that is helpful, but in essence it is saying that when you come to the Lord's table and eat the bread,
 - you truly do feed upon Christ's body.

1. This is brought out in the Bible in 1 Cor 10:16 where Paul says:

- 1 Cor 10:16: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?
- **Communion** means “fellowship” or “sharing together.”
 - The same word is used of those who have a common money pot—they all have a share in it.
 - Each can draw out of it as he has needs.
 - We have such communion in Christ—
 - All who believe are able to feed upon His flesh and blood for eternal life.
 - We have a share in His body that has been sacrificed for us.
- Paul further explains in verse 17, saying:
 - 1 Cor 10:17: For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread.
 - There is one bread (Christ) for all the communicants.
 - He is the one we all partake of in the Lord's Supper when we eat the bread and drink the wine.
- In verse 18, Paul illustrates that when the priests and the people ate a portion of the sacrifices they offered,
 - they had a share in the altar in the same way that we have a share in Christ:
 - 1 Cor. 10:18: Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?
 - In other words, the worshippers got a portion of what was offered to God on the altar.
 - In this they showed their close connection to the sacrifice and their participation or fellowship with it.

2. Jesus gives us this sign to help us.

- a. You cannot see Him nourishing you up in eternal life...

- Indeed, over time, you can see the changes in your life,
 - but you can't see Him actually nourishing you.
- b. He could have just promised to nourish us,
 - but knowing our weakness,
 - He gave us a sign to **show** us that He nourishes us.
 - Eating the bread helps us to look to Him in faith to feed us...
 - so that after hearing a sermon, we won't think:
 - "I guess I will just have to try harder."
 - or "What's the use? I can never be what God wants me to be."
 - The Supper points hungry souls to Christ to be nourished when the might be tempted to look only to themselves.
- c. We use signs all the time to point us to things we cannot actually see.
 - Even the juicy hamburger sign is for that purpose...
 - You can't see the real hamburger, but you can see the sign and the sign points you to the real thing.
 - That is what Jesus is doing when He says:
 - "This is my body, given for you."
 - He is showing us that He is there to nourish us.

I. And now I want you to consider that it is His human body that Christ gives us to eat.

- A. In John 6, Jesus declares that He is the bread of God that came down from heaven to give life to the world.
 - 1. He shows you that if you don't feed on Him, you will die.
 - In John 6:47, he begins by saying,
 - "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."
 - It all begins with believing on Him.
 - That is how we are first connected to Him to receive nourishment.
 - But then in the next verse (John 6:48) He goes on to say:

- 48 "I am the bread of life. 49 "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."
2. The important point here is that Jesus gives you life by feeding you with His human flesh.
- a. In Hebrews 10:5, the words of Psalm 40 are attributed to Jesus where it says,
 - "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, **but a body** you have prepared for me."
 - And then He says, "I have come to your will O God."
 - **Jesus came in a human body in order to do God's will in a human body...**
 - Not God's will for angels, but God's will for fallen sinful men...
 - all that God required of them to make them righteous after their fall into sin and rebellion.
 - b. Without Jesus who brings life to human flesh, all human flesh was dead.
 - By dead, I mean dead in our sins...
 - Dead as far as the purpose for which we were created.
 - We were unable to glorify our creator as His image bearers in the world.
 - Instead of being a good representation of Him, we became a misrepresentation of Him.
 - Because you were made in His image,
 - Your life is always talking about God...
 - But because you are fallen,
 - your life is always telling lies about God.
 - This is what it means to be dead in trespasses and sins.
 - We were unable to fill our proper place in the world as human beings...
 - The glory departed!
 - c. But when Jesus came and stepped into our flesh,
 - He brought life to human flesh.
 - Hebrews 1:2 says that

- He is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...
- This is what the Son of God was in our human flesh!
- He Himself is all that a human being ought to be.
 - He was the true man...
 - all others, apart from Him, are false.

