

Communion: At the Table / During the Meal

September 4, 2016

Introduction

- *Communion* is a three-week series, which is introducing us to, or reminding us of, our values as a church. Using the metaphor of Communion we're asking who we are, and where we're going about as a church.
 - Before the Meal – Welcome and Invitation.
 - During the Meal – Togetherness and Nourishment.
 - After the Meal – Purpose and Growth.
- Last week Doug began by sharing about our posture Before the Meal.
 - We emphasized invitation and welcome, and how vital this is to being a church, because, after all, invitation and welcome is at the heart of the Gospel – it is the Good News that God has invited us to enjoy his company and the generosity of his table.
 - “When we welcome we understand and express the very heart of Jesus.” (Doug Smith)
 - Jesus’ apprentices will naturally be preoccupied with the invitation to and welcome of outsiders. A church that really knows Jesus will be gracious and welcoming, because that’s what God’s like.
 - St. John put it well enough: “If you love God, you will love others.”
 - It’s not a passive love, a docile welcome; it’s an active invitation. To be anything less is than a hospitable people is to contradict the Gospel and isn’t who we really are.
 - So everyone is welcome *here* because God’s made a place for each of us at his table. And no demonstration of that kind of love goes unappreciated by God, and should not go uncelebrated amongst us.
- Now of course the invitation to the meal is simply an expression of the kind of the meal itself, a foretaste of the substance we’re invited to enjoy. An invitation tells you what to expect, like a wedding invitation.

- So what's it like around the table? Once we've gathered, what should we expect?

Community, Authenticity, Worship and Spiritual Formation

- Today, we're going to tackle four of our seven values: community, authenticity, worship and spiritual formation.
- We all have values. We may or may not be able to articulate them. A value is something you gain direction from, which orders your life. We live by our values. The trick is to identify them, and continually reflect on them so you stay true to them.

Community

- *Community: We care for one another, we honour one another, we are encouragers, we are challengers. We are there for each other.*
- Our value of Community articulates our primal need for relational nourishment. Humans are fundamentally communal. Christians are intrinsically relational. You simply can't be Christian by yourself. To be Christian is to be God's friend and to be a friend to others.
 - Genesis 1. 27-28 *"So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it...'"*
- Because God purposed us for relationship (with himself and others), and so any attempt to flee this reality is an attempt to abandon the very essence of who we are, what it means to be human.
- Of course we try and abandon it all the time. We've got a fiercely independent streak, which we see first in Genesis in the garden. We can tend to think we don't need God or anyone else.
 - Jesus describes this in his story about the lost son and gracious father. (Luke 15)

- “When he finally came to his senses...” The son remembers reality, the truth, the way things just *are*.
- At the end of the story things are put right. The son returns home, is embraced by the Father, and welcomed back to the family table where he belongs.
- Together is where we belong, and therefore it's the only place we'll find any meaning and purpose. The only place we thrive.
- So community, relationship (with God and others) is why we're here. What else is there to spend your life on?
 - Dallas Willard tells a bit of Leo Tolstoy's story (famous Russian writer, *War and Peace*), who fell into a “lengthy and suffocating depression” after he realized “everything he valued would die or otherwise pass away”. This was after he became one of the most successful authors of all time.
 - But, *“Through the teachings of Jesus he found an alternative, and such an alternative as soon delivered him from hopelessness about life and the meaninglessness of human work. So the wisdom of Jesus is that we should “lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt 6.20), where forces of nature and human evil cannot harm what we treasure. That is to say, direct your actions toward making a difference in the realm of spiritual substance sustained and governed by God. Invest your life in what God is doing, which cannot be lost. Of course this means we will invest in our relationship to Jesus himself, and through him to God. But beyond that, and in close union with it, we will devote ourselves to the good of other people – those around us within the range of our power to affect. These are among God's treasures. “The Lord's portion,” we are told, “is his people” (Deut. 32.9). (Willard, The Divine Conspiracy)*
- We've always taken Community seriously at Living Waters. That means we move beyond simply being nice to one another.

