

Baptism and Holy Communion

Lent 2 2018

Intro:

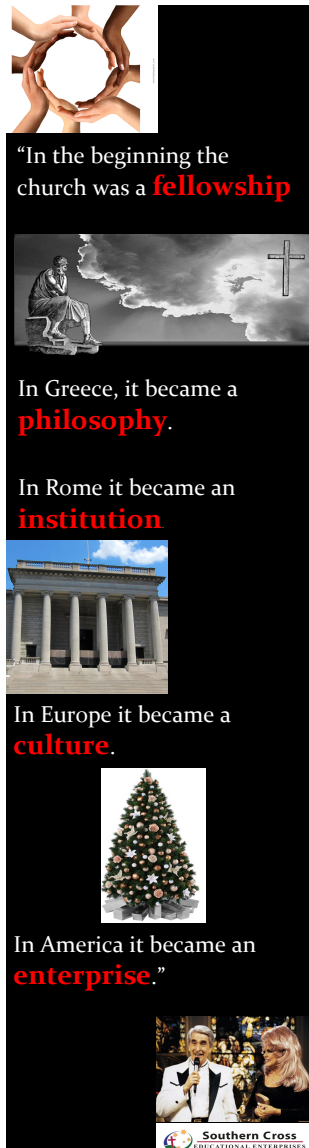


Last Sunday I was inspired by the readings for the first Sunday of Lent to speak about Baptism. Thank you to those who wrote to me about this. Hearing response helps me know how the message is heard and where people are coming from. The text is available on the Church Website.

For those who missed it, we looked at Jesus' command to baptize, considered what his purpose was in that and noted how others functions and agendas have been added to what Jesus intended to the point that Jesus' intention was easily lost.

Today I would like to look a bit more at baptism on the way to considering the second sacrament Jesus instituted and commanded us to do known variously as: Holy Communion, Lord's Supper or Eucharist. I am going to look at how baptism and communion are linked and what that means for how they should be practiced.

I want to consider this through fellowship, or '*koinonia*-fellowship' to note the Greek word behind this. To lead into this here is an overview based on a 1984 quote from a former chaplain to the US Senate.



"In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ.

Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy.

Then it moved to Rome, where it became an institution concerned with power and influence.

Next it moved to Europe where it became a culture structuring a civilization even until today,

and, finally, it moved to America - where it became an enterprise." ¹

¹ Dr. Richard C. Halverson (1916-1995), chaplain to the U.S. Senate, was credited in 1984 for this speech before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church:



That is a lot packed into a few phrases and it only considers the road west to the late 20th century.

What started as a community on the Day of Pentecost devoting itself to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers picked up several layers through the centuries.²

The Jesus movement was initially a *koinonia*-fellowship formed by the apostle's teaching who prayed and broke bread together.

What happened from then through Greece, Rome Europe and America helps understand why Jesus' command to make disciples, baptize and teach as he modeled has become so complicated and caused so much dispute.

I want to suggest that things get simple and clear when we get clear about *koinonia*-fellowship which is the true essential nature and foundation of Jesus' church.



So before saying anything more about Baptism or Holy Communion let's ask a question: What is *koinonia*-fellowship?

Take a moment to focus your understanding?

So what is this κοινωνία–fellowship that was used to describe the essence of the early church?

The Greek word κοινωνία / *koinonia* describes a shared participation, association or communion.

koinonia - fellowship
=
a shared:
participation, association
or communion.

- It is the bond among Christians that sincerely confess and live out the Lordship of Jesus.
 - It is the common connection that leads us to recognize someone as brother or sister because we beat with the same heart and share the same spirit.
- It is the sense of dismantled social barriers between people who are baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit.³
- It is the life of God in Christ shared between people.

This *koinonia*-fellowship is both what makes us to be church and the source/spring for what we do.

- It is what is marked, signed and sealed in Baptism.
- It is what we act out and feed from when we share a meal that represents the body and blood of the Lord Jesus offered for us.⁴
- It is what we see happening in self-giving *agape*-love between believers evidencing the active love of Christ.

Those are some positive statements about *koinonia*-fellowship.
Now to make that clear by saying what it is not.

