

MOUNT ZION
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
40 DAYS IN
THE LAST SUPPER



Mount Zion Lutheran Church

Lenten Devotional

“40 Days In The Last Supper”

You may notice in our bulletin each week that we have a fairly simple explanation of the significance behind the Eucharist. It reads:

Communion Is...

Faith in Jesus' death & resurrection that opened the way to eternal life.

Forgiveness from our sins that continue to separate us from God.

Food for the journey to strengthen us so we can face the battle ahead.

Family of faith united around one table where Christ draws us together.

Future promise that we will be worshipping at the eternal banquet table.

Yet, these five descriptions do not begin to scratch the surface of the sacramental significance which is a core feature of our Christian identity. God calls us to faith in baptism and keeps us through the continual grace offered to us in the Lord's Supper.

It can be easy with any part of our life that is consistent and familiar, to settle into a rut and not allow the Lord to challenge or expand our current ways of thinking. Yet, with a means of grace like the Eucharist, we are given a unique opportunity to be drawn deeper into the mystery of God's mercy every week. Whereas the baptismal waters are only part of our salvific journey at the conception of our adoption as sons and daughters, we are welcomed back to reexperience the same bread and wine that Jesus shared with his disciples frequently and faithfully.

As we journey together to the cross this Lenten season, I pray that our understanding and experience of this meal would blossom even more as we share in Christ's true body and blood.

Pastor Louis Liss & Pastor Dan Valasakos

Communion is an opportunity to receive forgiveness.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8-9

There was a time when I noticed someone in the congregation did not come forward to receive communion. Usually, I don't notice who remains in their seat, but for some reason this particular week my gaze was lifted, and I saw them sitting alone in a sea of empty chairs. Perhaps it was this stark contrast that moved me to approach them after service and inquire as to their absence from the sacrament that Sunday. They quietly replied that they just didn't feel worthy enough to come before the Lord.

First, if worthiness is the qualifying factor, then we need to immediately cancel that entire section of the service. No one is able by their own effort to receive the gift of grace offered at the table. It is an act of undeserved love given to broken people in need of the healing forgiveness that leads to reconciliation.

Second, communion is a place to be honest with God and admit that we are all unworthy. If we say we have no sin we lie to ourselves. But, when we confess our burdens before a loving savior, He promises that He will forgive us every time. In communion we don't just hear about forgiveness; we can see it, touch it, and taste it.

What have you been holding on to that you still need to bring before the Lord so you can taste His forgiveness?

Communion is the Fulfillment of the Passover Celebration

“The Teacher says, “Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?””

Mark 14:14

The meta-narrative of the Bible is the story of the Exodus. God’s people become enslaved by the sinfulness of humanity. Moses was sent as an earthly savior to deliver the people so they could worship God in the wilderness. The Pharaoh refuses and brings desolation upon his land until finally the same punishment comes upon Egypt that the Pharaoh’s family placed on the Jewish slaves, the death of the firstborn. The Lord promised that the curse of death would pass over every household that was covered by the blood of the lamb, and they would be delivered from captivity.

Every year the people were commanded to come together and remember that they were once slaves who were saved so they could be free to worship the Lord. As long as this freedom is conditional on the will of humanity, they will always return to a different form of captivity and require another exodus from the Lord. Jesus came to break this eternal cycle and forever shatter the bonds of slavery that humanity continues to wrap around themselves.

Now we gather together every week to remember that we are covered by the blood of the true Lamb. The real Pharaoh is our sinful nature, the lamb that shed His blood to save us from eternal death is Jesus, and we are delivered first into the wilderness of the world to worship the Lord and then into the Promised Land of Heaven.

Is there something you continue to feel captive to even though the Lord has given you freedom?

Communion reminds us that we are called to feed those who do not have physical food.

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

Matthew 25:37-40

The oral traditions surrounding the Jewish Passover celebration began to be written down after the destruction of the second Temple. The formal order of service, called the Haggadah, includes instructions to leave an empty chair and table setting to remember that God promised in Malachi 4:5-6 that Elijah would return and usher in the Messianic age.

Now that God sent John the Baptist to fulfill this promise (Matthew 11:14), we are living in the age of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This means that when we celebrate the Eucharist there should be no empty seats. If there is space left around the rail, it is a reminder that there are still people who are not present and in need of God’s provision.

The promise of God to provide for the spiritual needs of His people (John 4:13-14) and the physical needs of His people (Matthew 25:37-40) is the same gospel guarantee. In the same way that there is enough of the sacrament for everyone to partake, there is enough food in creation to feed all those who still go hungry.

How is God calling you to care for the physical hunger of those around you this Lenten season?

Communion is where Christ transformed us from servants to friends.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15

In youth group this past month we discussed how to have a friendship where Christ is at the center. In our discussions, we were challenged to identify what it even means to call another person “friend.” Some notable observations were that true friendship necessitates a deep emotional connection, friends are the family that we choose, and real friendship takes time.

It was after Jesus had served His disciples communion when He declared to them that their relationship had been transformed. They no longer were merely servants in the master's house, and they were something more than only children of God. They now were privileged to sit in the seats of Moses (Exodus 33:11) and Abraham (Isaiah 41:8); they ate the Passover meal as Jesus' close friends. It does not take much to apply the same principles from the youth group lesson to our experience of Christ in weekly communion.

Deep Connection: When we partake in the elements at communion, Christ is offering Himself to us.

Chosen Family: Being a child of God is a requirement in His kingdom. Being God's friend is a choice.

Time Together: Friendship with God means returning to eat together over and over with intimate intentionality.

How long do you remain in prayer and meditation with Jesus during and after communion? Why do you remain?

Communion is bread for the journey

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched [Elijah] and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.”

1 Kings 19:7-8

God does not call the equipped; He equips the called. Part of our calling in baptism is being anointed as part of the priesthood of all believers. We are sent into the world and are commanded to let the light of Christ shine through us in dark places. If God has beckoned each one of us to a sacred purpose on this earth, then inherent in the call is the provision to complete the task that He has set before us. This includes the requirement of giving up everything, picking up our cross, and following Jesus wherever He goes.

From personal experience, it is important to note that this calling from God is foundationally essential, ineffably rewarding, and unbearably exhausting.

