

Date: September 17-18, 2022

Title: *212: Celebration*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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Good morning. Let's take a moment and pray together. God as we are gathered at Orchard Hill today in the Wexford Worship Center, in the Chapel, Strip District, Butler, South Point, and Online, I pray that you would meet with each of us. God, would you let my words reflect your word today in content, tone, and emphasis, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last week we began a series that we called *212* representing the boiling point where water transitions to steam. And the idea is very simple, and that is you understand how boiling water works, how you put heat to a little bit of water and you raise the temperature until the temperature boils, hits the boiling point, and then there's a transition in what happens. And whatever's in the pot changes, the water changes, and it's a very functional thing.

And the reason we've called this series *212* is that there's something similar that happens to us spiritually where, if you use the biblical term, lukewarm from Revelation three, we can be lukewarm in our faith or we can be people who come to the boiling point, who are transitioned to a different state spiritually.

And here's my guess, and that is, if you've been around church for a long time, you believe for a long time, or you're newer to church, newer to faith, maybe you haven't crossed the line of faith, you're still examining, exploring, thinking about what is faith for you, that at times there can be some spiritual frustration. And what I mean when I say that is you come to faith in part because of this idea that you can have a relationship with the God of the universe and that God will work in your life and bring about transformation.

And yet sometimes what happens is you live your life and it doesn't feel like there's a lot of transformation. It doesn't feel like God's that present. It feels like God can be far away. And it would be easy sometimes to simply say, well, just apply some of these heat's spiritual disciplines to your life, and then you'll be transformed.

And what we're doing in working through the Book of First Corinthians is just taking the next passage. And so, we talked last week about how cultural adaptation can be like cold water to our boiling pot or spiritual pot. And today we're going to talk about how worship, and especially a solemn celebration, can actually add heat to our

spiritual lives and how just as when there's enough heat applied to water, it is transformed. When there's enough spiritual practice applied, we can hope for and believe that God will bring about transformation.

Now, if you've lost somebody in your life, you know what it is to remember when they passed. In fact, if you've had somebody die who's important in your life, you probably, on the day that they die year after year, have some memory of them or some way to commemorate it.

My dad died several years ago and he died on the Friday right before Memorial Day. And so, as a family, my mother and I would on the weekend of Memorial Day, for several years, we didn't do it the last couple of years for a variety of reasons, but we would drive down to the cemetery of the Alleghenies where my father's grave was. And we would visit and talk about him as we would drive down, and then we'd go back to my house. And because we're Bjorklund, it's a Swedish name if you didn't know that, we would have Swedish pancakes. And that was our way of remembering my dad, her husband.

And, what would happen the first couple of years was my mom would get in the car and she would cry. She would feel it and everything else. And then we'd tell some funny stories and have some memories. And all of a sudden, what was a somber occasion became somber and yet joyful simultaneously. And if you've lost somebody, you know that sometimes that season is longer of the somberness. But there's a joy that you do have in remembering.

And today we're going to talk about a somber celebration that Jesus instituted right before he died, that Paul talks about in First Corinthians and what the connections are that we're to make when we come to the table and celebrate communion together. And so, here's the first connection that I'm just going to make, and this is the individual to the community. We see this in verses 17 through 22 and we didn't have this portion read earlier.

But here's what it says, "In the following directives I have no praise for you." So, at the beginning of Chapter 11, he starts talking about public worship and some of the norms that he wants. And he says here, I'm about to talk to you about something. I have no praise for you. And then he says this. "...for your meetings do more harm than good." Do you know that it's possible to do some things that you think you're doing to honor Jesus, for Jesus, that actually can do more harm than good? That's what Paul says right here. And he says it's around for some of us in how we partake in communion.

"In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it." The word divisions here is the same word that he uses in chapter one. If you were here in January when we began First Corinthians, we spent a whole week talking about division in the church. He uses the same word here. So, he brings it back and he says you even come to the communion table, and when you come to the communion table, you're still accentuating the divisions that exist inside the church.

He says, "No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval." So, he's not saying that everyone should agree about everything he's saying. I know there are differences and some of the differences are important, but there shouldn't be divisions. By the way, if you're ever part of a church where everyone agrees on everything, you're not in a church, you're in a cult. And so there should be some differences. He's not saying everyone should think the same about everything, but what he's saying is that some of you have made divisions a thing again.

