

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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Union and Communion

By Rev. Sean McCann

In the last Saltshaker I wrote how after five years as your pastor, one of my big prayers is that the Lord would grow us inwards together. Today I want to elaborate on that theme of community within the body of Christ, but to get there we need to begin with community with Christ himself.

Union and Communion with Christ

Our **union** with Christ is an inseparable and unbreakable bond. He has bound himself to us by the promise of his word, and we *know* that nothing can snatch us out of his hand: “For I am *sure* that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:39)

Our **communion** with Christ, however, is a different matter altogether. Though we can never be truly separated from him, sometimes it can *feel* as if we are separated from our Lord by a huge gulf. At times God *feels* close and our communion with him *feels* intimate, while at other times he *feels* distant and our communion with him *feels* strained. The same Psalms that tell of David, who prayed, “O Lord, do not be far off” (Ps 22:19), also record the word of the Sons of Korah, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1). Sometime God *feels* far off, and at other times he *feels* very present.

In a sermon, Rev. Alister Begg made the wonderful point that Christians need to hear and rest in what we *know*, not in what we *feel*. He told of visiting a church and being welcomed from the front by the question: “How are you feeling today?” His response – in his heart, if not on his lips – was: “I am not feeling very good today, pastor!” He then goes on in the sermon to say to that pastor: “Don’t ask me how I feel, ask me what I know!” Feelings change, but God’s truth stands forever sure. In the Christian life we can *feel* up or down, high or low, close to or far from God, but in the midst of it we *know* that he is our God, he is for us, and he will never leave or forsake us.

Union and Communion with the Body of Christ

Now, we can take these truths about our vertical relationship with God through Christ and apply them to our horizontal relationships with our brothers and sisters through Christ. First, what do we *know* to be true about our **union** with one another in the body of Christ? “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Cor 12:12-13) We *know* that “there is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” (Eph 4:4-5) To put it simply, we are united to one another in Christ as his body, and therefore we are united one to another in unbreakable spiritual bonds.

However, just as we don’t always *feel* united with Christ, we don’t always *feel* united with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We disagree with one another. We fight, argue, and divide. We judge and condemn one another. We are impatient, ungracious, and do not extend the benefit of the doubt. We are lonely, forgotten, overlooked, ignored. We yearn for spiritual fathers and mothers to help us grow, but we cannot find them. We yearn for spiritual children who we can help grow, but we cannot find them. We yearn for spiritual brothers and sisters with whom to share deep, open, and committed experiences of spiritual friendship, but we cannot find them. We let each other down, and we are let down by one another. The body of Christ is not what we hoped it would be.

With these truths in mind, how then shall we live? We can’t live as fatalists, like Eeyore from Winnie-the-Pooh, who lower our expectations so that we are never disappointed. But neither can we live like idealists, always looking for the perfect experience of communion with God and his people, and thus never satisfied with what he has provided for today. I reject both of these extremes, and rather believe that we must *rest in what we know* (the truth of our union with Christ and his body), and we must *pursue what we experience*

Continued on Page 2

September–October

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; crpchg@gmail.com).

The Lord’s Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

During Morning Worship:	During Evening Worship:
September 5, 19	October 31
October 3, 17	

Shepherding Groups:

September 5, following morning worship.

Every member is assigned to one of our elders for oversight and care. Each elder gathers his Shepherding Group every few months for fellowship and prayer.

Church Picnic:

October 3, following morning worship.

Weekly Events

Sunday:		
Sunday School	9:30 am	
Morning Worship	10:45 am	
Evening Worship	6:00 pm	Except for 1st Sundays

Weekday Evenings: Community groups meet throughout the week in various homes in and around Asheville. Contact the church office for more information.

Bible Study

For Men:		
Men’s Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
(Retired Old Men Eating Out)		
at Cornerstone Restaurant, Tunnel Road		
Norm Bomer’s Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays
For Women:		
Gail Albee’s Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Debbie Cate’s Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

Continued from Page 1

(communion with Christ and his body). Pursing communion with Christ means attending to his means of grace in the word, prayer, and the sacraments - it's called Communion for a reason! It means confessing our sins, receiving his forgiveness, and walking by faith in obedience to his word.