This is why God commands us to rest (Exodus 20:8), be restored (Matthew 11:28), and return to the race (2 Timothy 4:7). Communion is part of that refueling process. It reminds us that our bodies need physical nourishment. If we are not caring for the bodies that God gave us, how can we expect to care for others in their times of need. Communion also reminds us that we cannot live by bread alone. Our hearts need to be spiritually nourished before going back into a hurting world.

What part of your relationship with God helps strengthen you to keep fighting the good fight?

Communion is a way to recommit your life to Christ.

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”

Joel 2:12-13

If you have been worshipping in a mainline church for a length of time, another Christian may have asked you, “Why doesn’t your church ever do altar calls?” This is an excellent question, and you can let them know, “We do an altar call in every service.”

Everyone is welcome to come to taste and see that the Lord is good during communion (Psalm 34:8). If it is the first time that someone wants to profess in their hearts that Jesus Christ is the Lord of their lives or the ten-thousandth time, it makes no difference to God. A choir of angels erupts in celestial shouts every time a prodigal returns home (Luke 15:7).

I am not being coy or trying to denigrate any other traditions, quite the contrary. Communion is a frequent opportunity to repent of a life lived away from God, to declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, and to receive the saving grace of God. I have the privilege every week of seeing people come forward weeping like at Lazarus’ tomb, celebrating like at a big tent revival, and being transformed like they were sitting in the Upper Room in Jerusalem during Holy Week. This is because the same Holy Spirit that was at Pentecost, is still present where two or three are gathered with us today.

What part of your life is God asking you to recommit to Him when you come forward to receive His grace?

Communion is a way for God to offer us Himself, unfiltered by the world.

“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

John 6:56

This is a hard saying, and you may be wondering who can listen to it? If that is how you feel, then you are in good company because after Jesus finished His teaching the disciples said to Him, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” When we come to Christ during communion, He is not only the presider of the meal; He offers us His very self in the provision of the sacrament.

The term “host” is derived from the Latin “hostia” which means sacrifice or offering. When someone hosts a meal at their home, they are making a sacrifice of providing nourishment, shelter, and service to their guests. In the Middle East, there was a tremendous risk of gaining honor if the meal went well or losing honor if the guests were not served properly.

Jesus hosts us at the altar when we come to receive the Eucharist. He nourishes us with His grace, shelters us with His eternal protection of salvation, and serves us as His honored guests at the eternal feast. More than that, you may remember that the bread itself is called the “host.” This is because all of the blessings we receive from communion do not come through a secondary source like the gifts of good health or the evening sunset. In communion we receive the pure power of Christ from the source as we eat and drink of Jesus Himself.

*What does it mean to you to be someone’s guest?
What does it mean that you are God’s guest?*

Communion reminds us of our baptism.

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Romans 6:4

When we are baptized, we are given salvation, promises, and a calling. The physical act of baptism illuminates how the waters of the flood cleansed the earth of sin so that Noah and his family could start again to fulfill the calling of God. In the same way, we are cleansed of the sin that separates us from the eternal righteousness of God and welcomed into an eternal covenant with God. All the promises for God’s people from Genesis to Revelation are then conferred to us as we receive the same declaration from the Father that was bestowed upon Jesus at His baptism, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). God makes a unilateral, unconditional declaration that we are His beloved, and that can never be altered or amended. Lastly, we are commissioned in baptism to fulfill the callings of Christ in our life by letting the light of Christ shine through us in a darkened world (Matthew 5:16).

We are not saved by good works we are saved by grace for good works. We hold fast to the knowledge that “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). We cannot ignore that the following verse reads: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). This means that the calling from baptism cannot stay in the baptismal waters but must be carried with us every day.

When we come to communion we are getting strengthened by God’s grace to go back out into the world to continue to allow Christ’s light to shine through us. With the continual renewal of God’s calling from baptism through communion, we can be refueled and sent out.

Where in your life is God calling you to let His light shine?

Communion is a way to give thanks to God for dying for our sins.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8

There was a day that I was extremely offended. When I began this paragraph, I had the full intention of recounting the entire incident with every juicy detail. The fact is that God’s grace has so covered over that offense, I honestly have no recollection of what it was that had upset me at the time. When it was happening, I was fully convinced that this was an issue worth consuming my every waking thought and feeling. Yet the only residual memory now is the name of the person who offended me and how completely consumed I was in the moment over whatever had happened.

What I do remember was praying the Lord’s Prayer and pausing at the petition, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” My first thought was that this applied to every relationship in my life except for this one that was bothering me because this was what I considered to be a “serious” offense. In my worldly miscalculation, I decided by myself that the Lord’s Prayer was only referencing small inconveniences that I probably could manage without the help of God anyway. In humility the Lord reminded me, that His death covers over all sin.

So, then I began to bargain with God, and informed Him that I would gladly offer forgiveness to this individual on the condition that they first came to me and apologized for what they had done. The Lord graciously reminded me that He did not wait for my apology before dying for me on the cross. I immediately went and sought the forgiveness of the person who I had hated in my heart, and now that hurt has been so cleansed I have no memory of it.

In communion Jesus is bestowing on us the undeserved gift of love He offered to us on the cross. He loved us to death and the way we can live out our gratitude is by forgiving others as we were forgiven by Jesus.

Who is someone you are being called to forgive this Lent?

Communion is a way of being sanctified by being brought closer to Christ.

“And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Hebrews 10:10

Salvation from Christ comes from God to us in three ways:

Justification: The instantaneous gift of God’s grace where we are brought from death to life in Christ, given the promise of eternal forgiveness, adopted as God’s children, and welcomed into an everlasting relationship with God.

Sanctification: The continual act of saving that we need from living in a broken world as we grow in Christ, bear spiritual fruit, and are daily conformed to the image of Christ.

Glorification: When we are finally saved from a sinful world and entered into a heavenly relationship in the new creation.

In baptism we are justified, and in death we are glorified. Communion is a way that we receive God’s saving grace through progressive sanctification. Why is it progressive? In baptism we believe that we are born again through the water and the Spirit (John 3:5), but being born does not mean we are done growing. We are born to a broken humanity and are called to abide with Christ so that we may be molded by the Potter into the image of Christ. Though by nature we are image bearers of God, His image is marred and His love is distorted by human sinfulness. So, we are sent back to the potter’s wheel to be cleansed and reshaped again.

