

## The New and Lasting Covenant

11/6/05

Matthew 25:1 - 13

As I drove to Wakefield on Thursday morning, I switched the radio station (as I sometimes do) to Public Radio. I don't know classical music well, but generally find it a nice backdrop as I head over from Maine. I consider it to be a side benefit! On Thursday, the wind was blowing pretty well and in gusts. Leaves were falling. However, all of a sudden, as the trees seemed to encroach more closely to the roadside, the leaves really started to fall. It was like a snow squall, except the flakes were yellow and brown and, of course, larger. For about a half a mile, the leaves just seemed to dance before me. What seemed especially strange to me is that the leaves seemed to dance to the music! Down, and then up with a start, all to the beat and rhythm of what turned out to be Schubert's "The Princess of Cypress" or something like that. It was quite fantastic and surreal, because the music seemed to get louder as the leaves fell in greater number!

I am not generally inclined to having sublime moments, but I really felt as this happening that all was well with the world. That nothing was wrong. That peace was at hand. Everything was well with my soul. At least momentarily!

I want you to keep this image with you, or a really pleasant one of your own choosing, as we explore The Lord's Supper a bit this morning. I don't want to imply that the first Christians considered Communion to be an escapist activity, because by nature communion prepares a person for service to the world. However, in a broader theological sense, The Lord's Supper entrusted the believer with the portrayal of a day and age when they would rejoice at the Heavenly Banquet with Jesus. And what could be more sublime than that!

Jesus initiates such thinking at the Last Supper when he declares, "I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29) We can assume this remark had great significance for the disciples and the early church. Likewise we hear Paul instructing the church at Corinth to first bless each element and then be reminded that "as often as you eat this bread or drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor. 11:26)

We forget, although we may use the same exact invitation today, how essential it was for the early church to live in anticipation of Jesus' return, or his second coming. Today it is more "popular" (if that is the right word) to think in such terms if you are a conservative Christian. Books in the "Left Behind" series describe what happens during the second coming of Christ to earth.

While I think such depictions as “Left Behind” tend to go way too far and portray the future far too violently, I think we must realize what we are saying. Two things take place in Communion. The first is that we partake together of a common meal, understanding that here we pledge ourselves again to live for Jesus. The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible states that as the “redeeming work” of Jesus is remembered by Christians, it challenges them to once again pledge the “totality of their lives in Christian service.” In other words, we leave the table professing to the importance of the church’s work in ministry and mission. We go forth intending to bear the cross in our lives. To live lives of love reflective of the teachings of Jesus!

But secondly, and no less important (at least to Jesus and the early church), is that this New Covenant of Christ’s love points the way to a messianic or heavenly banquet. I think that this is the point where the image of leaves dancing to a symphony begins to have bearing! It is a sublime vision that we are offered!

We can live morally upright lives, and not be Christian. Lots of people do that, although I believe Jesus provides a pretty good and accurate moral compass. What differentiates us is that Jesus expected us to believe that one day we would eat together again, around a heavenly table, in an age of peace. There are so many stories similar to that of the Ten Bridesmaids. At the end, the Bridesmaids are advised to “keep awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”(v.13) This is clearly not a wedding as we might observe today. It is the banquet people will one day attend in the Kingdom of Heaven. As such, it is a reminder that this is, in part, what we all are living for – the future outpouring of God’s love in a way never experienced before. It is the teaching we see time and again in the Book of Revelation: “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.” (Rev. 3:20) The sublime, perhaps surreal...vision that is offered by Jesus himself!

Now I admit that I am moving into pretty shaky territory here. I am not a conservative Christian and I realize that there are widely varying interpretations of God’s future kingdom. However, I am pretty certain about this - that when Jesus gave of his life and then experienced resurrection – that this is a New Covenant that has already begun and in which we live. Today is therefore a new day in God’s realm!

I also think that we are living towards something. I am not certain exactly what, but when I hear the call to “eat and drink,” I feel inwardly the assurance that Jesus is looking towards God’s future. Because we have been delivered, so to speak...because we have been saved, (again so to speak)...isn’t it logical to assume that God has an ultimate dream, a plan and a purpose that will somehow unite the world in a way that has never before been experienced? Is it wishful thinking to assume that God will work to bring us around the table in this life or the next? I think it is important to partake of communion with the understanding that we are somehow bound together, perhaps beyond our understanding or in ways we cannot comprehend, ...not just this morning...but sublimely forever...as God’s precious love continues to unfold.