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Sermon: The Sacrament of Holy Communion
Rose Hill Church
January 4, 2026

Introduction:

Today we are going back to school, and I will be talking with you briefly about the historical background and roots of our Protestant faith, reminding you that we are in the midst of a two-part series on the Sacraments we celebrate in our Presbyterian faith (also called the Reformed Tradition). As those who were here last week will recall, Pastor Kristin Jackson brought a wonderfully informed teaching on the first of those Sacraments, baptism. We learned from Kristin that our Presbyterian view of Baptism is that “it is all about God’s Grace”. We are baptized into Jesus’ death, dying to sin, our hearts are changed and changing, because we are forgiven and are no longer slaves to sin. And as we have died to sin, we are also raised to new life in His resurrection, and finally, we can embrace the fact that we are “cleansed by His blood and sealed by His Spirit”. This week we are taking a deep dive into the

Sacrament of Communion. But first, let's read our Scripture passage for today:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26
New International Version

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's Pray:

Before I get too deep into this week's subject, I want to lay the groundwork for today's message:

First off, the word Sacrament comes from the Latin word "Sacramentum", meaning an oath or pledge, or more broadly, "a revelation of the sacred".

Sacraments are ceremonies that point us to the sacred. For the first 1500 years of Christendom, the Catholic Church was the voice of

Christianity. Though there were historical shifts and splits along the way,

Catholics have always believed in 7 sacraments. These are:

- **Baptism, Communion (Holy Eucharist), Confirmation, Confession, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Ordination**

In our tradition we embrace variations of most of these actions, but we hold to only two Sacraments: Baptism and Communion. Now, I mentioned we would have a bit of a history lesson, and here it is:

What historically was called “The Protestant Reformation” began officially on October 31st, 1517, when a little known Catholic monk and University of Wittenberg professor named Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of All Saints Catholic Church, protesting the Catholic practice of indulgences (basically getting blessed or forgiven for giving the Church money) but also questioning beliefs on Communion and other Catholic practices.

This seemingly low-key challenge to traditional Catholicism began what became a massive and cataclysmic firestorm in Western Christianity, leading to the development of Protestantism, and the break from Catholicism for millions of people of faith.

In our Reformed Tradition, as I mentioned, we hold to two primary Sacraments, Baptism and Communion. It is not that we do not anoint the sick for prayer at times, or bless the marriages of Presbyterians, nor that we do not ordain our Elders. Rather, it is that in the Reformed Tradition we hold Baptism and Holy Communion to be the two sacramental pillars of our faith. Why do we believe so differently? 7 versus 2 Sacraments?

Well, it is because Baptism and Communion are the two Sacraments directly instituted by Jesus Himself in His earthly ministry. **In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded His disciples (and those who follow) to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel and baptize believers”;** there is also reference to this in **Mark 16:15. With Communion, the Apostle Paul relates to us in 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 that Jesus Himself tells us to “Do this (Communion) in remembrance of Him.”** This is also found in **Luke 22:14-23, and Communion is generally referenced throughout the New Testament.**

I think that in our history lesson it is essential that we understand where our beliefs come from, and how they differ from some other faith

traditions. Now let's turn our focus directly to Communion, called "Holy Eucharist", "Holy Communion", "The Lord's Table", or "The Lord's Supper" by various Christian traditions. These all mean essentially the practice of taking the bread and juice or wine in a sacramental service that originated with Jesus and His Disciples during The Last Supper, on the night in which Jesus was betrayed and arrested.

Communion as practiced by the Catholic Church for eons means that the elements of Communion, bread and wine, become the literal body and blood of Jesus, meaning the elements are transubstantiated. Okay, so how about we say this word together.

Transubstantiation

In addition, these elements are said to become a new sacrifice offered for both the living and the dead; in other words, Jesus' body and blood are once again sacrificed for the sins of the people.

So, I know this can be confusing, but stick with me here:

Now Martin Luther, and keep in mind he was a one-time Roman Catholic priest who was excommunicated for his beliefs; Well, way back in the early to mid-1500's, he came to believe that while the

elements were not literally Jesus' body and blood, they (Jesus' body and blood) were present alongside the physical bread and wine, thus the word he developed was Consubstantiation.

Let's say this word together, Consubstantiation.

Luther also argued against the idea of a repeated sacrifice for sins, stating that Jesus' single act of atonement was sufficient.

Consubstantiation seemed a definite move away from Roman Catholicism. However, other reformers during this time in the early to mid-1500's saw things a bit differently.

John Calvin is considered a founding father of our Reformed Theological faith. He held that Communion is a visible sign of an invisible grace, and that the Sacraments seal the promises found in the Word of God. He said, "This is a sealing of the promise that those who partake of the bread and the wine in faith truly partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, where believers experience a mystical union with Christ. Thus, the Lord's Supper strengthens the believers ongoing union with Christ and their walk of faith."

The Apostle Paul Himself affirms the power and impact of Communion, as well as the blessing of coming together as one body, saying in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17:

¹⁶ Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

So, rather than having to remember somewhat burdensome words like Transubstantiation and Consubstantiation, aren't you glad we can simply look to Communion as our experiencing a "Spiritual Presence" of Jesus Christ?

Folks, I want you to realize that through our participation in Communion we actually grow in our faith, in our relationship with Jesus Christ, and in community one with another by the partaking of Communion, in ways that simply having food together could never accomplish. **It is thus a covenantal meal for the faithful, one in which Jesus feeds and strengthens His flock by faith. We come to this table not simply to remember what Jesus did, although we do that, but we also come to the Lord's Table to receive Jesus in a deeply spiritual**

manner unlike anything else we do in our lives. We do this primarily in communion with each other, as this covenant meal deepens our union with our Lord Jesus and with each other as well.

In wrapping this up, I want to bring out three points for you and me to ponder about Holy Communion:

First, we must keep in mind that The Lord's Supper is rooted in the faith history of Judaism and Christianity. The first Communion was performed on a certain night, the night Jesus was betrayed, with His 12 disciples. The Passover Meal Jesus shared with His disciples was the marking of the remembrance of how God had delivered His Chosen People from the Egyptians. The Lord's Supper then began the process of looking forward toward God's redemption of all humanity through the arrest, torture, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Second, the Lord's Supper is about God's Gift, for Jesus tells His disciples, "This is My body, broken for you. This is My blood shed for you". Here Jesus is identifying Himself with the Paschal Lamb, the lamb that was sacrificed in connection with the Passover.

Israel was the story of a covenant that God initiated with them. Jesus is proclaiming a new covenant, one in which Jesus was entering into a relationship with those for whom He would die for.

Fourth, there is a proclamation, where we are to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. This is both a word of hope and a word of evangelism.

Let's Pray:

Lord Jesus, on the night You were betrayed You knew that not only would Judas betray You to the Jewish leaders and then to the Roman government; but You also knew that all of Your disciples would desert You in Your hour of need. And yet You chose to go to the Cross and give Your life as a ransom for humankind. And today, You know that we will fail You, will continue to struggle with selfishness and sinfulness and all the rest. Yet, astonishingly, You keep with us. You never give up on us. You are utterly faithful. Thanks be to God for Your Goodness and Mercy and Grace. Amen.