The only way to speak like Christ, act like Christ, and love like Christ is by spending time with Him in His sanctifying grace. When we come for communion, we are returning to the potter’s wheel. We are seeing what it means to be served and how we are called to serve others. We are learning the comforting sound of His still small voice as the words of grace are bestowed upon us. We are tasting the love that was prepared for us through His sacrifice on the cross. The more time we spend on the wheel, the more we are sanctified, and the more we are able to realize how much more time we still need with Him.

What is a burden you have been carrying for too long that you would like Christ to save you from?

Communion is a way to remember the cost that Jesus paid for us on the cross.

“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

(1 Peter 2:24)

The bridge to the song “Here I Am To Worship” by Tim Hughes involves repeating the line, “I’ll never know how much it cost, to see my sin upon that cross.” Every time we come to communion we are called to meditate again on the love that led to death. Each time we return to receive Christ’s body and blood, one more layer of revelation is illuminated.

Adam and Eve were born without sin and placed into the garden of God’s rest where there was no suffering. They chose to not abide in God’s love but instead to eat the forbidden fruit. This sin separated them from the love of God and brought death into the world. The poison of that transgression brought about murder, hatred, disease, and chaos to the Shalom of God.

God’s justice demands that there be a punishment for the death that was brought into the world. We cannot by our own abilities ever atone for even our own sin let alone the sins of others. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, so that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have ever lasting life (John 3:16). He took the penalty of sin on himself as the Passover lamb. By His wounds we were healed in baptism and we are being healed in the Lord’s Supper. One day in heaven may we truly know and understand the price Jesus paid for us in His death.

What are you thankful that Jesus forgave you of recently?

Communion is our call to pick up our own cross and follow Jesus.

“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

(Luke 9:23-24).

There are not a lot of things that Jesus makes optional. You will have an impossible task looking for quotes from Jesus in the Gospels that state, “If you have time...,” “At your earliest possible convenience...,” or “When you retire...” The Good News of Jesus Christ and His call to discipleship is not complicated; it’s hard. It involves dying to ourselves. Paul declares, “For I am crucified with Christ, and it is no longer Christ who lives but Christ who lives through me” (Galatians 2:20).

For the apostles and believers all around the world today, this call is not metaphoric. It is a call to give up everything to follow Jesus and never turn back even to the point of death. The author of Hebrews includes these saints in the hall of faith, “Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life...The world was not worthy of them” (Hebrews 11:35b, 38).

When we come to communion we come to the cross of Christ. If we have been carrying the cross, then it is a reminder that we do not carry it alone. We are yokefellows with Christ whose yolk is easy and his burden is light. If we have laid down our cross and tried to live apart from God, then when we kneel as Christ places the cross back on our shoulder and departs with us to carry it with us always.

When is Christ challenging you to bear your cross for others?

Communion is a way to humble ourselves before the Lord so that He may lift us up.

*“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”
(James 4:10)*

When I was in high school, I served on a retreat six-months after I had become a Christian. On the retreat there were two teams, the team that gave homilies and the team that prayed and cooked the food. After half a year living this new life of salvation, I had acquired quite an elevated view of myself. You can imagine my utter shock when I was called to serve on the cook team. The person who called me reminded me last month that my response to his request was the question, “Are you sure there are no more spots in the other room?”

I showed up to the team meetings with a bad attitude. I felt belittled, overlooked, and humiliated by having to wash dishes while other kids my age were giving talks of faith, Scripture, and living out the Christian life. All I could think about was me.

Finally, the Lay-Leader of the retreat sat me down and heard my complaints. He patiently waited as I exhausted myself complaining about being asked to serve in such a lowly position. At last he looked me dead in the eyes and said, “Louis I love you, but it’s not all about you.” This one line forever changed my life. It reminded me that we called to love God and love others.

Communion is for us, but it’s not about us. It’s about Christ dying for us and our call to humbly serve others.

Who is God calling you to serve this Lenten season?

Communion is an act of sacrifice at the altar.

“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins...For by one sacrifice, He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Hebrews 10:10-14

God made a promise to Abraham. He made an unconditional covenant that Abraham would father a great nation with innumerable descendants. He told Abraham to number the stars, and so shall His descendants be (Genesis 15:5). Yet there was a problem; he had no heir. So God made another promise that He would allow Sarah to bear a son in her 90th year of life (Genesis 17:17, 21:5). All of their hopes and dreams were riding on this miracle and despite their overwhelming failures in faith, God fulfilled His promise and brought forth Isaac who was the son of the covenant.

I don't know what would have been more shocking: A 90-year-old woman giving birth to a child or God then asking Abraham to sacrifice this child to Him on Mount Moriah. In faith Abraham trusted the Lord and set forth to give back to the Lord the greatest gift He had bestowed on Abraham and his family. The test of faith was passed, and an angel of the Lord was sent to save Isaac. The true sacrifice was provided and Isaac was delivered from death.

That place where Abraham built his altar on Mount Moriah became the site for the Temple of the Lord where every sacrifice brought to the priests was a reenactment of Abraham bringing his most precious gift to God.

It is us who deserve death for the things we have done and the things we have left undone, but like Isaac we were saved and Jesus was sacrificed in our place. Though the blood of animals cannot actually atone for the eternal separation from God, they acted as a shadow to prepare us for the true sacrifice of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world once and for all.

What have you been holding on to that God is asking you to sacrifice to Him this Lenten season?

Communion is a way for us to commune with Christ.

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”
Galatians 2:20*

At first glance, it may feel redundant to state that communion is a way for us to commune. Yet it is often the words we use the most often which we struggle to define, or the most obvious things that we end up overlooking.

In our house there is a light switch that is on the other side of the living room. In order to turn on the lights we have to convince someone to leave their seat and make the long trek to the far end of the room. There is often a battle to inspire volunteers for this task, but it has become part of the necessary quirks that each house has. One day we had finished cleaning the living room when I sat down and noticed something surprising over my daughter's shoulder on the wall. There in plain sight was another light switch that could be easily reached without leaving the couch. We had lived there for years and never noticed what was right in front of us the whole time. Communion can become our light switch that we ignore.

The word communion has several layers of definition.

Communication: A foundational key to every relationship is communication. When we come to the altar the words are not coming from the pastors or the officiants, they are Christ's words spoken through His people. Jesus is always trying to communicate with us, and communion is an opportunity to stop and listen.

Connection: There is a deep, ineffable intimacy that is experienced between Christ and His people when they gather together at the family meal. The communion rail has no status other than humility and no separation between one another.

Consummation: Communing is where the walls are torn down and the separate become united. Divisions and barriers are replaced with family and intimacy. It is a culmination of the service and a place where heaven meets earth in God's Kairos.

