

SERIES: Fifth Sunday Worship  
SERMON: **In Remembrance of Me**  
SCRIPTURE: 1 Cor. 11:17-34  
SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus  
DATE: August 31, 2008

The tiny town of Nerstrand, Minnesota lies fifteen miles east of Faribault and ten miles south of Northfield. Just a mile out of town is the Evangelical Cemetery, with fewer than a hundred gravestones, some dating back to the early 1800's when southern Minnesota was still Indian territory. The cemetery is on a dirt road and is surrounded by fields of corn and oats on all four sides. One of the grave markers along the back fence of the cemetery reads, "Edwin Samuel Roth, 1879-1971." He was my grandfather and was the one after whom we named our son, Eddie, who was born just six weeks before Grandpa Roth died at the age of 92. The other half of the stone bears the name of my grandmother, Clara Louise Roth, 1886-1985. She died at the age of 99.

Exactly one mile across the fields from that cemetery one can see a two story white frame house, where in a second floor bedroom Ed Roth was born just 14 years after Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. The house is still owned and inhabited by my relatives. My grandfather lived his entire life within 100 miles of that spot.

Whenever I am in the Minneapolis area I try to drive 45 minutes south to the town of Nerstrand. One purpose is to get some of the world's greatest balogna and sausage at my uncle's meat shop. A more important purpose, however, is to visit the cemetery where the world's greatest grandfather lies buried. There's something about standing there and looking from that grave to that house that brings the rich memories of that dear man closer to mind.

Ed Roth was well-known as the well driller in a four-county area. I can still spot farms along the road where I helped him drill wells when I was a teenager and he, at age 79, was still working six days a week with his home-made drilling rig he called "Betsy." I remember his incredible water witching, or dousing, whereby he could tell not only where the water veins were but also exactly how deep the well would be before he ever broke ground. I remember how he would take his 22 rifle down to the dump and shoot rats by the dozens and how he would catch catfish in the Canon river, using Limberger cheese as bait. He always ate the leftover bait before heading home.

My grandmother was just as special. She was a Norwegian immigrant and made the best lefsa in the world (just so you could keep her from putting lutefisk on it, which tastes like a combination of sardines and dry leather). Her homemade donuts and twists were enough to put you in a sugar-induced coma.

Just standing there beside that grave brings back a flood of rich memories. I'm not alone. All of us have visited the graves of loved ones or famous people as a part of the remembrance process. We've been to Lincoln's tomb in Springfield, to Washington's at Mt. Vernon, to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, perhaps to the thousands of graves in Arlington National Cemetery. Some make regular pilgrimages every Memorial Day to the grave of loved ones.

Memories are nourished at grave side. That's why the Pharoahs built the pyramids as their own tombs and why Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal as a memorial to his favorite wife. They believed that the more

elaborate the memorial, the more likely they would be remembered.

Isn't it strange, then, that the greatest man who ever lived left no physical monument by which to remember Him. His tomb has not even been identified with certainty, and, even if it had been, His body has not been there since three days after He died. A pilgrimage to his alleged tomb under the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is disappointing to most visitors, for what one finds there is crass ecclesiastical commercialism and blatant competition among the Catholic and Orthodox clergy. The Garden Tomb is much more serene and meaningful, but most archaeologists reject it as the genuine site.

But Jesus *did* ask us to remember His death—not by pilgrimage to a place but by observing a simple meal. Today I want us to look at the key passage in the New Testament that explains the Lord's Supper. Let's begin our reading in 1 Cor. 11:17:

*In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!*

Let's stop there for a moment. Have you ever considered that going to church might “do more harm than good.” We generally view church as a place of safety, a place to find forgiveness, a place where God is pleased to find us. But John Warwick Montgomery wrote a little book decades ago called, *Damned through the Church*. His point was that when churches are not teaching truth or practicing truth they can actually be a place of condemnation and clergy can be “blind guides of the blind,” as Jesus referred to them in Matthew 15:14. People can be lulled to sleep spiritually and end up worse off than if they had never attended.

What was it about worship in the church at Corinth that caused Paul to speak so negatively? The key factor was a spirit of division. Friends, God hates disunity in the Body of Christ. When Christians gossip about one another, question one another's integrity and motives, exercise prejudice toward those who aren't in their social class, or in other ways make distinctions among themselves, God is offended, and He promises to discipline those who practice such things.

Here in Corinth the divisions in the church resulted, ironically, from the Agape Feast, or Love Feast, which was a regular feature of the first century church. Its closest analogy today would be a potluck, or as my Calvinistic friends call it, Pot Providence. The problem was that cliques were developing. The wealthy and the socially prominent were saving seats for one another, sitting together, and pooling the sumptuous food they had brought, undoubtedly trying to outdo one another with their gourmet dishes and fine wines. Some were literally pigging out while others were getting smashed. Meanwhile the poor had little or nothing to eat or drink.

The result was that the Lord's Supper, which always followed the Love Feast and which should have been a time of rich worship, became instead a travesty. As one writer put it, “The Corinthians had turned the memorial of selflessness into an experience of selfishness and had made a rite of unity a riotous disunity.”

All of us, of course, can see the heinousness of taking communion while drunk, but do we see the sin in taking it while harboring attitudes of prejudice, resentment, or conflict with others in the Body of Christ? The very word “communion” speaks of peace, harmony, and unity with others in the church.

Let’s continue our reading. (23-26).