B. At the table, Jesus teaches you to come to Him to be nourished in human life...

1. It is not some sort of ethereal life or otherworldly existence that He offers you.
 - a. We don't become some sort of demigods or something weird...
 - He doesn't transport us into some other state of existence as we sing Hallelujah with our eyes closed 30 times.
 - He doesn't drive us away from
 - working with our hands
 - or living in the state of marriage,
 - or eating and drinking...
 - b. He rather restores us to perfect manhood and womanhood.
 - He makes us into what He is in our flesh—
 - He restores us to the image of God.
 - He makes us partakers of His perfect humanity.
2. That means that when you look to Him to nourish you (as He promises He will),
 - You ought to look to Him to nourish you into your calling as a human being.
 - a. You ought to look to Him to make you a better husband or wife if you are married.
 - You know what I spoke to you about last week—
 - how we are not only forbidden to divorce,
 - but also to do anything that will separate what God has joined together...
 - Harsh words are to be replaced with kind and gracious words.
 - Adulterous thoughts must be replaced with thoughts toward your spouse alone.
 - Selfishness in the marriage bed must be replaced with giving...
 - Men who neglect to command their households in the Lord are to repent...

- Wives are to learn to respect their husbands.
- You see, it is not some sort of supra-spiritually that Jesus came to give you that raises you out of marriage...
 - He gives you His flesh.
 - He came to nourish you into the kind of marital life the pleases God and glorifies Him.
- b. And you children...
 - Do you find it hard to obey your parents?
 - Do you find yourself continually distracted when there is work to be done?
 - Are you disrespectful to your mother?
 - Do you find it difficult to speak kind and gracious words to your siblings?
 - Do you find it hard to submit cheerfully to decisions your parents make?
 - At the Lord's Table Jesus testifies to all His covenant people that He will feed you His own human flesh...
 - He is the one who gives you strength to live the way a child ought to live.
 - He feeds you with His own flesh.
- c. How many of you could use help in learning how to eat and drink to the glory of God?
 - Sometimes you "live to eat" as if that is all that life is about...
 - And sometimes only "eat to live" as if that is all eating is about.
 - By feeding you His flesh, Jesus offers you help with these very ordinary human activities.
 - He knew how to enjoy God's good gifts without abusing them.
 - He is able to nourish you so that you will learn to use the things of this world in ways that are more honouring to God!
 - Neither rejecting them all as evil,
 - nor worshipping them as your God.
 - Again, you see, it is **human** life that He nourishes us up in.

- d. Now perhaps you are struggling with things like worry or fear or bitterness.
 - These are human struggles...
 - Sometimes you can feel utterly helpless...
 - The worry just keeps creeping into your life...
 - The fear overcomes you...
 - Bitterness keeps cropping up toward another person...
 - Sometimes it seems like these things just overtake you and control you and that you can't shake them.
 - Well brothers and sisters, I have good news!
 - Jesus was subject to these temptations as a human being, but never gave in to them...
 - and He offers to feed you with His flesh!
 - He knows your weakness,
 - and that is why He pledges to us at the table that He will nourish us with His own human flesh.
 - John 6:35: "And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'"
 - He has mastered all these things, and He is ready to share His life with you if you will look to Him.
- e. I am sure you would like to be better worshipper as well...
 - One who is stirred to the core of your being for prayer...
 - One who beholds the glory and majesty of God in all its fullness...
 - One who trembles at God's word and rests comfortably in His promises.
 - One who is able to sing praise without your mind wondering all over the place.
 - Well I tell you, there is nourishment for you in Jesus' body!
 - His body is given for you!
 - He will feed you with His flesh!
 - "The hungry soul that looks to Him with food is satisfied."

C. It is easy to see how this sacrament corresponds to the preaching of the word.

1. When you hear a sermon and you see your need of Christ...
 - Then you come to the table to feed upon Him.
 - You look to him in faith to do what He promises to do through this sacrament.
 - To feed you with His perfect human flesh that was sacrificed for you.

2. I have pointed this out already...
 - The Lord's Table is given to help you to remember that Christ is dead for you and now lives for you
 - Don't go away from a sermon discouraged and downcast...
 - Go to Christ and feast upon Him!
 - He is everything you need for eternal life as a human being!

3. His Supper points you to Him and away from works righteousness.
 - In this you can see what a perversion it is for those who look at coming to the Lord's Supper as if **it** were a work of righteousness to be performed!
 - This Supper is rather a summons to look away from your own works and your own strength to Jesus!
 - He is the bread of God that came down from heaven to give life to the world.

TRANS> But perhaps you would say,

- Well I have been to the Lord's Table and quite frankly,
 - I can't tell that much difference before and after.
 - If Jesus is really nourishing us, why isn't there more of a change.