Which of these three areas is God calling you to dive deeper?

Communion is a way for us to commune with others across all locations around the world.

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, since all of us share the one bread.

1 Corinthians 10:17

There were many verses from The Last Supper that were significant in my early spiritual formation. I remember spending months in John 15 learning about what it meant for Jesus to be the true vine and that we were His branches. I would go to the adult forum at church to ask questions about whether we could truly do nothing apart from Christ as He declared in verse five. I spent so much time meditating on vines that I started to feel like leaves were going to sprout from my ears. Jesus' teachings during communion were so familiar to me that they became a primary source of comfort for me no matter where we were in the world.

When we were overseas, we visited Paphos, Cyprus. Our experience was at first very unwelcoming. The neighborhood we were staying in still worshipped the Greek deities. As we walked the city, we passed by a restaurant that had a sign in the window stating that Christians were not welcome. I was wondering if we should return to our hotel and just order food to our room, when we turned a corner and came across a small church that could seat maybe 20 people. We discovered that it was built on the site of Paul's persecution. The stone that he was tied to and lashed 39 times was still in the courtyard. Though it was a sacred and historical location, it had been covered over and largely neglected by the community. Recently someone had begun to excavate the site to uncover the original worship space that had been significantly larger.

As we walked the grounds, we could see where the feet of soil had been cleared away and underneath the original mosaic was bursting forth. The image was covered in vines and the ancient Greek stones spelled out the phrase "I am the true vine."

The same words that Jesus spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper, are the same words that have transformed the church for two-millennia. We are hearing the same living words, eating the same living bread, and drinking from the same cup until Christ returns.

Who do you feel connected to when you come to communion?

Communion is a way for us to commune with others at the same time around the world.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling.

Ephesians 4:4

I heard a Lutheran make a statement that was almost correct. A person who belongs to a multi-site megachurch was speaking to a Lutheran. They were asking one another where they worshipped. The first person said, "I am part of a megachurch. We have over 50,000 people in our church." The second person said, "I am part of the Lutheran church, and we have over 2.5 million people in our church. At a glance it is easy to see where both are coming up short by give-or-take 2 billion people.

Paul was speaking to the church in Ephesus about divisions in the congregation. He reminded them that there is no separation for those who are in Christ Jesus our Lord. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:1-6).

When we commune on Sunday we are communing with the Presbyterian church across the street, the Missouri Synod church around the corner, and the Pentecostal Church down the road. We are at the same table as our family members around the country who are wearing sweaters to worship while we are in shorts. We share the paten and the chalice with those communing in Gaza and Israel, with those worshipping in Russia and Ukraine.

When we watch the news we rejoice with our family around the world that are celebrating the Eucharist, and we cry out in prayer for those who partake in the body of Christ in the midst of tribulation. The meal transcends space so that we are all eating from one host together.

Who do you pray for when you come to receive communion?

Communion is a way to remember that we drink from the same cup of suffering as Christ.

*And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink"
Mark 10:39b*

Three times on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus tells the disciples that he will be killed and resurrected. "And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise" (Mark 10:32b-34).

This did not concern James and John, if they believed Him at all. They were concerned with sitting at Jesus right and left when he conquered Rome and established His new throne in Jerusalem. They did not understand that they were not on the road to revolution; they were on the road to resurrection. If they understood that they would have also begun to come to terms with the fact that for there to be resurrection, there must first be death.

The cup that Jesus drinks from is the cup of suffering. The seven bowls of God's wrath in Revelation 16 are God's judgment on a sinful world. Jesus drank from that cup and absorbed the righteous judgment of God. It was His blood that covered over the people of God saving them from eternal punishment. James and John boldly step into this salvific discourse, and without a second thought inform Jesus that they can certainly drink from this same cup.

The baptized are redeemed from eternal conquest of death that was awarded to us by our Christus Victor but still partake in Christ's earthly suffering. "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same mindset" (1 Peter 4:1). Communion reminds us that when we drink, we are sacrificing the empty promises of this world and following Jesus to the cross. That in our humble sacrifice others would come to know the love of Christ.

What challenges is God calling you to endure for the sake of others?

Communion allows us to see and recognize Christ.

*For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.
1 Corinthians 11:29*

A few nights ago, our family watched *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In J.R.R. Tolkien's world of Middle Earth, the wizard Gandalf was an ancient spirit who took the form of a man to help foster relationships between different races all while wielding cosmic powers of the eternal realm. When he comes to the Shire, he introduces himself to the Hobbits as a jolly old man who brings fireworks to entertain the children. When he discovers that one of the Hobbits named Bilbo has taken hold of a powerful ring, Gandalf implores him to leave it alone and not keep the power for himself. Bilbo has become so friendly with Gandalf that he begins to argue and lash out at the wizard. It is at this moment that Gandalf fills the house with an eruption of ancient magical energy causing Bilbo to shrink back in surprise. Gandalf reminds him that though he may present as a kindly old man, he is in fact a being of supreme power who is not to be trifled with but does want to help the people in their time of need.

Communion is a place of welcoming where grace is bestowed to us without restriction. It was during the Last Supper that Jesus made the world changing proclamation that He no longer called us servants but called us friends (John 15:15). It is this intimate familiarity that can draw us close to His everlasting embrace of love, but also carries the danger of causing us to forget that He is the omnipotent ruler of heaven and earth. We rightly have the ability to boldly approach the throne of grace now that we no longer need a mediator because we have been given the righteousness of Christ (Hebrews 4:16). We still are called to pause and realize that communion is common in our lives but is not a common experience. The loving embrace of grace is united with a holy reverence for the awesome power God's gift of love.

How do you show reverence to Christ during communion?

Communion is a way to proclaim that Jesus died for our sins.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:26

We are part of an ironic denomination. Mount Zion is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. “Evangelical” comes from the word “evangelism.” If you were to ask our members what the word “evangelism” means, I imagine we would receive a strong cocktail of confusion for those who couldn’t define it and severe apprehension from those who could. Evangelism comes from the Greek “evangelio,” which means “to proclaim.” Speaking God’s love.

Many Christians have an easier time saying the right things than they do doing what God has called them to do. Our community usually struggles with the opposite issue. We have an amazing community of people filled with the spirit of Martha who would gladly feed the poor, clothe the naked, and care for the afflicted. Yet the idea of proclaiming the gospel can send a cold shiver through the veins of most Lutherans in our community. The truth of evangelism is that it’s all found in the feast of the Eucharist and how that is expressed through our frequent gatherings together.

