



The ROBERT E. WEBBER INSTITUTE FOR WORSHIP STUDIES

151 Kingsley Avenue, Orange Park, FL 32073

January 2013 Seminar Worship and Sacramental Spirituality Gordon T. Smith, Ph.D. (Rev.)

Session I: THE SACRAMENTAL PRINCIPLE: Speaking of Sacramental Spirituality

A. Word and Sacrament – and the Means of Grace

1. The profound duality that is at the heart of the Spirit's work in the world:
 - See Matthew 28 and Acts 2:38 for baptism
 - See Luke 24 and Acts 2:42ff for the Lord's Supper
2. The powerful interplay between Word and Sacrament in Christian worship

B. Thinking about the sacraments – why they matter

1. Does It Make Any Difference?
2. The Meaning of Symbol
3. Signs, Photographs and Symbols
4. Sacraments as Symbol — visual symbols and symbolic actions (ritual).
5. A Theological Perspective
 - (1) Creation
 - (2) Incarnation
 - (3) The Church as the Body of Christ
6. The symbol and the Ascended Christ: distinct but inseparable (the distinction is crucial; but it does not lead to dismissal of the symbolic action).

- C. **Sacramental spirituality:** the whole of the Christian life viewed through the lens of the encounter with Christ – in baptism, but particularly at the Lord's Table.

Session II: REMEMBRANCE

Introduction: the vital place of remembrance in Christian spirituality.

A. The Last Supper (Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19f; Matt 26:26-28 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

1. The Last Supper as a Passover Meal
2. The “acts” of the Last Supper; Jesus:
 - (1) took bread
 - (2) gave thanks over it
 - (3) broke it
 - (4) distributed the bread[Later]
 - (5) he took the cup
 - (6) gave thanks for the cup
 - (7) handed it to the disciples.

Some traditions thus follow this seven fold action, with two separate prayers of thanksgiving. Most traditions have four acts:

- (1) Bread and wine are “taken” or presented;
- (2) Prayer of consecration
- (3) Bread is broken;
- (4) The elements are served/distributed together.

B. The Remembrance principle in Christian spirituality

1. Remembrance as “the past made present”: contrast both nostalgia and memorial.
2. To remember is to re-member: giving integrity to our present; giving meaning to our “present”, and thus meaning to our lives.
3. The deep historicity of the Christian faith – we remember the God story; and our lives are then incorporated into the God story.

C. The Lord’ Supper – dimensions of meaning

1. Overview of the diverse theological perspectives on the Lord’s Supper.
2. Remembrance as the ‘base line’ – anchoring our experience of the Lord’s Supper in the historicity of our faith (no sentimentality): without the cross and the resurrection, which we *remember*, it is only a kind of pseudo-ritual/therapy.

Session III: COMMUNION

Introduction: **The Lord's Supper as Communion – with Christ and with one another.**

A. The meaning of the Christian life – see John 15:4

1. The call to mutual abiding
2. The two-fold way in which Jesus highlights the meaning of this mutual abiding
3. How is this possible – yes, the cross, but more – how possible?
 - The Holy Spirit as the power and presence of God;
 - The Logos – made flesh, but more, as teacher and preacher; the power of the “words” of Christ and thus of the Word.
 - The incarnation and the sacramental perspective
 - The interplay of the three.

B. Reprise: the Lord's Supper as participation the life of Christ

C. The Counterpart: our communion with Christ and thus with one another

1. The inter-communion and inter-connection of our lives – as represented by and as fostered by our participation in the Holy Meal.
2. The power of the Meal in making the church the church.
3. The call for intentionality – the passing of the peace and the restoration and cultivation of our mutuality.
4. The Lord's Supper and Ecumenism.

Conclusion: the interplay between communion with Christ and communion with one another: the counterpoint, the sequence . . . and the need for vigilance.

Session IV: FORGIVENESS

Introduction: seeking grace in the Lord's Table. Asking the question – what grace to you seek? One answer: the grace to know that we are under the mercy (that we are forgiven).

A. Baptism and the grace of forgiveness

1. The interplay between baptism and forgiveness in Acts 2:38
2. Baptism as a cleansing and purification rite.
3. The Lord's Supper as a renewal of the grace of this forgiveness.

B. Repentance, Confession and Forgiveness in Christian spirituality

1. The strange “loss” of repentance – and (ostensibly) the reasons for this loss; and the need to recover this vital dimension of the Christian life and of Christian worship.
2. Repentance, confession and spiritual growth – the critical dynamic and leverage point: confession and healing; confession and alignment to the reign of Christ.
3. The practice of confession – the need for catechesis at this point; the five aspects or dimensions of confession:
 - We acknowledge
 - We accept responsibility
 - We throw ourselves on the mercy of God
 - We appropriate forgiveness
 - We turn in the power of the Spirit (from sin).

C. The Vital Place of Confession in Christian Worship – Essential to the Faithful participation in the Lord's Supper

D. John 21 – the Lord's Supper as a Table of Mercy

Session V. COVENANT

Introduction: now to speak of the Lord's Supper and the purposes of God in the world – first, the moral imperative on our lives and second, the missional imperative.

