

Psalm 105:1-6
 1 Corinthians 11:17-26
 Communion

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
 Midway Presbyterian Church
 July 1, 2018

No Silases at the Table

Introduction to the Psalm

Our Psalm today is part of a hymn celebrating God's faithful ways with his people. The opening verses invite the congregation to rejoice in what the Lord has done. Listen to these words from Psalm 105:1-6...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

Our Epistle Lesson today is taken from Paul's First Letter to the Church in Corinth. First the Apostle addresses a social snobbery at the Lord's Table, whereby distinctions were made between rich and poor. Then we hear what has become known as the Words of the Institution of the Lord's Supper. Listen to 1 Corinthians 11:17-26...

Sermon

In his 1966 poem, "The Death of the Hired Man," Robert Frost presents a conversation between a farmer named Warren and his wife Mary, about an old and undependable former employee named Silas. Silas had once helped with the farm work but left at an inappropriate time—"at the last haying." The dialogue occurs while he is asleep beside the stove. Warren does not want him back. But Mary disagrees. For she sees just a weary old man who has,

Nothing to look backward to with pride.
 And nothing to look forward to with hope.

Robert Frost's hired man has many modern-day companions—that is, people having nothing to look backward to with pride and nothing to look forward to with hope. And we might add—a present life with little meaning.

However, the doorsteps of the church have been for many such people, the place of new beginnings and transformations. As they have received the good news of the Gospel, they have found new joy in living. For our faith offers the Silases of the world something to look back to with pride, something to look forward to with hope, *and* something that gives meaning in the present.

First, let's consider *looking back*. The words on the front of our Communion Table are: "In Remembrance of Me." So this is a time to remember. All of us gathered here today have our memories—some joyful, some sad. And sometimes the smallest thing can bring forth a memory. A photograph. A phrase. A song. A simple fishing lure can remind me of good times going fishing with my father. In just a few seconds I can picture half a dozen lakes we fished together. Every celebration of Holy Communion is a reminder of the past. Not just any past, but a particular past. When breaking the bread and pouring the cup, Jesus said to his disciples, "Do this in Remembrance of Me."

In speaking of God's faithfulness our Psalm calls us to:

Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered. (105:5)

Remember the wonderful works God has done. Like calling forth leaders such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Like raising up Moses and leading the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Like providing Ruth, the loyal daughter-in-law of Naomi, a husband—Boaz. And by God's providence Ruth, the foreigner, becoming a part of the lineage of David, and thereby part of the lineage of Christ.

Looking back through the lens of scripture, we see that God created humans in his own image and was pleased with his creation, calling it good. Although we have stumbled and fallen, we are still persons created in the image of God. And throughout the Bible we are reminded that

no matter how low we go, even to wasting ourselves in riotous ways in a far country, we never escape God's love and concern.

We learn that in the fullness of time the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and his glory was beheld. We see Jesus reaching out to outsiders, tax collectors and sinners, the sick and sorrowful—all the Silases of the world. We see the faithfulness of Jesus, even willing to give his life for us, he who knew no sin becoming sin for us. For God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. What we could not do for ourselves, he did for us. Hanging there on a cross beside Jesus, a criminal asks our Lord to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. And Jesus assures him that he will. We read of his death. We read of his resurrection and ascension. His victory over sin and death.

In 1 Corinthians Paul gives us the Words of Institution of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Therein Jesus tells us that when we come to the Communion Table, we are to eat the bread and drink the cup *in remembrance* of him. As we *look back*, our faith reminds us that we have come from the almighty, eternal God, that we are important to him, that he loves us dearly. That by the life and death of Jesus we receive a new covenant, no longer based on the law, but on love. Under the old covenant we were like a criminal before a judge. Under the new covenant we are like a child before his father. And this new covenant was made possible by the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord.

So when we look back, we are reassured that we are not mere grains of sand in the hourglass of time; we are not mere bubbles tossed by the tides upon the shores of fate. Rather, we belong to God—sheep of the Good Shepherd—children of God. And our Creator is our Redeemer and Friend. We can look back with pride in our God, the God whom we have come to know in Christ, through the lens of Scripture.

Secondly, the Lord's Supper invites us *to look forward*. Paul the apostle declared to the members of the church in Philippi, "and I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (1:6) It was that same day to which Jesus referred in our scripture when he said, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." That day of Jesus Christ literally means the time of calling into being a new creation, the time when God will make all things new. The divine and eternal purpose will be achieved, for the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.

This is a great hope, a great expectation, a great promise. To be sure there is a mystery about it. But we believe that it will happen. We believe that God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year. And that one day the earth will be filled with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.

And Scripture assures us that our Lord has gone to prepare a place for us. A house not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens. Beyond that, "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor. 2:9)

To all of this we testify as we gather at the Table of our Lord and remember. Because of what God has done in mighty and wonderful acts and in the sending of his Son Jesus Christ. And because of what he yet will do through his Holy Spirit. There is joy ahead of us. Here at the Lord's Table, we all have something to look forward to.

The past. The future. Then thirdly, Holy Communion offers us the dimension of a *present* enriched by the past and the future. The Psalmist wrote:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
 and crowned them with glory and honor.
 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
 you have put all things under their feet. (Ps. 8:3-6)

Notice, “your *are* mindful...you *do* care,”— present tense. Furthermore, the church is called by Christ, “the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” That is to say, we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to have a similar effect upon the world today as did our Lord 2,000 some years ago. What is man’s chief end? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. And one way we glorify God is to be agents of his reconciling love on earth, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Here at the Lord’s Table our saltiness can be restored, our lamps relit.

Given that understanding, this Table invites us to peace and purpose in the present. So that here should be no Silases at this Table, bereft of a place of esteem in our Father’s world. Life in Christ is unlike the familiar patterns of the world. In place of degradation and abuse, there is reverence and respect for all of life. Instead of the politics of power, there is humble and joyful service. Instead of retribution and revenge, there is forgiveness and reconciliation. Instead of fear and anxiety, there is trust in God. Beyond the forces of disease and death, there is wholeness and life eternal.

My friends, we come to this table from separate ways to be one family in Christ. We come to celebrate God’s grace. We come with our sins, our heartaches, our griefs—seeking forgiveness, hope, and healing.

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper calls us to look backward in celebration of the power and faithfulness and love of God. It invites us to look forward, rejoicing in hope for our eternal future. And it calls us to open ourselves to transformation in the present. We are part of the people of God—with a history, a future, and a present of meaning and purpose—to be like salt and light, for the world.

So let us commune with God, with one another, with God's people throughout the world, as well as with those who live even now in the presence of the Lord of Life.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As a response to God's Word, let us stand and join together in affirming our faith, through the Apostle's Creed.