This doesn’t end at the formal communion service. It is fleshed out and continued in our large group events, small group Bible studies, one on one conversations, and culminates again where it began in worship. Our actions secure the words of life from Jesus Christ, but we are all called to share about how much God loves us with those around us. Sadly, actions are not enough. If they were it would be like an emotionally absent father who said to his son, “I will show you my love by going to work, paying the bills, and driving you to school, but please don’t make me talk to you.”

Love has to be spoken as well as lived. Communion is a way where we can experience both the proclamation and the incarnation of God’s love for us and we are called to share that with the world.

Who is calling you to tell about God’s love for them this Lent?

Communion is giving us grace we don’t deserve.

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:9-10

Grace we don’t deserve is another redundant phrase, but it also falls into the infamous category of dangerous familiarity. We use grace so often and in so many different contexts that its powerful significance can easily fade into sacred obscurity. If a word means anything we want, then it ceases to have meaning at all. Since the Eucharist is one of the two sacramental “means of grace” we affirm as a church body, it can be helpful to define it more clearly.

Picture a courtroom scene. There is a defendant on trial for a crime they most certainly committed. An accuser is seated in the place of the prosecutor whose job is to condemn the accused to the greatest punishment possible. There lastly is an advocate who attempts to defend the defendant against the endless attacks railed against them by the prosecution.

In this scenario we are the defendant. As much as our defense attorney attempts to convince the judge of our innocence, the evidence is irrefutable. We have sinned against heaven and earth and the only just punishment is the death penalty. The judge could choose to be merciful and just cancel the punishment out of compassion, but then there would be no justice. Sin would have no cost and evil would ultimately become the new law.

Instead, the judge declares the defendant guilty of all accusations and agrees the only just punishment is death. The law must be satisfied, so the judge comes down from his seat, takes the shackles from the accused, and places them on his own wrists. He declares that he will take the place of the convicted and die in his place. Grace is the undeserved gift of God’s salvation given to us freely because He has paid the just penalty for us through the death of Jesus on the cross.

When we partake in communion, we are tasting the freedom paid for us by the substitutionary sacrifice of the Christ’s death. His grace is free to us because He paid for it with His life.

What is a time you have seen God give you grace you didn’t deserve?

Communion is a way of looking forward to a new life in Christ.

*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,
I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which
God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:13-14*

One of our favorite traditions at Mount Zion is nailing our sins to the cross on Good Friday. This is the opportunity to physically write the things that we have been carrying with us for far too long. These could include things that we have done to harm our relationship with God and others or things that were done to us that have caused bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness in our hearts. Writing it out is cathartic enough and can lead to a more common spiritual practice of journaling our prayers to God throughout the week.

Yet there is something even more powerful about taking these physical acts of confession and actually nailing them to a wooden cross. There is a finality to the ritual, that reminds us that, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

There is a difference when we ask for forgiveness from something that we plan to do again or have no plan to actually root out the transgression from our lives, and when we come to the cross with the full intention to leave it there and return to our lives transformed by the power of Jesus’ forgiveness.

The truth is that in our communion service each week, the exact same call and response from God is taking place. We are called to reflect on the struggles we have had in the previous week between the Eucharist. We are invited to come forward to lay those burdens at the feet of the cross, and then we have the words of forgiveness spoken over us. We get to leave those struggles at the altar and go forward as new creations. Our sin was cast as far as the east is from the west and blotted out from eternal remembrance. Even if we don’t take the papers outside and physically burn them, the same experience is taking place in our hearts as we are refined by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

What have you continually asked for forgiveness that can be given to God?

Communion reminds us that Jesus descended to the darkest depths of death in our place to ransom us from our condemnation.

“Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)
Ephesians 4:8-10

This is part of the Apostle’s Creed that the leadership of the church has struggled to understand since the fourth century. Every time a new Lutheran hymnal is developed, in the last 100 years it has gone back and forth between professing that Jesus descended into Hell or that he descended to the dead. We are ultimately satisfied believing in the result of Jesus’ death and the life that we have through His resurrection from the dead.

That being said, we should not shy away from meditating on the mysterious qualities of Christ’s character. Our God is big enough for questions, wonder, and theological tension that ultimately rest on the salvation that comes through Jesus’ death on the cross and defeat of damnation. Here are some things that can be helpful to contemplate the next time Jesus’ death is proclaimed at the Eucharist.

All of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The just penalty for sin is death and without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22). God saw that we had rejected Him and condemned ourselves, so He staged a rescue operation by sending His only Son to die in our place (John 3:16). He who knew no sin became sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He experienced the full weight of sin, death, and the devil so that we could be saved. Christ’s death on the cross was the decisive victory over the powers of evil, liberating humanity from their bondage and opening the way to everlasting life. Importantly there is no part of cosmic creation where Christ has not gone, no place where He does not have dominion, and no place where He is not the King of Kings.

What kind of life would you live without the saving grace of Jesus?

Communion is sharing in the blood of Christ.

*The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?
1 Corinthians 10:16a*

I grew up with Craig who lived next door for much of my early childhood. The Wyborny family moved in when I was about three years old and then moved out when I was about twelve years old. We remained friends until he died in 1976. We were the same age and even though we had different interests, we played together constantly. At one point, we watched a movie in which two men cut their palms with a knife and then put their bleeding hands together to become “blood brothers.” Craig and I did the same the next day using Craig’s knife. That act always stayed with me, especially after his death.

Throughout scripture, blood speaks to us as life. Blood was life, alive and very sacred in the life and living of God’s people. In Communion, our Lord gives to us His life. His blood comes to join our blood. Our life, our living, our blood is constantly being made new each and every time we join with Christ to receive His Body and Blood. We have the very life of Christ flowing through our bodies, feed each muscle and organ. As Christ’s blood moves with ours, we are in the act and promise of being sanctified, being made pure and holy as the Holy Spirit directs our organs, our muscles, our minds to live as Christ calls us to live. May our words and deeds reflect the blood of Christ forming our lives this day and always.

*When do you feel the power of Christ
flowing through you the most clearly?*

Communion is a way to dive deeper into your relationship with Christ.

“Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you”
James 4:8a

We all get drawn into the “ways of the world;” willingly or unwillingly. I recently had fraudulent charges on my debit card, and I had to deal with the bank to cancel and dispute charges. Then, I had to go through my auto-pay accounts to replace the account number with the new one. I am drawn into the results of criminal activity which stirs anger, bewilderment and despair. “Oh Lord, when will this end?” It’s not going to end because these are the ways of warped humanity, broken humanity, misled humanity.

As we engage with the world around us, we seek to walk and set our feet on paths of right ways and righteousness. As we daily must draw near to the world to exist, the world with all its goodness brings along with it darkness underlying. It’s at such times when darkness draws us, that the faithful tend to draw closer to the Lord. We may seek faithful fellowship to express our dismay, or remember certain Bible verses, or open our Bibles to seek what God speaks to us about such matters. We draw near to God and God draws near to us. This is promise, God’s promise.

Each Sunday, faithful gather and in many congregations, Holy Communion awaits. We draw close to God as we gather around the rail. And, as God promises, the pure grace of God comes in promised Body and Blood. God’s mercy, care and promise arrives directly from the God of promise. After a tough week of engaging and being drawn into worldly ways, we get to draw near to God and God draws near to us in mystery and in reality.

Where in your life is God calling you to draw nearer to Him?

Communion is a way for us to share in Christ without the barriers of race, ethnicity, class, or heritage.

“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” James 2:1-4

I stopped at the store to pick up some food items for our Community Meal. I was coming from a funeral and I was wearing my clergy “gear”. As I walked toward the store’s doors, someone asked me for money, of which I really did not have any cash and I could offer only, “Sorry, but I have no cash.” The response was, “Some Christian you are!” Well, I got what I needed and headed back to my car. As I was unloading the cart, I could see someone from the outskirts of the lot heading right for me. He had a brisk walk that was a straight line to where I was. I thought, “Oh boy, another disappointed customer heading my way. He’ll ask for money, I have no money to offer and then words of judgement will come forth.”

I am so used to this routine, and it is tiring. As the young man with dirt caked hair and a dirty oversized jacket was yards away, I was positive that I had a face of disgust and frustration. He came close and then asked, “Can I take your cart for you?” My heart, to this day, still sinks when I share this story.

How often do we judge without relationship? I judged this young man with never engaging a word between us. Certainly, his appearance set a tone but not until I got a glimpse of his heart was the negative judgement exposed in my own heart. I got in the car and prayed for forgiveness. I know I am forgiven and yet I am not at a point in which I can forget. Maybe, this is a good thing?

Where do we show preference or lack of preference to others, perhaps before we have even met them?

Communion is a way for us to rehearse for heaven.

*“And I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”
Luke 22:29-30*

I think of all the tables in our home in which I ate a meal. We had the kitchen table that got a lot of use. We had a coffee table in the living room we would sometimes use to eat a meal. We had a picnic table in the yard. We had TV trays, or tables, to eat from. Then, we had the dining room table. The dining room table was for family time. You know, not just a place to eat a meal, but to be with family and have conversation, sharing the day, getting on the same page, for celebrations with larger family, for forging and keeping our identity. So much of the way we see life today most likely comes from gathering at the dining room table.

In the verses for today, Jesus is actually reminding the disciples about their new identity as disciples of Christ. The disciples were talking about greatness and who will be the greatest disciple. Jesus reminds them that He came to serve. He sets the table and serves the meal which is Himself. This is the place from which discipleship is rooted; deeply rooted. We gather at the table Jesus made, and we dine on the food that Christ prepares and we, as disciples, gather at a place of identity. And this is not a place made with human hands, but with the very incarnation of God’s love and grace.

As we return to this place of pure love and grace again and again, we rehearse the welcoming and humbleness that our Lord gives in this place and in this meal.

When you come to communion, what reminds you of heaven?

Communion is a way for us to commune with others across all time.

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, since all of us share the one bread.

1 Corinthians 10:17

Jesus reveals to the faithful that He is the Bread of Life. When communing with the Lord in and among His Body, we are communing with all the saints who are in the Body. This is the promised feast we hear of in the Old Testament. (Isaiah 25:6-9) The future is now! in this meal. But does that mean that as I commune today, with those who have passed, who tormented me in younger days? Does that mean that I'll be communing with those who have brought pain and suffering into my life? What kind of heaven is that going to be? These questions come from the ways of being human rather than coming from the salvation which has come and claimed our entire being, including our mind.

To commune with someone who has bullied constantly or periodically, those who stirred doubt and despair upon us (I include myself in this group) is really a testimony to the power of God's love and grace. To enjoin with the other saved sinners in a Messianic feast speaks to the incredible transforming, faithful promising of God to save, heal, restore, redeem and recreate as a testimony of the greatness and power of our Lord. This power dwells within God's people and within each of us this day for as we commune, the future promise of God is now, for we ALL partake of the one bread.

Who do you have the greatest challenge feeling connected to when you are at the communion table?

Communion is a way to remember that Jesus is the Manna from Heaven.

"Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." John 6:32-33

"It was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but it is my father..." The original DoorDash. Not only does the Lord deliver to your house, but to all of your neighbors; even the neighbor who is so annoying. The Lord delivers to all and doesn't stand around expecting a tip. As a matter of fact, the food arrives at no charge. And what do we do? Are we like God's people back then, we too speak to God in a manner, much of the time, that expresses that I ordered a pizza and not this manna. God gives freely that we may live freely and yet, do we tend to desire to keep finding comfort in the old ways of life, like when we were slaves?

The manna came and went and fed until God's promise of a land became a reality. The manna was no longer necessary, but the providing of nourishment for God's people will continue to fill the needs of a royal priesthood. The Bread of Heaven, the One who feeds thousands on a hill and continues to feed thousands of generations throughout history through His Body and Blood does not go away and will always be the necessity for True life and True living as we walk this land with eyes and hearts of faith. And not only eyes and hearts, but hands that share in the bounteous presence of our Lord in this world and in the fullness of the kingdom to come.

What is something miraculous that God has provided for you after praying "give us today our daily bread?"

Communion is a pure, unblemished place.

“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”

1 Corinthians 10:21

As one who is educated in Fine Arts, I also spend time trying to apply that education into actual works of art. When I want something to pop, or to stand out, I use complementary colors. These are colors that are opposites on the color wheel – red/green, blue/orange, yellow/purple. In my most recent attempts to learn watercolor, complementary colors work, as long as you keep them separate. Once the yellow and purple blend together (an action that is not desirable) I find that the blending colors form a new color which is actually the opposite of the desired effect. Most the time, one gets an ugly dead lifeless and dull area rather than the two complementary colors keeping their distinct color and bringing about an area within the artwork that stands out.