And then he says this. "So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers." So, the church was more of a house church movement probably at that time, so what some of the people were doing was they would have special guests, maybe ahead of time or in a more intimate setting, and then the people who weren't as renowned in their community would be to the outside or coming later. And this was largely around wealth in this culture, as best we understand it. So, the richer people eat together, and then the people who don't have as much come and then they get to eat.

Now you may say, okay, that's not how the church functions today, and there may not be as many divisions around wealth. Maybe we substituted for other kinds of status, things like saying, oh, you've been educated in the way I've been educated. You like the things I like. You believe the things I believe. And maybe you don't actually have your own private communion dinner but what happens for some of us is we come to a worship gathering and our minds go to, can you believe what she wore? Can you believe what he posted on social media this week? Can you believe the way that they've chosen to do...? Fill in your blank. And what you or I are doing whenever we do that is we're accentuating the divisions instead of understanding that we are part of a whole and that the spiritual journey is not a solo journey, but it's meant to be a corporate journey. What we tend to do is accentuate these differences.

Here's how Anthony Thiselton writes about this in his commentary on First Corinthians, he says, "Any grouping that invites some Christians to feel that a segment within the community of faith that divides the church between us and them

starts down the slope that damaged the church in Corinth." So, anything that we do that says there's an "us", there's a "them", there's an "in" there's an "out", again, not that there are no differences, but when we say it's so substantial that there's a good group of people and a not so good group of people, we're going down the same path.

I got a text the other morning from a friend of mine and he texted me an article that talked about how pastors in our country are experiencing burnout at a high rate right now. And the article said we believe that this is happening in part because there's so much acrimony in the church around politics and different things. And so, people are being burned out who are in ministry. And I took it as a text that he sent to me to say, hey, I feel whatever you're feeling and I'm supportive. That's how I chose to take that at that moment. That's what I think it was.

And so, I just texted back and I said, you know, my guess is that it isn't just pastors, but people who attend church, who've been in church for a long time have also felt that because they've said, I'm not sure the people that I go to church with are like-minded anymore. Maybe I should be part of a smaller group that thinks exactly as I think.

But you know, the differences actually matter. You may agree with people on 70-90% of things, but those differences are part of what we need because, in the community of faith, it's when some people say, I read that differently, I see it differently, I think about it differently, that it actually helps us become who we are. And if your only connection to the community is the people who think like you, behave like you, dress like you, do the things you do, ultimately, it's not really a church. It's more like your own little cult that you form.

And something happened a couple of years ago in the church, the broad church that still is having an impact. A few years ago, the church went entirely online for appropriate reasons. But there was a transition that happened, and do you know what that transition was? We went from experiencing church and community, which means we're together, we're doing it as a community, to experiencing church on screen. And we started relating to church the way that we relate to everything else on a screen.

Do you know how I relate to things on a screen? I sit there constantly going, yes, no, holding my interest, or not holding my interest. Do I agree with it? Do I not agree with it? I'm getting off of this to something more interesting and something I agree with faster. And some of us have continued either on screens or with a screen mentality.

And what communion physically is meant to do is to make you say, I'm around a table, it's not a solo journey, and I'm not just about me when I come to do it in my own spiritual journey, but it's about something bigger and belonging to a community. So, the first connection that communion is meant to bring for us is that the individual is connected to the community.

Here's a second, and I'm just going to say that the past is connected to the present. We see this in verses 23 and following. He says, "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." And the simple statement here is that the bread and the wine, the cup, are meant to be done in remembrance of Jesus.

Here's what's important about Christianity, and that is Christianity is rooted in history. It's not just the philosophy of some philosophers or thinkers from an era past that say, here's how you are to live your life. But it's rooted in a historical person, Jesus Christ, who the church believes was Jesus as a man and God simultaneously, and that He went to the cross and died. And not only that, because he died, this isn't about the things that I do, but it's about what Jesus does.

So, what the table is meant to do is to remind us that Christianity isn't about the promises we make to God, but about the promises God has made to us through Jesus Christ. It isn't about the things that we do to serve God, but it's about what God has done through Jesus Christ to make it possible for you and for me to have a relationship with him.

And so often what happens without communion is we get into thinly veiled moralism where we say, if I just work a little harder or do a little more then God will like me better. And what communion does is it reminds us that Christianity is about a cross, and it's about what Jesus has done. He has made it so that you and I come to Him not based on our merit or goodness, but on the basis of Jesus' merit and goodness. And when that is how we see communion and Jesus, what it does is, it's a constant reminder of our need. I don't know about you, but I have a tendency to forget without the physical reminder.