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

As he begins to describe the Lord's Supper in verse 23, Paul makes it clear that what he is about to tell them came directly from the Lord. It is important on such a controversial subject for us to know that this is not just Paul's opinion but divine revelation. The meaning of the Lord's Supper is debated endlessly, but I want us to focus on the fact that the Lord's Table is *principally*, though not *merely*, a memorial, a vehicle to remind us of the sacrifice which our Savior made for us.

Paul tells us that on the very night Jesus was betrayed, He celebrated the Passover meal with His Twelve disciples in an Upper Room in Jerusalem. The Passover was instituted by God when He delivered His people from their 400 years of bondage in Egypt. It celebrated the death angel's passing over the houses of those whose doorposts and lintels were smeared with lamb's blood.

Jesus took the Passover and transformed it into the celebration of an infinitely greater deliverance He came to bring. Passover reminded the people of the Old Covenant of their temporary, physical deliverance. The Lord's Supper reminds the people of the New Covenant of their permanent, spiritual deliverance.

After thanking His Father for the bread, Jesus broke the loaf and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this *in remembrance* of Me." The same was done with the cup, Jesus saying, "This is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, *in remembrance* of Me."

The one thing that is explicitly clear from this account is that the Lord's Supper is designed for remembrance. So whatever meaning one attaches to the Lord's Supper, remembering our Lord and His sacrifice on the Cross must be the focus of it. The question, of course, arises as to whether communion is more than an act of remembering.

We reject the Catholic teaching that the bread and the wine become the actual body and blood of Christ, but there is some sense in which participation in Communion is a sharing in the Body and blood of Christ. 1 Cor. 10:16 asks, "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?"

What does that mean? Think for a moment about the purpose of any meal. It is to take nourishment, is it not? The bread and wine are not just symbols. Otherwise we could simply have a loaf and a cup sitting on the communion table and meditate on it. But the bread and the cup are given to Christ's people to eat and drink. In this vivid way, the Supper shows us that it is of the essence of the Christian life to receive

Christ crucified and risen, and to partake of him. He said, “This is my body: take, eat.”

Two very simple, basic truths stand out to me here. The first is that Christ Himself is the believer's necessary food. He the bread of life. The Christian life cannot begin without him, nor can it go on without Him. He gives us new life when we first believe, but He does not then leave us to our own resources. The Lord's Supper directs us to Christ that we may feed on Him.

The second basic truth is that receiving is a necessary part of nourishment. There is no intravenous feeding in the spiritual realm. We cannot feed on Christ by osmosis. We don't find nourishment by sitting next to someone who has received food. We must *take* and eat. We have the responsibility of receiving Christ and finding nourishing by continual receiving.

We have not understood the importance of the Lord's Supper, however, until we look at the warning that is attached to it in verses 27-32:

*Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.*

I believe this warning has not always been well understood. Often it has been explained as teaching that every known sin must be confessed; only then can we be worthy to receive Communion. But friends, we are never worthy. If you look carefully the passage does not warn us about being unworthy; rather it urges us not to come in an unworthy *manner*. It is our attitude that is in focus. We must not take Communion flippantly or thoughtlessly; we must not take it just because it's on the schedule; we must not take it hypocritically, acting very holy while our hearts and minds are thinking about something totally extraneous.

I am certainly not opposed to confessing known sin before Communion (or anytime for that matter). But I think coming in a worthy manner means recognizing our intrinsic unworthiness and stretching out our empty hands to receive for ourselves what Christ so bountifully provides.

When Paul says that participating in an unworthy manner causes us to become guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ, I think he means we become guilty of mocking the sacrifice the Savior made. To trample our country's flag is not to dishonor a piece of cloth, but to dishonor the country it represents. And to come to the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner does not simply dishonor the bread and cup—it dishonors the sacrifice of the One in whose honor it is celebrated.

To make sure we come to the table prepared in heart and mind, Paul urges self-examination. If we fail to do so, rather than finding grace, mercy and forgiveness we may actually find judgment or discipline through communion. That discipline can include disease, disability and even death. Apparently some Corinthian believers had actually undergone divine execution due to their unworthy behavior at the Lord's Table. But as traumatic as God's discipline can be, it's far better than condemnation with the wicked. That's what verse 32 tells us: “When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will

not be condemned with the world.”

But, friends, the seriousness and solemnity of the Lord’s Table must be balanced by celebration. The early Church called the Supper the Eucharist, which is the Greek word for "thanksgiving." Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper is a feast of liberation. While we give thanks for Christ's death, we dare not forget His mighty resurrection and glorious ascension. That should produce overwhelming, abiding joy. If we miss the joy, we miss the ultimate meaning.

**Conclusion:** So what are we going to do with what we have learned here this morning? Well, for one thing we should use the opportunity provided us here to call to mind with new freshness the incredible grace that was extended to us when the Son of God took on human flesh. Remember His deeds, remember His discourses, remember His suffering, and most of all remember His death and resurrection.

Also we should acknowledge and affirm anew our unity as the Body of Christ, as we commune not only with the Savior but also with one another. Let us pledge ourselves to living out the truth that in Christ there is no male or female, no slave or free, no Jew or Greek, no rich or poor. We are all one in Christ.

Finally, let us do what the passage commands us to do: examine ourselves. We're going to take a few moments for silent prayer as all of us examine our lives, our motives, and our attitudes toward our fellow believers before we participate. If you are in conflict with another person in the Church, I urge you to seek to resolve that conflict before coming to the Lord’s Table. That may mean you quietly let the plate pass by and spend this time in prayer, seeking God’s help toward reconciliation. Let’s pray.