As we pursue communion with Christ, how do we also pursue the experience of communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Here are a few ideas:

- 1) Take advantage of opportunities for fellowship and community. This fall we are focusing on fostering community within our church. We have restarted monthly fellowship meals as an avenue to meet and befriend members within the church, we have restarted quarterly Shepherding Groups to foster spiritual openness and prayer within the body, we are structuring our adult Sunday School class to be less of a lecture and more of a discussion and prayer time, we have Mystery Fellowship Dinners to meet others and grow deeper together, and we are encouraging small groups during the week. These small groups are intended to foster community and deeper relationships in the church through prayer and sharing together, and I hope you can join one.
- 2) Attend the gatherings of the church with others in mind. Show up each and every Sunday looking to connect with someone new or to encourage someone who is downcast. Start with this mindset and be ready for the Spirit to lead you to someone in need. A key element to growth in relationships is intentionality, so focus on what you can give, not what you will get.
- 3) Seek out spiritual relationships within the body of Christ. Relationships with those with whom we have much in common

are easy; relationships with those with whom the only thing we have in common is Christ can be difficult and must be formed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Are your relationships spiritual? Are your conversations with those at church different from those with your neighbor? Start with asking good questions and listening with empathy, and see where the Spirit takes you.

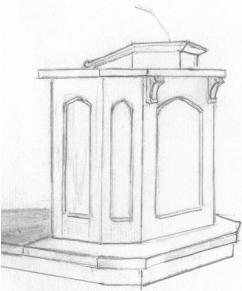
4) Lead with honesty and vulnerability. Don't be afraid to tell your brothers and sisters what you are struggling with. Open up about your fears and hopes, your anxieties and discouragements. This can be scary at first because we all fear judgment and rejection, but press through and you will help open the door for others.

5) Invite members into your home. The old saying goes, "Home is where the heart is." If that is true, then inviting people into your home is inviting them into your heart. In the 21st Century we live such isolated lives that exercising simple hospitality is a radical expression of our faith. Free yourself from the pressure to be Martha Stewart and just put out some paper plates and hot dogs – remember the point is spiritual relationships, not extravagant meals.

I can think of many more examples, but I've run out of space. Will you join me in this prayer for our church, that we would grow inward together? And will you join me in working towards that end, to foster a community in which we not only *know* that we are united to one another, but in which we *feel* that reality daily in our experience of communion within Christ's body?

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



As the seasons turn and a new school year begins, we turn to a new beginning of sorts in our sermon series through the book of Genesis. This summer we have journeyed with Abraham in his wonderings, successes, failures, and ultimately his death just a few Sundays ago. At times the promises of God seemed at risk of failing, but time and time again we have seen how the Lord provides land and seed to keep his promises alive. Now, with the death of Abraham, we will follow his heirs on a similar journey in the second half of the book.

This is probably the least defined section of Genesis. The opening eleven chapters focus on creation and primeval history, chapters 12-25 center around the life of Abraham, and the final quarter of the book is taken up with the story of Joseph in Egypt. Our focus this fall will be a few chapters on Isaac, but then for the bulk of the time we will follow the story arc of Jacob. Much of the story follows the pattern of Jacob's father and grandfather: he is sent off to find a wife, his wife is barren, so he turns to other women, and once his children are born there is strife and animosity between them – truly the sage was right when he wrote "there is nothing new under the sun."

But just as we observe these men fall into similar sin patterns of their forefathers, so too will we see examples them holding onto God's promises. There is much encouragement here to see ordinary and fallen men meeting the struggles of life with faith. Indeed, this is how they are remembered in Hebrews: "By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff." (Heb 11:20-21) Truly we see that sin remains, but grace abounds all the more.