I don't know how many of you pay attention to college football. I don't pay a ton of attention to college football, but when I do, I watch Pitt. I don't watch Penn State unless they're playing Pitt. But one of the things that happen at Pitt games every year or two is they bring out the 1976 championship team. Any of you who have been to a

game or watched it on TV know what I'm talking about. Just the other day, they had Tony Dorsett.

Tony Dorsett represents the 1976 championship team. Now, I don't remember 1976. I wasn't a fan. I don't have memories. I was too young to have memories of what was going on then. So why do they bring out this 1976 championship team all these years later? Well, part of it is to honor them. But part of it is to say we were once really, really good and we will be good. Don't forget that we're really like a storied program. Now, I know if you're a Penn State fan, you're saying what happened lately, right? Yeah, I hear that. But the memory of it is intended to spark something. And that's in some ways nothing like communion, but in some ways, it's very like communion in this. And that is the constancy of having the bread and the wine is intended for you to say, I'm remembering what Jesus Christ has done. Do this in remembrance of me. And because of it, I live in a new covenant, that the language of a new covenant and the blood was spilled for me, and it isn't about my effort, it isn't about my performance, and as I worship Christ for what He's done, it reminds me of my status.

So, communion connects the individual to the community, the past to the present, but it also connects my current life to the future. And here's where we see this. This is verse 26, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." And so here you have a backward look again, which is what we just talked about. It's backward-looking because you're looking back at his death, but then you have something that's outward-facing. You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. And proclaim here is a word that can mean a celebration announcement or a somber announcement.

In Romans chapter one, verse eight, we get a more celebratory sense of this word. Here's what we read. Romans 1:8 says this, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world." And here it is proclaimed, and here I believe that this has a sense of being celebrated all over the world.

And then in Acts 13:38, the same word again is used for a more somber announcement, that is the proclamation of the forgiveness of our sins. You have this celebratory and yet somber proclamation idea. And so, this is both kind of backward-looking, outward-facing, and then thirdly, forward-hoping because he says until he comes.

One of the things that the table is intended to do is to remind you that there is coming a day when there will be a feast in the kingdom of God and everything will be made right. That the future of a Christian, a person who hopes in Jesus Christ,

believes in Jesus Christ, is not an ethereal, disembodied existence in some kind of heaven where you play the harp and sing in a bad choir.

But instead, it's that Jesus Christ returns to Earth, he reigns, His kingdom is established here, and He redeems what's broken and restores what isn't right in this world. That's the future that you hope for. And the idea of coming to this table is to connect your current life to that future, to say, when I experience brokenness, when I experience hardship, when the world seems to be spinning out of control, I've been given a promise by the God of the universe that one day I'm just experiencing a part and there will be a whole.

And it's a little bit like an hors d'oeuvre. Have you ever been to a wedding where the person walks around with a little hors d'oeuvre and they give you just this little light, nibble and you're like, thank you very much? And you think it's been hours since I've eaten. Could I have another? And they circle around and they come back with just a little bit. And it's meant to just give you a little taste so that when you sit down to the meal, you are ready to have the meal, not to satisfy you in communion, I wouldn't say isn't meant to satisfy you, but it's meant to be a taste of the beauty of the meal that will be when Jesus comes. So, you proclaim this until he comes.

I was speaking at our 2nd Act group a week or so ago. 2nd Act is our group of people who have retired and are in the second act of their lives. That's how they would describe it. They invited me to come and speak and when we got done, we had a little time of interaction of question and answer. And somebody asked the question, do you believe that we are kind of moving toward the last days? When you look at the news and the things that are happening in the world. You know how sometimes when you're asked a question, you say something and afterward, you think that wasn't half bad? It was just one of those moments.

They asked the question, and here's what I heard myself say. I said, here's what I know. And that is we are closer today than we have ever been to the return of Jesus Christ. That's absolutely factually true, right? You cannot argue with that. And then I talked for a little bit about some of the current events.

And here's what else is true. And that is, however, you read the Book of Revelation or some of the parts of the Bible that are apocalyptic, that is speaking of future events, whether you're somebody who says, I take this all literally and I'm trying to see how all the current events add up, or I take it more figuratively and I see it as part of the church age. Here's what's true. The Bible paints a picture of increasing brokenness in our world and increasing difficulty for Christians. In fact, if you've lived in the West, which most of you do, if you're here today in America, in the last 50 years, it has been

an unparalleled time of prosperity and ease for Christians compared to the history of the world and compared to worldwide events.