² Acts 2.42

³ Galatians 3:27–28 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

If we consider St Paul's use of this word we can be clear about what is not meant by this:

koinonia - fellowship

For St. Paul:

Never a social basis but
through a common faith in
Christ

- Paul never associated *koinonia*-fellowship with society, companionship or community - it is not essentially social or humanly based.
- He did not use it as a parallel to *ekklesia*/church and it has nothing to do with local congregation - so not a synonym for 'church'.
- It is not a group of individuals united by a common idea - so not like a political party gathered around an ideology or branch of science like a royal society.
- It's not about a shared quest like the 'Fellowship of the ring'.

That knocks out quite a bit of how the word 'fellowship' is used and heard in English.

So coming down to where this might bite into our reality.

Q: Have you ever heard Christians talk about 'having fellowship together' and what do you think they mean by that?

Q: Have you seen church buildings with designated 'Fellowship Rooms'?

In reality this precious *koinonia*-fellowship is not something we create or practice.

It is not social or human in origin. It is a work of the Holy Spirit in Christ among people of faith.

That is essential to recognize. It is grace of God.

Practical Application For Mobile People

When you come into this or any church for the first time, as with any church, you need to be discerning. That is more than asking, am I comfortable here? Instead ask:

Q: Is God to be seen here?

A: The key issue in deciding that is *koinonia*-fellowship - not philosophy, institution, culture or enterprise.

Can you see that these people evidence connectivity in Jesus Christ?

What 'spirit' lives in this congregation?

Do they share a common faith in Jesus as Lord or are they having a lovely time together without Christ at the center?

The preaching might be sad, the music lamentable, the coffee undrinkable but if the people are well connected in Christ and his Spirit is flowing through that body it will be tangible at the door and then it's a church worth considering. *Hurray for the Welcome Team!*

Jesus told us to expect both wheat and tares so come down to seeing a critical mass of that congregation as centered and linked in Christ. It's not about the quality of the social life, or people being nice providing a home away from home.

Now back to a positive statement:

In John 15 Jesus provides a beautiful picture to describe the reality of this as he envisages it and what you get if it breaks down.



Jesus' picture of *koinonia*-fellowship is delightfully simple and organic centred on himself as The Vine. We who as disciples accept him as Lord and Saviour are the branches.⁵ What makes the branches flourish and bear fruit is their connection to the Jesus Vine. That is our *koinonia*-fellowship. If the branches try to break free and have a life of their own and form community apart from the vine you have something very different – a bundle of sticks. Branches without vine are futile yet that is what some Christians seem to be trying to achieve as if people alone are the basis for '*koinonia*-fellowship'.

Koinonia-fellowship is about being centered and linked in Jesus Christ so his Spirit can be present and active within and among them. It's an internet-like linkage that forms a temple of the Holy Spirit made of living stones built on Jesus as the cornerstone.

Application:

Now we may ask a few tricky questions:

Q: When is this *koinonia*-fellowship in Christ established?

Q: How does it come about?

That is actually a mystery. What we can be very clear on is when that coming to *koinonia*-fellowship is marked, signed and sealed which is at baptism.

The analogy that comes to mind is human reproduction in considering conception and birth.

In a baby we see a new creation. We may be very clear about when it was born down to the minute. That is clear enough to publish the time and weight on a birth card, but when was that new creation conceived? Father may say one thing, mother another, doctor or fertility clinic another thing again.

The essential spiritual re-birth is like conception, a bit mysterious while baptism is like birth, clear and demonstrable.

In church life this can create something like a prolonged pregnancy.

Children or adults for that matter may be part of the community as disciples but not part of the *koinonia*-fellowship as established by baptism.

People may be discipled, pastored, involved and active in and around church but until they are baptized they are not marked, signed, sealed members of the *koinonia*-fellowship of people recognized as re-born in Christ. Like adolescence that creates a tension, an in-between stage waiting for clear resolution.

In today's world the spirit of this age has no patience for this.

I don't know how many young couples have said to me, we love each other and that's all that matters so why do I have to go through a ceremony to prove it to people invited by my parents? By that they mean a wedding ceremony and not a civil or gemeente ceremony. In today's climate that logic is widely accepted.

