



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for May 1, 2022**  
**“Sacrament: Assured by God”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: I Corinthians 11:23-32**

## **Flying Buttresses**

We were all devastated to witness the burning of the Cathedral of Notre Dame some three years ago. The fire wiped out its roof and high steeple. Restoration is underway and will require many more years of work.

The walls stood despite the inferno. A big reason for that were the flying buttresses that line the outside walls. They are a well-known feature of the cathedral. The flying buttresses provide extra support, so the structure doesn't fall in on itself.

The great theologian, Emil Brunner references flying buttresses in talking about the Sacraments. He says, *“The Sacraments are the divinely given flying buttresses which save the church from collapse.”*

## **Holy and Sacred Rites**

As we said last week, the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are the most holy and sacred rites of the church. They are an important way to connect with God. They awaken us to God's grace and put us in touch with his presence. The Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion help define who we are as Christians. They keep us well-connected to God and one another.

As we said last week, baptism helps form our identity as Christians. Through baptism we celebrate the fact that we are claimed by God. We are his children. Last week, we also said that baptism is just something the church does. It is fundamental to our life together. As a baptized people,

- We encourage one another in the faith.
- We hold one another accountable.
- We see to it that everyone is growing in the faith.

This week, our focus is on the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Holy Communion, much like with baptism, draws us closer to Christ and one another.

In the Lord's Supper,

- We experience Christ's presence.
- We remember what God did through him.
- We find ourselves strengthened for the road ahead.

Both Sacraments should be approached with *“holy awe.”* We know though from experience that it is all too easy to approach them without being fully engaging. That's particularly true for Holy Communion.

We simply celebrate communion more often, and because of that it can be old hat. We need to resist that and put our whole selves into the experience.

Let's hear what the Apostle Paul says about such things as we read I Corinthians 11:23-32.

### **I Corinthians 11:23-32**

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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." 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." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

*So then, 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. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.*

### **A Church Deeply Divided**

Corinth was a rough and tumble place. It was a crucial seaport, and because of that people from all over the world converged there bringing a "boatload" of divergent ideas. Corinth was a melting pot, of sorts. It had a reputation for wild living and immorality. Despite that a church was birthed. The case could be made that Corinth was the exact place where a church needed to be.

We shouldn't be surprised that the church there reflected the culture in which it found itself. That's often the case when it comes to church. It is almost unavoidable, even though Jesus calls us to a different path. We are in the world, but not of it. That just the way it is when it comes to being a part of Christ's Kingdom.

The Corinthian Church was deeply divided, and Paul spoke very clearly to those divisions. There were a lot of "haves" and "have nots," and that sort of thing was never more apparent than when the church gathered for the Lord's Supper. Back in those days, the Lord's Supper was a part of a broader meal called "a love feast." It was sort of an early church potluck dinner.

You would think that those who "had" would have brought enough for themselves and then some, so that those who "didn't have" would have something as well. What ended up happening was that the rich made sure they were taken care of, while the poor were left wanting.

Selfishness abounded to the detriment of everyone being able to share. What the church needed was a good lesson in table manners and Paul was willing to oblige.

I have teased that one of the first things they teach you in seminary is how to go through the potluck line. I have learned to put my napkin and silverware in my pocket. That way I have both hands free to load up my plate. I always worry about my drink and dessert later. Again, it's good to have both hands free.

There is an etiquette to going through a potluck line. You don't get the last piece and you don't get the best piece. Those are best saved for somebody else.

There was a lot of selfishness to go around when it came to the Corinthian Church, particularly when they ate together. That selfish morphed into a sort of discrimination to where some really didn't feel a part of the church.

*"When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!"* (I Corinthians 20-22)

I have always felt this about the church. It is a level playing field where all people are welcome and where everyone is treated as an equal. After all, that's what God does. His love is that consistent.

### **Honoring What Jesus Did**

Having tackled the divisions that plagued the Corinthian Church, Paul went on to talk more specifically about the Lord's Supper. He quoted Jesus and what he shared in the Upper Room with his disciples. Paul talked about Jesus taking bread, breaking it, and saying, *"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.* (I Corinthians 11:24)

Paul He also talked about Jesus taking the cup and saying, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."* (I Corinthians 11:25)

Some scholars have noted that these words in red letters are the earliest recorded words of Jesus in the Bible.

Regardless, these words are as important as the day they were first spoken. They point us to the supreme sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf.

We lose sight of what took place to make salvation possible. To keep from facing our sin we water things down so not to grapple with what took place on the cross. Our salvation comes at a high price. Jesus offered himself on the cross so that we might be reconciled once and for all with God. We'd do well to contemplate that, which this table helps us do.

### **Slipping into Complacency**

When it comes to Holy Communion, it's all too easy to slip into bad habits. We referred to that a bit earlier.

Regarding the church in Corinth, Paul was quick to point out that they had slipped into a sort of complacency when it came to their coming together. They really weren't putting themselves into what they were doing, particularly when they shared in the Lord's Supper. In a word, they had become nonchalant.

When it comes to doing church, it's all too easy to slip into doing the same old, same old. It's all too easy to just go through the motions.

You've heard it said that *"familiarity breeds contempt."* Well, if it doesn't breed contempt, it certainly breeds complacency, and we need to be on the lookout for it.

Complacency is a blight that saps energy, dulls attitudes, and causes a drain on the brain. The first symptom is satisfaction with things as they are. The second is rejection of things as they might be.

*“Good enough”* becomes the watchword of the day, and regrettably the standard for tomorrow.

### **The Solution**

Paul is quick to offer a remedy for that complacency He called on the church in Corinth, just as he calls on us to examine our motives, to test our hearts, and recognize God for who he is.

We are challenged to consider why we do what we are doing. We are challenged to lay ourselves before God and recognize him for who he is.

Again, we need to *examine our motives, test our hearts, and recognize God for who he is.*

By so doing, we will certainly be *“assured by God”* of both his love and presence for our lives.

### **Examine Your Heart**

I can think of no better way of *“examining”* our hearts than letting God’s Spirit sift through the clutter of our lives and awaken us to the error of our ways. In awakening us to the error of our ways, we are brought by God to the place of confession where we will know and experience his grace and forgiveness for our lives.

The invitation to the Lord’s Table is offered to *“all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another.”*

This is a big table. There is room for everyone. The invitation is to **all** who come with an open heart ready to receive what Christ has to offer.

Come, then in *“holy awe”* as you seek to share in this holy meal.