And all that means is when you read your Bible about what's coming, that brokenness, whether there's global or personal, is meant in part to increase our longing for the things that God will restore and rebuild. I don't know what the future holds, but I know that if you read your Bible, there could be a lot of hard things ahead.

And I know that even if the period of prosperity and ease is prolonged through my lifetime, your lifetime, there's enough brokenness in our individual lives to make us say, this world is not my home. This world is not as it should be, because even in our best moments, there's a fleetingness to it. There's a sense in which I can't hold to this moment in perpetuity, and that's intended to create a longing. And the table is intended to remind us that this isn't everything and to say there's coming a day when God will rebuild and redeem what is so hard, what is so broken right now.

So, communion makes a connection between the individual and the community, between the past and the present, and between my current life and the future. And then I would say it's intended to make a connection between my heart and God, between your heart and God. And this is where we come to these verses in verse 27 and following. Here is what we read.

"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." The word unworthy here is only used here in the New Testament, and it's a word that means to do so in a way that is improper or without heart. What he's saying is that it's possible to come to the table, take the wine, take the bread, partake of it, and not have it be done in a way that your heart is aligned with it or is proper.

And here's what he says next. "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." Commentators are divided on exactly what this means to eat and drink judgment on yourself and what it means to be sick and fall asleep.

Here's what I can tell you. It's not good. This isn't what you want. You do not want to eat and drink judgment on yourself when you come. And so, what is communion intended to do? It's intended to connect our heart to God in such a way that we say I'm thankful because God is the one who's done for me that I can't do.

And so, if you're a person who's here today at any of our campus locations or online, the idea is to say we practice open communion. You probably heard us say that. Meaning whatever your church background is, you can come. But we always want to say maybe not every time we do it, but what we want you to be aware of is that if you don't believe, if you haven't come to a point of faith, don't come and partake of this because it's not intended for you to partake of it. And you can eat and drink judgment on yourself.

But not only that, he says, examine yourself. Now, why is this here? I think this is here because what he's doing is he's not only saying don't take this if you don't believe it, but he's saying, don't take this if you know you're not aligned to it.

Now, I know some of us will say, well, wait for a second, isn't the whole point of this that Jesus does for us that what we can't do? What do you mean? Well, to examine yourself, I think, in this context, means to see if you're making a mockery of the table by coming to the table with no intention of following Jesus in the actual details of your life. Because if you do, you're eating and drinking judgment on yourself.

And so, this is intended to be like a checkpoint where you say, am I living the life God has called me to live now? None of us will live it perfectly. So, when I talk about alignment, what I mean is, am I with a hard heart saying I don't care what God has said, I'm doing what I want to do regardless.

Maybe this is for some of us just where we've gotten okay with some patterns in our lives where we've said, you know what, I'm okay with this right now. Maybe we've been drinking too much, and certainly, that isn't a reason not to take communion in and of itself, but if we're settled with just saying, I'm okay with that. Maybe we yell too much, maybe we work too much, or maybe we've gotten comfortable with a thought pattern or an activity in our lives that we know is not pleasing to God.

This is intended to be a moment where you say before I come and partake of the table, I'm willing to confess and, say, God, this is not what I want as part of my life. And when you and I do that, then what happens is we can come to this table and as we come, we can say, God, I come and my heart is thankful for what you've done, and I want to be aligned with you in every area that I'm aware.

Communion is intended to connect us as individuals to a broader community. It's intended to connect the past, our present, our life to the future, and our heart to God. Here at Orchard Hill, we typically do communion about twice a month. I say about

because we're not rigid. Some churches do it once a month, some do it every week. We do it almost every week in our chapel service. The Bible doesn't prescribe how often. The reason we've landed on about twice a month is we've found that about half of us come to church about half the time. And so, if we miss it, it can be two or three months before we have a chance to partake in communion. And we found that every week can start to feel a little bit rote for some people. And so, we try to do it about twice a month in our weekend service as a way for you to be able to say, I'm partaking of this.

And this somber celebration is one of the ways that we fuel our spiritual life so that we get closer to the boiling point, so that we reach the boiling point, so that we experience transformation. And I don't believe there's any substitute for partaking in the physical elements in the context of a local church fellowship and being reminded of these things and saying, yes, this is what I believe and where I'm aligned.

Father, I ask today that you would help us as we come to this table, something you instituted thousands of years ago through Jesus Christ, that we would come and be able to experience afresh the connections, ourselves to the community, past to the present, our life to the future, and our heart to you. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.