

7-4 Living Communion

Today, we are out in the warm summer air in the Sunday shade tapping our feet to a musical style that came from slaves; from those who knew the whip and the fear of the oppressors just like those ancient Hebrew slaves in Egypt. That music is so powerful and festive because it carried slaves through their struggles and into freedom.

Those liberated from Egypt remembered the event through ritual. Those liberated from slavery in this country established their own rituals. Colonists who declared their independence from England established rituals to keep the story alive. And of course, we who have been set free from sin and death in Christ have our own rituals.

My son was 2 when we moved to Mississippi. It was there we discovered that the mosquito was the state bird. Almost from day one in our new house, our evening ritual went like this: the kids got baths and we put them to bed; within 10 minutes, my son would call out, “*daddy, there’s a buzz in my room.*” All of us who have been around mosquitoes know the sound he was hearing. Why he didn’t call out for his “mommy” I don’t know; but I suspect that mommy told him I was the buzz expert.

I hated the idea of some swamp loving bug having a free buffet on my son, so I would go into his room and hunt down that mosquito. He would sit up in bed and watch me; sometimes he would see them before I did. After the hunt we did the tuck-in all over again.

Our ritual took place every night and I supposed he simply hated those flying blood suckers as much as I did. But he kept getting into it more and more. At first, when I went into his room, he would be laying down in bed. Soon, he was standing on his bed when I came in; then he had a T-shirt in his hand to swat them like I did.

I thought the ritual was about getting rid of mosquitoes, but eventually I figured out it was more than that for my son. One night when I came into his room, he had his plastic light saber in hand, his toy six-shooter in the other; and he was wearing his football helmet. He said, *after we kill these skeeters, let’s go find a dragon.* For him, that nightly ritual was the way he took part in the human history of conquest, danger and protection. The ritual engaged us in an archetypal story for fathers and sons.

Rituals can be more than routines, habits or memories. They have the power to be living links to the deep meaning of life. 4th of July parades, patriotic music, family get-togethers and fireworks are part of our Independence Day ritual. Without them the historical event would get lost under cobwebs and dust.

God was very interested in creating living links between us and the unfolding drama of freedom and redemption. Take the Passover, for instance; itself a kind of independence celebration. (Exodus 12:26)

Establishing this ritual of freedom was for the benefit of the Israelites, not God. God said to his people, (v. 26) “*And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this (Passover) observance?’ you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’”*

The wording has slipped our attention. When the children asked *what do you mean by this observance*, the answer was not “*this is a meal that reminds us of the Passover.*” The answer was this ***IS THE PASSOVER SACRIFICE TO THE LORD***. More than a memory, this sacred act was to be an offering to the Lord; a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving that linked the people of God to their freedom purchased by God. Put simply, the Passover wasn’t just a vehicle to teach a history lesson. Taking part in Passover was more than a symbol. It was a present tense participation in God’s great act of liberation.

Clearly, the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus during the Passover meal. Jesus used the story of Israel's freedom and covenant as the preamble to God's ultimate act of redemption in Jesus. Instead of a lamb being sacrificed to spare us from the angel of death, The Lamb of God was sacrificed to defeat sin and death.

Sadly, we have come to see the Lord's Supper only as a symbol of receiving from God. But like its forerunner, communion is also our sacrifice to the Lord. In other words, instead of just receiving bread and cup at communion, we also give an offering of praise and thanksgiving for God's grace and salvation. We present ourselves as living sacrifices.

Communion brings us to a place where we must ask, what will we do with our freedom? How will we live now that we are free at last, free at last?

Nelson Mandela said, *to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.*

I have a friend in ministry who sensed God's calling during a Lord's Supper service during a CBF assembly. As he watched the bread and cup being given, he suddenly put himself in the position of the servers and thought, *I need to move from the receiving side to the serving side of this communion.* And when he took the bread and cup that morning, he presented himself to God as a life-long servant; giving food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, presence to the lonely.

As we take bread and cup today, put yourself on the serving side.

The first communion service I led was for young people on a retreat. I was their youth minister. We were in a casual, rustic place but I wanted the supper to have serious meaning. After I did words of institution for the bread, I took a pitcher and a cup like the one you get in hotels. As I began to pour, I was to say those sacred words about the cup of the new covenant. But that cup had a little hold down at the bottom so that as I poured, it streamed out all over my front side.

Of course the kids thought it was hilarious and I needed to redeem the moment. So I told them that this is what communion is about. It's not just getting my cup filled; it's pouring it out for others. Communion is a ritual of giving because we have received the gift of God; serving because we have been given our freedom.

As you take bread and cup today, consider how God is calling you to use the freedom you have received in Christ.