⁵ John 15:1-10 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

That mind is also applied to baptism. “Well, God knows me and my relationship with him is my business so why should I have to be baptized?”

That logic signals that the Gospel has not landed or taken hold.

What would be the best answer to that?

Q: Why, if you know you love God should you have to seek baptism?

A: Because Jesus commanded it. - How can you claim to love Jesus while ignoring his commandments?

This is an example of the spirit of the age or cultural norms being in conflict with the commands of Jesus and the church needs to be clear about this.

This is a battle in an age where Westerners in particular authenticate their lives in their own way as individuals according to their own wisdom instead of the way God sets out through Christ.

So to the bottom line,

Baptism, marks, signs and seals a believer in Christ and marks their clear point of birth into the *koinonia*-fellowship of the church.

Holy Communion

That brings us briefly to Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper, *Avondmaal* or Eucharist.

With reference to *koinonia*-fellowship, this is the top level signing and sealing of fellowship in Christ. To join in peace, receive broken bread and share the cup as symbols of Christ broken and given up for us is a celebration of *koinonia*-fellowship in Christ.

As I bring out every time in the words of institution, it is something Jesus himself instructed us to do, drawing us together around his table and to him in bread and wine.

As baptism marks, signs and seals the birth into *koinonia*-fellowship, Holy Communion signs and seals our ongoing participation and belonging in it.

As a church community we can have a shared lunch. Everyone is welcome. That is community hospitality and a very good thing too.

However, as *koinonia*-fellowship we break bread as Christ’s body and then share it along with a cup of wine to show our shared participation in Christ. It is a demonstration and celebration of *koinonia*-fellowship among the initiated.

A simple reduced way to describe it is,

In Baptism we are clearly sacramentally born into the *koinonia*-fellowship.

In Holy Communion we are fed and sustained in that *koinonia*-fellowship.

This is how these two sacraments are ordered.

One marks beginning, the other ongoing sustenance.

They are both signs of God’s grace to us in Christ.

One establishes us in covenant with God in Christ and the other sustains and affirms that covenant.

Application

What this all means for Christians is that until we are baptized one is not yet recognized as part of the *koinonia*-fellowship.

One way several denominations used to mark and manage this was to distinguish between services of the Word and Holy Communion. A service of the Word was what we do on first and third Sundays as far as the collection. It was confession, readings, sermon, worship and prayers.

This was often conveniently in the morning, so in Anglican Tradition it became known as ‘Morning Prayer’ and it was open to all. Anyone, Christian or non-Christian could come to that.

Then at set times, there would be a communion service. This was only open to registered baptized members of the church.

Over the last century in Anglican Churches this changed towards almost every Sunday worship service being a communion service combining Part A, The Service of the Word and Part B, a Communion Service.

That worked so long as everyone was baptized or people understood who was welcome to come to communion and who should not come.

Take that into our context and it can get confusing to the point where we drift from sound practice of the sacraments Jesus instituted.

They are both intended to be opportunities of grace in which people can take hold of the Gospel in some tangible way. In Baptism it is with a ritual experience of drowning in water representing the grave with a profession of faith and in Holy Communion it is with the body of Jesus broken and bled for us in the form of bread and wine.

They are both gospel themed acts marking, signing and sealing first the entering into and then sustaining of *koinonia*-fellowship in Christ. They need to happen in that order.

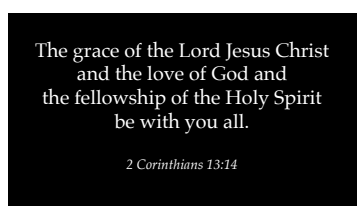
So if you or your child, understands and believes the Gospel, you or they may be ready for baptism as commitment to Christ.

That is the first thing to consider.

Even if you or they understand the saving work of Christ and believe, without Baptism you or they are not ready for Holy Communion.

To authenticate one’s faith in the Gospel of Jesus crucified and risen its baptism first, then communion.

As always please write to me about this if you want:



Finally from end of 2nd Corinthians:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the *koinonia*-fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.