

Sermon

The offering and presence of Christ

Year B 2021, Pentecost 12, John 6.51-58



A few years ago, during Holy Week, I was home alone. Prayerfully following in the footsteps of Jesus, and his way of the cross, suddenly, by God's Spirit, I was lifted out of my ordinary life, and taken up, outside of myself, in Jesus Christ, in his Passion. Standing there, I could only look on as, in awe and in wonder, Christ became present, in his Passion. I wept, as Christ offered himself, there, right in front of my eyes. Once, for all. All time. All people. For me.

Last week, we saw that Christian worship is a re-presentation, a literally, making present once more, of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And in such a way as Jesus' life and death are transfigured by Jesus' resurrection. By his participation in the eternity of God. 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life', Jesus said.

Here in worship we participate in Jesus Christ. His presence. His offering. In all of its atoning power. And in the power of his resurrection.

By this, we are made new. A new humanity. Made right, before God. At one, with God. And on this basis, with each other. And a sign of the future destiny of the human race, in the future kingdom of God. In our worship, the future, is here.

Justification is by grace, through faith. By grace – God’s ‘Marvellous Exchange’ in Christ. Through faith - believing trust in Jesus Christ, outside of us. In a ‘spiritual marriage’ with Christ. Who in worship lifts up our hearts, elevating us, outside of ourselves, into himself. As we trust, we make a trust fall, into his trustworthy hands. As we give our lives, our hearts, our self-wills, to him. Who is here, giving himself to us. Enabling us to come before God, with our prayers and our praises and offerings, not doubting in him, who is our pastor and our priest, bringing us before the face of God himself in heaven. When as a congregation and priest together we do in faith what the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper show us, by its words and actions. And what the church’s liturgy depicts, is an act of Jesus Christ himself, who not only invites us to the Supper, but who also sacrifices himself in it.

I remember as a boy being led by the hand by my father to the local Good Shepherd parish, on a Sunday morning. It was there that I first became aware of the presence of someone, of something, beyond myself, in the church’s worship. Of someone so awesome, so unique, so extraordinary, that my natural response was to hide my face away from him. So holy was he. Little did I know at that time, that all the while, he was lifting me up, beyond myself, up, into the very presence of God. Nor that he was calling me, into the world, a witness to him, his glory. And to bring that glory to others. The glory of God. The salvation of God. The future kingdom of God, now dawned in God’s world, in His Son.

In Christian worship, we are strengthened in our inner man, and woman. Our new creation in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said that, ‘If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.’

In Christian worship, we participate in the presence and offering of Jesus Christ. In his death, most centrally. But also in his life. His life understood as his life of dedication to the mission that he received from God. So that all who gather, who receive him in the bread and wine, are drawn into a life of mission, a life of witness to the reign of God. As this is present in Christian worship. In the presence of Christ

In the presence of God. In the presence of salvation. Into the future saved community of God's kingdom.

In worship, we participate in the once for all offering of Christ to God, only as we allow ourselves to be taken up also into Christ's offering of himself to the world. Only as we allow ourselves to be sent by God, into the world, to bring others into salvation, in humble obedience to the mission we have received from God, do we partake of his presence. The Christian church is on a mission to the world, as a witness, to the presence of salvation. Of the rule of God himself in the world. In Jesus Christ.

As the Supper grants us fellowship with Jesus Christ, and by him participation in the salvation of God's reign, and hence fellowship with God himself, we also receive the forgiveness of our sins. But forgiveness of sins does not define or exhaust the meaning of God's salvation. Fellowship with Jesus Christ, and by him, fellowship with God himself is the essence of salvation. Participation in the future kingdom, reign, or rule of God is the essence of salvation.

A participation, in the divine lordship, that draws all of the participants in the Supper of the Lord, into God's mission. To bring the message of good news of the kingdom of God to others. In witness to the living reality of the kingdom of God, present within the Christian church, in Christian worship, the Supper of our Lord.