

Voices: An Episcopal-Baptist view of the Lord's Supper

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Although I was ordained in a Baptist church and am a Baptist pastor, my faith journey started in the Assembly of God and moved to the Episcopal church where I found most of my theology.

The Episcopal church is vastly different from Baptist churches for many reasons, but the one sticking out to me most is the Eucharist—or Lord's Supper, for my die-hard Baptist friends. The Episcopal church holds the feast in a much higher regard than Baptists and other free church traditions.

The best way I can describe the Episcopal feast is to say it is a “reverent celebration.” In fact, the church is so serious about it, they will not dispose of unfinished bread and wine, so they have a designated person to finish off at the end of the service what has not been taken.

The New Zealand prayer book says: *“Any remaining consecrated bread and wine, unless required for the communion of persons not present, is consumed at the end of the distribution, or immediately after The Dismissal of the Community.”*

Now, to be clear, I love the Baptist tradition for a lot of reasons and certainly did not write this article to speak ill of Baptist churches, but rather to offer a different perspective on one of the two ordinances Baptists observe.

Examining Baptist notions of the Lord's Supper

If you have attended enough services in a Baptist church, then you probably have participated in the Lord's Supper. Baptist tradition indicates the Lord's Supper generally is to be taken every quarter and should consist of unleavened bread—usually those papery little cracker squares—and grape juice—usually served in little plastic cups.

The Baptist Faith and Message states: “The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.”

I want to take this perspective and challenge it a little.

When we call the Lord's Supper a “symbolic act,” we take the risk of lessening its meaning and importance. Like diluting lemonade with water, it takes the power out. I believe Jesus intended more from the supper than just a symbol.

The Lord's Supper as covenant reminder

If we look at Scripture—specifically the account in Matthew 26:26-30, Jesus used the word “covenant.” Also, in Luke 22, Jesus is recorded as saying that the supper is the “new covenant established by [his] blood.”

From the point of view of Scripture, a covenant is not a small thing. We see this in the Old Testament covenants—Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic—which were more than a simple thing practiced every three months. The covenants were a promise of freedom and forgiveness.

When Jesus—the New Covenant—came, we received a promise from him that he will be back to take us once and for all. This good news is more than just a really cool apocalypse promise. It's the covenant of eternal life with the Trinity. When Jesus sat down with his disciples to share his “body” and “blood” with them, he was sealing this covenant.

As a result, the Lord's Supper is not merely something we do as a symbol of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Lord's Supper is a reminder that the covenant is still alive and active.

The Lord's Supper as a satisfying practice

When asked about the Eucharist and its importance, [Pope Francis said](#): “The Eucharist is simple food, like bread, yet it is the only food that satisfies, for there is no greater love. ... There we encounter Jesus really; we share his life and we feel his love.”

We are a people who hunger to be loved, but where can we find such wholeness? It has to be in the body and blood of Christ. Through the taking of the body and the blood, we experience the love of Christ in his promise to come back for us. Jesus is the only one who truly can satisfy our hunger for love. We have to celebrate that as more than just a symbol.

The Lord's Supper as discipleship

Baptists have disputed for years how often to observe the Lord's Supper. Some see the Eucharist as something to be practiced every Sunday, while others see it as a strict once-a-quarter institution.

While I was talking to a professor about this not long ago, he said the argument that the Lord's Supper will become a “meaningless or rote

practice” if taken too often is an invalid argument.

When we want something to become common practice to our children—such as reading their Bibles, praying, participating in worship, etc.—we do not tell them to do that thing only once every three months. Think about it, have you ever told a new Christian to pray only once a quarter? No! You tell them prayer is a constant practice, and it matters because it is a connection between them and God. Why is the Lord’s Supper any different?

Similarly, I think it is vital that we practice the Lord’s Supper more than once a quarter so we can become more acquainted with its importance, connect better with the covenant and be closer to Christ.

Next time you are taking the Lord’s Supper at church, remember: It is more than just a “symbolic act” we do because the Bible says to do it. It is deeper than that. Take it as an opportunity to reflect on Christ’s love for us and the covenant he made to return for us. Then, if you’re feeling especially passionate, suggest to your church leaders that they do it once a month or twice a quarter. After all, nothing can change if no one offers a suggestion.

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