A. The new covenant renewed in this meal

1. God a covenant-making God
2. Meals as the context in which covenants are established and renewed.
3. Baptismal identity – and its kingdom orientation; the Lord's Supper as the renewal of our baptism vows

B. The Lord's Supper as a renewal of our missional orientation

Side note: the missional implications of the Lord's Supper somewhat undeveloped in most Evangelical theologies of the Sacraments.

1. The mission of the Triune God in the world.
 - the Creator of all things is resolved to reconcile all things to God's self;
 - the redemptive purposes of God are fulfilled in Christ (see especially Ephesians 1) – and that the Christ of whom we speak is the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Christ; and,
 - the work of Christ in the world, post Pentecost, can only be spoken of in and through the Spirit.
2. The Ascension as a reference point.
3. The Church as a liturgical *and* missional entity
4. The place the sacraments in the mission of God.
5. Witnessing in Word and Deed to the reign of Christ.

Conclusion: the Benediction and the empowerment for mission.

P.S. Who is welcome at the table?

Session VI: NOURISHMENT

Introduction: an image – on wings of eagles, as those who lean into the grace of God.

A. The Christian Life – and Radical Dependence on the Grace of God

1. Contrast – the self-constructed life; the life of “seven habits” of the highly effective and the successful. The self-made person.
2. The means of grace – the need to distinguish between the means of grace and the grace of God (and yet, the indispensability of the means of grace).
3. The Christian life as one of constant leaning into the grace of God.

B. The Lord’s Supper as “heavenly food” – as manna for the soul; as life-source for the Christian journey

1. The stunning language of John 6 – Jesus could not be more explicit and graphic: we lean into and depend on Christ who is the ultimate “grace.”
2. All “means of grace” is actually a means by which Christ is present to us.

C. Thus, two critical questions –

1. The connection between the Word and the Sacrament: between the word and baptism; between the word and the Lord’s Supper.
 - The Word as the “content” of the Lord’s Supper;
 - The Lord’s Supper as the necessary response to the Word.
2. The matter of frequency – how often should the Lord’s Supper be celebrated?
3. Reprise: Acts 2:42 and anchor of the church in Word/Sacrament.

Conclusion: The disposition that we bring to the Holy Table.

Session VII: ANTICIPATION

Introduction: Robert Webber – used to speak of three dimensions through which we would view and approach our participation in the Lord’s Supper: looking back, looking to Christ, who is present; and looking ahead – forward to the consummation of time.

A. The Crucial place of hope in Christian (and human!) experience

1. Hope and reality: no nostalgia; no wishful thinking (no, “Britannia rules the waves” thinking).
2. Hope – not optimism, but a confidence on the ultimate purposes of God.
3. Hope and the confidence that Good will triumph over evil, that justice will reign, that “all is well and will be well” (Dame Julian)
4. The danger of cynicism – its pervasive power, in the church and in society but especially within the academy.

B. The interplay or intersection of two meals (each participating in the other)

1. The ultimate -- the marriage supper of the Lamb.
2. The immediate – the sacred meal of the Lord’s Supper. This meal anticipates and participates in the marriage supper of the lamb.
Side note: Webber used to speak of our worship as “rehearsal.” Well, in a sense yes, but the image needs refinement, for in the Lord’s Supper we are not merely rehearsing but actually *participating* in the meal that is yet to come. We enter into another sphere of reality.
3. Thus, we do not merely know that Christ reigns and that justice and peace will embrace; we feel it in our bones, in our bodies.

C. The indicators that our participation in the Lord’s Supper has been effective

1. Patience – with the church, with our world, with those with whom we live and work, and with ourselves.
2. Joy – a joy that makes no sense in the light of the reality in which we live, but makes complete sense, given the kingdom that is yet to come.

Session VIII: THANKSGIVING

Introduction: The Lord's Supper as *Eucharist*, as an offering of grateful praise.

A. Gratitude and Christian spirituality

1. Psalm 100 – we enter with thanks.
2. Colossians 3:15 – 17 – “and give thanks.”
3. Thanksgiving as obedience – from the eating in the garden to the eating at the Lord's table (in thanksgiving).

Side note: Bonhoeffer's observations – we enter into our common life not as demanders, but as thankful recipients.

B. The Lord's Table as Deliberate Thanksgiving

1. We enter with thanksgiving: The Great Thanksgiving – to the Creator and Redeemer of all things.
2. We give special thanks: for Christ and for his gracious work for us and in us.
3. And we give particular thanks for these gifts, “the gifts of God for the people of God.”

Side note: we have a choice, complain or give thanks. More: will we let go of despair? The Lord's Supper forces the issue. Will we give thanks: for our lives, for God's goodness to us (in particular)?

C. The Evidence of this thanksgiving – again, we come to joy

1. We let go of fear, mourning, discouragement and anger – each of which has its place, but each of which does not ultimately define us.
2. Joy is not a fabrication (no sentimentality); it is, rather, the fruit of living in dynamic and grateful communion with the Ascended Christ.
3. Joy gradually but surely infuses our lives – incrementally percolating deep into and within our consciousness. We become happy people.