Living by faith as the Spirit works in us, creating a holy and sacred being, we seek ways to keep ourselves from being blobs of dead color and remain sacred in word and in our life's actions. The world continues on its sacrosanct way to absorb all things sacred, but as people of faith we have this sacred meal. This is God's meal and there is nothing in this world that can take the Pure Grace from coming to touch, empower, forgive and bring pure joy into the lives of Christ's faithful followers. Here, in the gathering around pure heavenly meal, the sacred is empowered to go and restore that which we hold sacred in the world. Things like family, congregation, and life itself remain sacred when the pure sacredness of our Lord visits us day in and day out. Thanks be to God.

What are the places in your life that cause drain the color from your walk with God?

Communion is a way to remember what we've been forgiven for.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

2 Peter 1:9

It's interesting to take time and consider the image that “the world” has of you and of me. I get the impression that the image is always shifting and changing revolving around new products and ways of living that will make one's life full and complete. There is the constant tug to redefine ourselves and rewrite our history so that we “fit in” with the latest fad, latest and greatest technological blessing to make life more efficient and productive or the latest food group, medication or lifestyle that will bring you up to date with our status in the world. We seem to keep running faster and faster, not to catch up with the world, but to remain where we stand in the world.

At the table of Christ, we get to sit still. We get a moment to stop running and hurrying and seeking. At the table, we fall to our knees and stop. At this moment of stillness, we are given new life in the Body and Blood of our Savior. We take a moment to remember that we are not of the world, but we are of and in the Christ. We are reminded of whom we belong and of the Lord's promise to provide what we need, not necessarily what we desire. We are reminded that we belong to a faithful Lord and a faithful people who are set apart from the world to share in the peace that comes as our Lord comes to us.

What helps you be still and know that God loves you when you come to communion?

Communion is a way for us to enter into mystery.

*“He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ”
Ephesians 1:9*

I am proud to have children that know the Bible well enough to make jokes about it. In fact Davey’s very first joke that he made up himself and actually made us laugh was about Peter in the Bible. One of my kids’ favorite jokes is from Veggie Tales when the vegetables are outside of Jericho and want to go back to Egypt. They say how much better things were in Egypt, and an onion yells, “We were in SLAVERY!”

Humans are a mysterious species, with our forgetfulness and inability to follow through with the commands of God at times. And God still comes to us and speaks to us in his still, small, quiet voice. God tells us plans and actions and reveals to us mysteries that we do not ever earn. He just shares with us because we are his hilarious children, and he wants to be in relationship with us.

God enjoys us and enjoys sharing with us what He is thinking. No matter what you are processing, thinking, feeling, or doing, God wants to be a part of it all. Perhaps you are upset, God wants to hear about it. Perhaps you are sad, God will sit and weep with you. God is not a distant God, but a speaking, living God who is nearby. He is close enough for us to hear his whisper and feel his breath. Take time this week to sit in silence with God, to listen for his voice and what mysteries He wants to open for you.

When was the last time that you let your emotions have more power in your life than God’s promises?

Communion is a way for us to commune with others in the same physical space.

*“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, welcome one another.”
1 Corinthians 11:33*

One of the things I love about being Lutheran is taking communion every service. Growing up communion was done in many different ways at the different nondenominational and charismatic churches I attended. I loved that there was a routine to it when we did it, and I loved the way that no matter the service, communion mattered in a way that required reverence. The exact method may not have been the same everywhere, but we would stop and take time to focus in on the message of Christ’s salvation and sacrifice.

The blood and body of Christ were held up and spoken about in a way that was written on my heart as a child, then a teen, and continues to be engraved as I am an adult now. One of the things that makes communion special is the people that I get to take communion with. While my daughter is now in the choir, and my son is sometimes sitting with friends, I always make a point to go to the altar with one of my family, and when I cannot move freely to be with a blood relative I am reminded that we are all in Christ’s family now because we have been adopted, paid for by his blood.

And in that vein, I wanted to call on you today to kneel at the communion rail with someone new this week, make a point to switch sides or skip an aisle so that you can receive the meal with a different sister or brother than you have before. And thank God for the many people we have at this church to love and share with each week.

Who is God calling you to share love and welcome with this week?

Communion is a way to physically partake in our salvation in Christ

So Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, because my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.” John 6:53-58

Communion is full of rituals and traditions for each of us. And these can be as important as we make them. In South Carolina, our pastor said that something he loved about blessing the elements was how it made the entire experience of communion fill all the senses. He could smell the bread and wine as he removed the covers, see the colors, feel the bread as he broke it. All of these pieces come together when we take time to really focus in on these senses. This next communion, take time to note the texture of the bread on your fingers, then with your tongue.

Spend a second looking at the bread before you taste it, and look at the color of the wine and its smooth texture. Smell the elements, and perhaps even the perfume of the people around you. Note the colors of the altar, the cross, the light of the candles. And sit in the presence of God to thank him for his salvation, for bringing us a physical reminder of his love in this way. I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. (Psalm 116:13)

Which part of communion brings you the closest to God?

Communion is a way for us to examine our hearts, mind, & spirit.

“Let a person examine themselves, in this way let them eat the bread and drink from the cup.”

1 Corinthians 11:28

There are several parts of our church service that allow us to examine ourselves at the throne of God. Entering into church, we are in the holy place where God chooses to reside. In this sanctuary, we are given the opportunity to be freed from guilt anew each week. We have a prayer of forgiveness for sins known and unknown, and again in the Lord’s Prayer we ask for help to forgive others and for forgiveness again. And as we enter the altar to kneel for communion we enter into a reverence and another time to bow our hearts before God, to prepare our hearts for his correction and direction.

“If we were properly evaluating ourselves, we would not be judged, but when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). As we approach to ask for forgiveness, we are recognizing that we are blessed by God and being given a gift above all others to be called His children because of the sacrifice of Christ. And by accepting the truth that all have sinned, and that we have sinned in a way that hurt the heart of God and need forgiveness allows us to enter into that communion with Him fully, to hear His voice so clearly, and to share His love with others freely.

What are you still holding onto that you may need God’s forgiveness for?