If this sounds like you – sin and grace, struggle and mercy, victory and failure – then these stories are just for you, so I hope you can join us in search for the mercy of God in Christ, written in the pages of Genesis.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Sep. 5	Guest Preacher	
Sep. 12	Gen. 27-28	1 Cor. 12:12-31
Sep. 19	Gen. 29:1-30:24	1 Cor. 13:1-13
Sep. 26	Gen. 30:25-31:55	1 Cor. 14:1-25
Oct. 3	Gen. 32-33	
Oct. 10	Gen. 34-36	1 Cor. 14:26-40
Oct. 17	Guest Preacher	1 Cor. 15:1-11
Oct. 24	Gen. 37	1 Cor. 15:12-34
Oct. 31	Gen. 38	1 Cor. 15:35-39

Divine Providence and a Pastoral Internship

By Mr. Wilson Goins

The great preacher, J.C. Ryle once said "Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to a believer, without God's ordering and permission. There is no such thing as 'chance,' 'luck' or 'accident' in the Christian's journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God." At the beginning of this summer, I reached out to a pastor I hardly knew with the intention of receiving godly mentorship as I prepared for seminary, but the plans of the Lord far surpassed my intentions. What seemed to be an internship pulled from thin air blossomed into something far greater. This summer, not only have I learned the challenging, yet rewarding, duty that is pastoral ministry, but experienced the warm embrace of a true flock of God's people, and words cannot express my gratitude.

What have I learned this summer about the calling of pastoral ministry? I have come to know the high task of leading in the public worship of God and the rigorous preparation that it takes to fulfill this responsibility weekly. I have experienced the challenge of studying to preach God's Word whilst experiencing unexpected trials and occurrences. Not only this, but I have sat under the tutelage of a true shepherd leader and watched him while he endured one of the most unexpected and greatest challenges of his ministry. Most of all I have learned from Pastor Sean McCann that all of these tasks can only be completed by relying on Christ alone for strength in every situation.

What have I learned about word and deed ministry? I had the opportunity to sit and listen to the Elders of CRPC consider the good of the congregation and make tough decisions for God's glory. My most favorite memory of the CRPC Elders is our journey to Presbytery and our accidental detour through Tennessee on the way home. I have also observed the hard work of the deacons every Lord's day as they serve the flock. As well, I had the blessing of befriending the most knowledgeable Presbyterian Church administrator in history. Additionally, both Merry Chandler and I felt the care of the congregation in every aspect of their hospitality. The meals, the conversations, the hugs, and the prayers, all meant so much to us.

Above all else, an internship at Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church teaches one the beauty of Christ's bride, that is the Church, and the real gravity and importance of God's institution of it. I am forever grateful to every soul of CRPC, to my friend Sean McCann, and specifically the Sovereign God for placing me at CRPC this summer. Grace and Peace be with you all. Lord willing, I will see you very soon.

Books on Community

by Rev. Sean McCann

In line with the cover article on fellowship and community, I wanted to give a few book recommendations for your further reading. Back in February I took a weeklong study leave and devoted most of that time to reading and thinking on this very topic. Of the handful of books I read, here are three I think you would appreciate.

The first book on my list is the Enduring Community: Embracing the Priority of the Church by Brian Habig and Les Newsom. The authors are PCA ministers with experience in Reformed University Fellowship and write from the perspective of explaining the beauty and importance of the local church to graduating college students headed out into the world. On the topic of community, the authors write "The most fundamental definition of the church is a covenantal bond that a believer has with the person sitting next to him in the pew. Therefore, at the heart of believers' responsibilities in a church must be intentionality in building relationships."

Second on my list is a book written by two reformed Baptist pastors, The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive by Jamie Dunlop and Mark Dever. The thesis of this short and practical book is that authentic and gospel-revealing community has supernatural depth and breadth as a natural outgrowth of belief in God's word. The authors point out how any group of people can have the experience of community, but in Christ God brings people and groups together in supernatural ways that would never occur in any other community, and this shows the mystery of God (Eph 3:10). In this way, church communities are either gospel-plus communities (relationships founded on something in addition to the gospel) or gospel-revealing communities (relationships that would not exist without the gospel).

Finally, and from a bit of a different perspective, is Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This book tells the experience of Bonhoeffer – a pastor and professor in Nazi Germany – and other Christians in their underground seminary leading up to the second World War. His experience is of a tightknit group driven together by adverse circumstances and forced to share all aspects of their lives together. In this setting, he testifies that "the physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer." Like the books above, Bonhoeffer ties together the word with the experience of community: "The goal of Christian community is to meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation, for God has willed that we should seek and find his living word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's word to him."

Taken together, these three books paint a beautiful and challenging picture of the local church as God's agent in fostering community among the body of Christ. I hope you have a chance to pick up one – or all three – of these books, you will not be disappointed.