

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, October 7, 2018
Rev. Dr. David Thompson

Sacred Memories Can Heal the World

“This man who you crucified God hath raised from the dead and made both Lord and Christ.”

A dairy farmer, who was fed up with the new Nafta agreement, decided to make a little money on the side to make up for his losses. So, he bought a medical white coat and opened a medical clinic. He put a sign up outside that said: "Get your treatment for \$500 - if not cured get back \$1,000." A medical Doctor called Smith, who was positive that this old farmer could know nothing about medicine, thought this would be a great opportunity to earn \$1,000. He went to the farmer's clinic and signed the paper for treatment on the terms posted on the outside sign. The farmer came in and took him into his consulting area. The medical doctor said: "I have lost all taste in my mouth. Can you please help me?" The farmer said: "Nurse, please bring medicine from box 22 and put 3 drops in Dr. Smith's mouth." She did so, and Dr. Smith cried out "Aaagh! This is Gasoline!"

The farmer said "You are cured! Congratulations! You've got your taste back. That will be \$500." Dr. Smith quite annoyed, went back after two days figuring to recover his money. This time Dr Smith said: "I have lost my memory, I cannot remember anything." The farmer said: "Nurse, please bring medicine from box 22 and put 3 drops in the patient's mouth." Doctor Smith: "Oh no you don't, that's Gasoline!"

The farmer said: "Congratulations! You've got your memory back. That will be \$500." Dr. Smith (after having lost \$1000) left angrily and came back after several more days looking to get his money back.

This time Dr. Smith said: "My eyesight has become weak I can hardly see!"

The farmer said: "Well, I don't have any medicine for that so. So, I am writing you a check for \$1000. After he had written it he held it up for the doctor to see saying "Here's your \$1000 back."

Dr. Smith: "But that is only \$500."

The farmer said "Congratulations! You got your vision back! That will be \$500."

Some people who want to be remembered, plant a tree which lives for awhile or even a century or two. Others may build a building and name it after themselves or another person they want remembered. In Stratford they are currently naming streets after prominent residents. Some people write a book. Others write music and we remember them.

Once I was at a Messiah concert in old Massey hall in Toronto with the Mendelsohn Choir and the Toronto symphony orchestra. Elmer Isler was conducting. He received endless standing ovations afterwards. He had the soloists stand, the first violinist, the orchestra but people kept on clapping. Then suddenly he did something absolutely memorable. He lifted up the score and turned to the audience and raised it up high. The place went absolutely wild. Finally, Handel had his due!

When Jesus was to be remembered why did he choose bread and wine?

Sure, it was convenient, it would be on every table for dinner. Bread was a staple of life. Wine made glad the hearts of human beings as Scripture said. But why ask to be remembered every time we handled bread and wine?

Let remember that Jesus set this ritual up during the Passover meal. He could have meant every time you celebrate Passover, remember me. But the early church didn't do that and that tells us something. They remembered him at every communal meal. The church began in homes.

When Jesus first set up this memorial it was part of a meal. In the time of St. Paul, it was still part of a meal, but excesses developed. People were getting drunk on the wine and the sacred memory was getting lost.

By 100 AD or so the church began to build buildings and when that happened the communion was moved into the church service as a more fitting place to get the memory right. The communion became part of every service on a Sunday and this is still the case in the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches.

After John Calvin around 1546, communion was limited to once a month and after the government of Geneva got a hold of it, it was celebrated only 4 times a year. Calvin wanted it to be very special and did not feel that doing it every week as a ritual was the right thing to do. The Geneva council made it common practice among Presbyterians to celebrate it 4 times a year. For some reason the 4 times stuck. Modern Sessions in Presbyterian churches now have the flexibility to celebrate the sacrament more than the 4 times a year, but at least 4 times without fail.

Why do this?

A lot of people think that Christ wanted us to remember his sacrifice as a sacrifice for our sins only. But the words of Jesus however simply say “ This is my body **given for you**. Do this in remembrance of me.