Communion is Manna from Heaven

“Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.’” John 6:53-58

When reading about the manna, did you know there is an exhortation to eat, that is disobeyed? The people are afraid the manna will not be there the next day, so they try to save some, even though Moses lets them know that God said, “No one is to let any of it remain until morning.” But they didn’t listen to Moses; some people left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and smelled (Exodus 16:19-20). Obedience to God is not done because we want to earn favor or a ticket to Heaven. God gives us directions because He loves us and wants life for us. In fact, He will make a way miraculously for all of our needs.

When the Israelites reached the 6th day of manna being provided in the desert, “The Lord has said: ‘Tomorrow is a day of complete rest, a Holy Sabbath to the Lord...set aside everything left over to be kept until morning.’” So they set it aside until morning as Moses commanded, and it didn’t smell or have any maggots in it. (Exodus 16:24). God provided and gave directions to work as needed, and to eat as needed, and then He called on them to rest. I pray that we listen to the directions of God in our lives this Lenten season, and remember that His call on our hearts will bring us abundance and life.

What can you do to follow God’s call to rest?

Communion is a way to be spiritually fed.

If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you gather together you will not come under judgment.

1 Corinthians 11:34

God has always provided for His people. As the Israelites walked in the desert, they were tired and hungry. They began complaining, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!” (Exodus 16:3). And the Lord responds, “I have heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them: at twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning, you will eat bread until you are full. Then you will know that I am Yahweh your God” (Exodus 16:12).

The chapter goes on to speak to the requirement that on the 6th day, the people were to gather twice as much of the manna, and it miraculously would not rot or mold for the Sabbath day. In this way, God taught the people to rest (Exodus 16:30). God taught Israel to trust His provision through Sabbath rest. And each week for us God has preserved the act of eating and drinking with Him in the form of communion. We enter into this history of being provided for and fed by God.

Communion is a way to be spiritually fed. Instead of focusing on the hunger that will return in our stomachs, we long for our hearts and souls to hear the voice of God. We no longer need a mediator like Moses to speak to God on our behalf, we have been given the privilege of walking right up to the table at the altar to sit and eat with God. Just as manna taught Israel to depend on God’s daily provision, communion invites us to receive Christ as our true sustenance.

How can you prepare for a day of rest and rely on God’s provenance for a day each week?

Communion is sharing in the body of Christ.

*The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
1 Corinthians 10:16b*

We are not disconnected modern believers — we are participants in the same living story of God’s people in both the Old and New Testaments, and communion places us inside that ongoing narrative. “Now I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.” These verses at the beginning of 1 Corinthians chapter 10 invite us to realize that we are part of an epic story, connected to our biblical forefathers in many ways.

Not only do we get to share in the story of deliverance out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, following the cloud that contained the actual glory of God. Not only do we get to share in the miracles of manna being provided in the desert; we continue to share in this eternal story of Christ. “The cup of blessing that we give thanks for, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). Communion invites us weekly into this reality.

We are sharing in the love and sacrifice of Christ with those who approach the table at the altar with us at church, and are also sharing in this meal with those who have gone before us from years, to decades, to centuries before. This week as you raise the bread and wine to your mouth, think of all those before and raise your glass to them.

What story in the Bible do you most connect with?

Communion is where Christ gives us a New Command

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:34-35

A new command, this verse says. It is hard to believe that it was a new command because it has become such a natural way of living life here at Mt. Zion. One of the core values of Mt. Zion is love. People come here because they feel that the love we share is real. This authenticity speaks to people much louder than the sermons or the songs. We truly do show the love of Christ when we share peace with each other.

We have to be forced back to our seats during the sharing of the peace most weekends because everyone wants to share that love with every other person in the building. I pray that we continue to find people to love on throughout our weeks, that as Lent ends, it does not end our focus on the call of Christ in our lives to continue to love one another.

I pray also that you will find someone new to share that peace of Christ with in the coming weeks. Continue to share the love of Christ with all of those around you. Continue to be the people of Christ, welcoming anyone who comes in our doors. When you approach the altar for communion, bring those on your heart to Christ, our prayerful intercessor. Let the voice of Christ guide your hearts to actions of love.

How can you share God’s peace this week?

Communion is sharing in the blood of Christ.

*The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?
1 Corinthians 10:16a*

I grew up with Craig who lived next door for much of my early childhood. The Wyborny family moved in when I was about three years old and then moved out when I was about twelve years old. We remained friends until he died in 1976. We were the same age and even though we had different interests, we played together constantly. At one point, we watched a movie in which two men cut their palms with a knife and then put their bleeding hands together to become “blood brothers.” Craig and I did the same the next day using Craig’s knife. That act always stayed with me, especially after his death.

Throughout scripture, blood speaks to us as life. Blood was life, alive and very sacred in the life and living of God’s people. In Communion, our Lord gives to us His life. His blood comes to join our blood. Our life, our living, our blood is constantly being made new each and every time we join with Christ to receive His Body and Blood. We have the very life of Christ flowing through our bodies, feed each muscle and organ. As Christ’s blood moves with ours, we are in the act and promise of being sanctified, being made pure and holy as the Holy Spirit directs our organs, our muscles, our minds to live as Christ calls us to live. May our words and deeds reflect the blood of Christ forming our lives this day and always.

*When do you feel the power of Christ
working in you the most clearly?*

Communion is a way to remember that we will be given our daily bread.

*“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.’”
John 6:35*

What’s for dinner? The age-old question that makes a mother want to go to bed instead of eat. We are constantly preparing for the next meal. As soon as we eat, our bodies start moving that meal on to use the nutrients and before we know it, we have to eat again. The feeling of being full never lasts. Yet, Jesus tells us that He can keep us from hungering and thirsting! This spiritual satisfaction is true satisfaction.

With Christ we can truly fill up, because the food he provides is lasting. His peace and joy and righteousness are real and strong enough that we can not digest it. When we turn our hearts, minds, and eyes fully onto Christ, we are able to truly be satisfied. First, it allows us to know the truths God knows about ourselves as we are able to hear what God says about us. As we begin to believe these truths, we can also see how God sees our circumstances and the people around us.

Finally, we can turn our voices back toward God to share with him the praise, honor, and glory that he deserves as we realize how great the forgiveness is He has showered upon us. We can truly rejoice when God’s truth and presence are a daily part of our lives. May God bring you his constant presence, that you may feel His arms around you this week and every week going forward.

When do you feel the most satisfied by God?