- We encourage you commit to meaningful relationships. Don't live on the periphery but get involved.
 - Commitment to church. Be here. Commitment spawns intimacy. It is a breeding ground for intimacy.
 - Life Groups, Networks, pastoral support.
 - Serve together. Service brings a special kind of camaraderie.
- We believe a church should look more like a community garden than a supermarket. We gather to serve and receive, not just to consume.
- Too many people float around unfulfilled, directionless, and it's because we're isolated. We're outside of healthy, consistent Christian community.

Authenticity

- *Authenticity: We desire to be the real thing; followers of Jesus who say what we do and do what we say.*
- Community is what we're made for it but that doesn't mean it's easy. It takes Authenticity (another of our values).
- That independent streak can rear its ugly head. It usually does when we're afraid of rejection, or we're ashamed of something.
 - In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and then they hid. But God asks, "Where are you"? (Genesis 3.9) and desires that they acknowledge the truth and not stay hidden.
 - The lost son in the parable Jesus tells in Luke 15 shamefully dragged himself home, not expecting to be received well in *his rags*, but he was!
- Being authentic means we can be ourselves in this community. We can be vulnerable. We can admit our shortcomings, our needs, our struggles, our pain, and our joy! We don't need to pretend at Jesus' table.
- It's okay to be rough around the edges, and there's no sense in hiding that. God sees it, and he love us!

- Zacchaeus and Jesus (Luke 19.1-10) The story of Jesus and Zacchaeus is full of good news. It says we don't have to wash up in order to be friends with God. He does the washing. God knows our name, our very essence, and is perfectly happy to enter our untidy, often shambolic, lives and bless us in our space.
- There's no need for your Sunday best here.
 - "Standing in a church singing a hymn doesn't make us holy any more than standing in a barn and neighing makes us a horse."
(Peterson, *Run with the Horses*)
- We can have real conversations, be ourselves, ask the big questions, share each other's loads. When we're vulnerable this will get messy.
- A sterile, whitewashed, picture perfect projection is of no help to us. If that is what God wants from us then Jesus' wouldn't have been born in a barn and have died on a cross.
- The God of the Bible gets involved and his hands dirty, and our response is to be honest with him and one another.
 - Get real with God
 - Get real with one another

Worship and Spiritual Formation

Worship: We desire to be passionate about the adoration of our God.

Our worship doesn't have to fit a particular box and is open to the expressions of the Holy Spirit. We believe worship is a whole-life expression.

Spiritual Formation: We are a people who journey to be more like Jesus. We respect the notion that we are at different places along the way and celebrate the fact each of us has chosen the same path.

- Something powerful happens within authentic Christian community and authenticity. We begin to worship and grow.
- God obviously deserves our worship. The word “worship” means “worth-ship”, acknowledging something or someone’s worthiness.
- Worship and growth aren’t things we merely experience or chores we have to do, but the way we’re made to thrive.
- Worship and growth happens when our roots grow deep into the soil of God. Where we’re nourished by God and revel in our relationship with him alongside others. It is the meal of God we enjoy in unity with others.
 - *“Only through worship are we restored to vigor from the exhaustion and burnout of seeking our own glory.” - Keller*
- With this understanding worship and growth takes on many forms.
 - We worship and grow together in communal settings
 - Church services, Life Groups, Networks (youth, young adult, women, men, mentoring, classes).
 - We worship and grow as we work and play.
 - *“When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.” (Eric Liddell)*
 - *“Do all things as unto the Lord...” (Colossians 3.23)*
 - Worship and growth isn’t restricted to Sundays, Life Groups or a retreat.
- Listen to what CS Lewis said about it:
 - *“In commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy him.”*
(Lewis)
- We invite you to worship and grow. Expand your vision of worship and spiritual growth.
- What would it mean to begin to enjoy God?

Paul wrote this to the Colossians: *“...just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives*

be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.” (Colossians 2)