- Well, I could talk to you about how coming to the table in the wrong way can hinder you from receiving a blessing and all that...
 - It is right to examine yourselves before and after you come...
 - But today I want to encourage you to look for the kind of growth that Jesus promises.
 - You will be discouraged if you look for the wrong kind of growth...

II. At the Lord's table, Jesus teaches you to expect growth by nourishment.

- A. There are a lot of Christians that are always wanting to get zapped by spiritual lightening bolts.
 1. They want to go to some special conference or find the Spirit at a Holy Spirit weekend or learn some new secret of higher life.
 - But this is **not** the way God ordinarily works in our lives.

- And it is not the way He promises to work at the Lord's Table.
 - Sometimes there **are** very significant life-changing experiences,
 - but those who are continually looking for these usually have spiritual lives that look more like a roller coaster than something that is growing.
2. When Jesus teaches you that He gives you his flesh to **eat**,
- it points to a growth that is not at all like spiritual lightening bolts.
- a. He is telling you that you are to look for the kind of growth that an oak tree has.
- It starts out as little sapling...
 - And if you look at it from one day to the next, you can't see that much is really happening...
 - But when you look at that little sapling after thirty or forty years,
 - your are amazed!
 - When I go to visit my mother,
 - I see trees in her yard that are taller than her two-story house, and they are the same trees I used to jump over when I was a boy!
 - A significant change has taken place!
 - Now I can guarantee you that my Mom did not look out the window one day and suddenly that little sapling was a strong tree!
 - That tree was nourished...
 - day after day, little by little...
 - Growth by nourishment is not flashy or showy, but it certainly is significant!
 - That tree went through winters when growth was slow but strong,
 - and through summers when growth was faster,
 - and little by little that tree became mighty.
- b. Do not look for instant results in your Christian life,
- At this table, Jesus teaches you to expect **nourishment** from Him!

B. Now I know that this is hard to do sometimes!

1. You want something you can see results from right away!
 - a. When you take an aspirin, you expect your arthritis to go away immediately.

- but if you take some sort of nutritional remedy for your arthritis,
 - you have to stay with it for a while without seeing any results!
 - And unless you are really confident that your new diet is really going to help, you may want to give up.
 - You have to walk by faith, not by sight.
- b. Jesus knows that it is hard for you to believe that He is working in you when you don't see immediate results.
- You can't see yourself being nourished by Him any more than you can see that sapling being nourished into an oak tree.
 - But this is one of the main reasons Jesus gives the Lord's Supper.
 - It's to support your faith!
 - It is to remind you of His promise to nourish you week after week.
 - You are to believe the promise!
- c. You must learn to look at Lord's Table like a meal.
- You hear the word preached—and then you feed upon Christ...
 - The meal may indeed be very satisfying, but all the nourishing does not take place while you eat...
 - It occurs as your food is digested and absorbed into your system.
 - Christ must be digested and absorbed into your system like food.
 - You receive Him at the table, but He works His life into you over time.
2. All this points to the fact that you ought to be diligent about the regular use of the means of grace.
- a. **Regular** prayer, **regular** Bible Study, **daily** family worship, **weekly** public worship.
- Faithfulness day after day after day will bring growth.
- b. I remember Andy Kubik speaking to me about what it was like for him when he first began regular family worship in his home.
- At first, it didn't seem like he was getting anywhere with it,
 - but he stuck with it for almost a whole year because he believed the benefits would come.
 - He was walking by faith through this time...
 - And then he began to see some results...

- And I can promise you that in twenty years if he keeps it up,
 - he will see even more!
- c. Christian, you need the pledge that Jesus gives you in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to support your faith.
 - He is nourishing you.
 - Keep on feeding upon Him and you will see the results!
 - Godliness is produced through the seasons of life, day after day; week after week, month after month, year after year.

My friends,

- There are many tables from which this sons of this world eat...
- But there is only one table where the Lord of Glory Himself had provided the bread:
 - "This is my body, given for you"

- 1 ¶ "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.
- 2 Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread, And your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
- 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David.
- 4 Indeed I have given him *as* a witness to the people, A leader and commander for the people.
- 5 Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, And nations *who* do not know you shall run to you, Because of the LORD your God, And the Holy One of Israel; For He has glorified you."
- 6 ¶ Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.
- 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.