What Jesus was driving at was not **just part of his life- the crucifixion**; he also wanted to be remembered for his whole life as a man for others. What he had given to the world, his teachings, his parables, his compassion for the poor, his miracles healing lepers and outcasts, his embrace of little children, his friendships with tax collectors muleteers and publicans and gentiles, his teaching about loving the enemy, his teaching about turning the other cheek, his teaching about forgiveness 70x7.

Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem to die and he knew he would suffer. Why do it?

His belief was that the Messiah had to suffer because Love is extremely costly, and his values totally threaten power. His values he knew clashed with the establishment as they still do to this day. Jesus loved so much that he was willing to die for what he believed. Like Martin Luther King. Like Gandhi, like many a martyr.

What a world we would have if we all embraced the values of Jesus! It would go back together wouldn't it? For what the world needs now is what Hal David wrote:

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love

No not just for some but for everyone

Lord we don't need another mountain
There are mountains and hillsides
Enough to climb
There are oceans and rivers
Enough to cross. enough to last
'Till the end of time

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No not just for some but for everyone.

This is what Jesus lived for, taught about, and was crucified for and then something happened.

The great Creator God acted.

No more was the wheel of suffering to turn endlessly without hope.

This man had been crucified by the establishment. They thought it was the end and so it was apparently. Crucified Dead and buried. The end of someone who had defied them for love.

But on the third day there was a sudden intervention in our History. He was raised from the dead.

As St. Peter said, "This man, who you crucified, God hath raised from the dead and made both Lord and Christ."

When we take the sacrament, we take the Lord Christ into our bodies into our blood stream. The identification is TOTAL and deeply personal. And who are we identifying with? The man who loved us enough to die for us.

As Dr James Allan Francis wrote in "The Real Jesus and Other Sermons" in 1926 .

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today...I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat

and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life...

Why? Because God acted in history.

As St. Peter said, "This man, who you crucified, God hath raised from the dead and made both Lord and Christ." And that is such good news for us and the whole world.

There are two Presbyterian gifts to the world-wide church. The first was the Great Scottish entry and the Second in chronological time was World Communion.

Today is World Communion Sunday. How did this begin?

Dr. Kerr of Shadyside Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh, first conceived the notion of World Communion Sunday during his year as moderator of the General Assembly (1930). It was his attempt to bring churches together in a service of Christian unity—in which everyone might receive both inspiration and information, and above all, to know how each congregation is interconnected one with another."

Celebration of World Wide Communion Sunday was adopted as a denominational practice in the Presbyterian Church (US) in 1936. Churches in other denominations were invited to celebrate with Presbyterians from the beginning, but it was not until 1940, in the middle of the second World war that this Sunday took on a deep significance. The values of Jesus were held on either side of the conflict. The Department of Evangelism of the Federal Council of Churches (a predecessor body of the National Council of Churches) promoted extending the celebration to a number of churches around the world. The practice became widespread. Today, World Communion Sunday is celebrated around the world, transcending boundaries of denomination, geography, and language.

The Great Scottish Entry of the Communion elements which we celebrate today was the brainchild of Andrew Mitchell Thompson. He was minister at St. Georges in Edinburgh. He adapted psalm 24 and wrote the tune with the precentor of Paisley Abbey. (If you want to see a beautiful church look p Paisley Abbey on the web. It has been restored and is absolutely stunning!)

Andrew Thomson wanted to emphasize the whole life of Christ, not just the death. He wanted to celebrate the resurrection and so he went back to psalm 24 and the great words that we will sing this morning:

Ye Gates lift up your heads on high, ye doors that last for aye be lifted up so that the king of glory enter may.

His idea was that the elements would be carried in at eye height in resurrection triumph not in defeat. Our children today will bring in the elements after baking the bread over the last three weeks.

"This man who you crucified, God raised from the dead and hath made both Lord and Christ."

Who is the Lord coming down the aisle at eye height? The psalm tells us: The lord of hosts and none but he The King of Glory is". When we take the bread and wine inside us we identify with this man in History who taught us all the sacred values that can heal the world. And they begin with us World Wide!