

Growing Spiritually
Taking the Sacraments Seriously
John 15.5,7; Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 6:1-4
Luke 22:14-20, 1 Corinthians 11:27-30
Sermon Outline

Introduction: The aim of spiritual growth is not to be good or happy or fulfilled (these are all by-products of spiritual growth, not the heart of it). It is to know, love, and be loved by God, thereby rediscovering our true selves in fellowship with him and others. Part of how we grow towards this goal is by taking seriously the sacraments Christ has given us.

I) Why should we take the sacraments seriously?

A) Jesus wants us to

1) He gave us the Lord's Supper as the great send off event before his greatest act.

Luke 22.19, 20: Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood

2) He gave us baptism as an essential part of our marching orders in the new covenant era.

Matthew 28.19: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing...

B) They are a vivid description and experiential communication of the gospel

1) Baptism: Union with Christ in his death and resurrection

Romans 6.4: ...buried with him...in order that... we might walk in newness of life

2) The Lord's Supper: Receiving the new covenant--forgiveness, a new heart, a new community

Jeremiah 31.31ff

3) Windows on deep Reality: not merely cognitive

4) Wired for mystery

C) We discover and experience God himself

Luke 22.15: I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you

Luke 22.20: ...poured out...

- The effect of his cross
- The extent of his love

II) How do we take the sacraments seriously?

By faith and reflection

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Once we define spiritual growth as the quest to get in touch with, and make a contribution to, deep reality, we discover that most people are interested in it. What are some of the larger realities into which people seek to place themselves?
- 2) The aim of Christian spiritual growth is to know, love, and be loved by God—who is the Source of all that is good, true, and beautiful—and thereby to rediscover our true selves in fellowship with him and others. How is this definition of Christian spiritual growth different from some of the others we might have encountered?
- 3) According to the Scriptures taking the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper seriously is one of the ways that we grow spiritually. Note the settings in which Jesus commands us to make use of the sacraments (Luke 22, Matthew 28). How do the contexts underscore the importance of the sacraments?
- 4) The Westminster Shorter Catechism Q 92 reads: "A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible (i.e., sensory) signs, Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers." Reflect on each phrase of this statement—especially 'instituted by Christ', "sensible", and "applied." What do these phrases add to, or how do they challenge, your view of the sacraments? Reflect on this definition in the light of Romans 6:1-4, 1 Peter 3:21-22, Luke 22:14-20, and 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:27-30.
- 5) Reflect on the following: "Public worship is not merely a cognitive experience—a lecture with some musical window dressing. It is properly an embodied experience in which we receive instruction on words, but also one in which we move, feel the physical presence of others, hear and sing music, and smell and taste wine and bread. God has so arranged it because he knows how we are made and he knows that there are multiple 'windows' into Deep Reality—both mental and sensory." How have the sensory elements of worship helped you?
- 6) What do the following phrases of Jesus in Luke 22 reveal about his heart, and the heart of the Father (when we see Jesus we see the Father): "I have *earnestly desired* to eat this Passover" [for how long had Jesus and the Father been waiting—consider Jeremiah 31.31ff]; "This cup is *poured out* for you..." [Note that neither the wine, nor even the blood it symbolizes, was literally poured out—so why does Jesus use flooding language]; "I will not drink...until the kingdom of God comes" [But then I will!].
- 7) What steps will you take this week to take the sacraments more seriously and to help your friends and/or family to do the same?