

GATHERED 'ROUND THE HOLIDAY TABLE
Communion Meditation –Second Sunday of Advent – December 4, 2011 –Revelation 19: 5-10
The Church of the Covenant

Let me tell you three stories about three tables. I'd like you first to envision a scene in your mind of gathering around a holiday table. Perhaps it is Thanksgiving dinner; or perhaps it is Christmas dinner. See the table and how it is set. Smell the smells of the meal cooking in the kitchen. Is there music playing and what is it? Who is there? What family members are gathered? What friends are gathered?

I see a beautiful table set with my family's china and silver. A wonderful centerpiece and special table favors made each year by my Mother. Each plate and dish and fork and spoon is carefully arranged because setting the table is my job. I smell the cooking of wonderful food. Perhaps it is the smell of turkey baking in the oven or the smells of baked ham. There are all manner of vegetables but I particularly remember the butternut squash filled with peas. I think of special music on stereo records that are officially antique now, but these are broken out once a year and the musical strains always put me in mind of the season. And then I think of the people gathered around that holiday table. I think of my parents, of course. But I also think of my grandmother and great aunt and uncle, all now gone to be with the Lord. I can see them there. I can even see the seat they normally would sit in. It is a time of joy and fun and comfort and holiday memories. And as we gather together we all hold hands and pray together. We pray for the meal and for our family. But as the years pass and as the chairs empty as people go to be with the Lord, we pray for those absent members as well. We remember them. There is a feeling of absence (they are not there) but there is a feeling of presence (they are also there in spirit). And we give thanks to God and to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for all the blessings we have received. And gathered around that holiday table are more than just those actually physically present. There are those loved ones as well. And there is Jesus, He is present. The invited guest always present over all those years.

A second table is our communion table. I think of all the tables where I have received communion over all the years. It is set with fine white crisp linen. The silver is shined and sparkling. Someone who loves the Lord has spent time carefully setting this table and making certain all the elements are "just so". There is a centerpiece and it is a cross, reminding me of the person and the reason we gather around this table as well. It is a meal but it is a different kind of meal. It is a holy meal; it is broken bread and a spilled blood. We feast spiritually upon the real presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I hear music quietly playing in the background –favorite hymns reminding us of the death Jesus died for us and the life He lives for us. It is a place of forgiveness and joy; we are at peace and the Lord is powerfully present and at work in us as we sit and sup with Him. And I think of sitting there at table with my Lord Jesus and seeing Him face-to-face. I think of Him sharing His life with me and I think of all the troubles of this world becoming strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. I see Him breaking the bread. I see Him sharing the cup. I see Him blessing it and blessing me. And whatever feelings that other holiday meal engenders within me this sacrament and the holy meal I receive from my Savior's hand engenders those same feelings, only more so. And then I feel others present with me. I think of the great "cloud of witnesses" that ever surround us and especially in communion. The saints who loved Jesus in this life and now love Jesus in the next life. And they are all here; ever present and surrounding me. And my grandparents are here. And my great aunt and uncle are here. And aunts and uncles they are all here, all gone on to be with the Lord. They are the great communion of the saints and in communion the communion of the saints are here; they are all here, spiritually present and alive forevermore because of what Jesus has done for them. We bring our feelings of loss to this table; the absence however brings the presence; the emptiness brings the fullness. And gathered around this

communion table are more than just those actually physically present. Those we love are here. And there is Jesus, He is present. The invited guest always present and especially present in the sacrament of communion.

Then I think of a third table. This table is set for us in heaven. How often Jesus uses the image of a great heavenly banquet to represent what heaven is like. His first miracle is set at the wedding feast at Cana. His last meal on earth is communion around a table in an upper room. His last image of all eternity is a banquet set in heaven for us. He says: *"Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:9)* In that day when we die and go to be with the Lord we emerge into eternity and into a great party. It is like the JOY of a wedding reception. The bride and the groom united together; two families united together; two sets of friends united together. The two become one, only now in eternity the two are Jesus and His church and we become united and one with Him and for all eternity. And we gather around another table, a table of rejoicing and celebration and joy. It is the greatest family reunion ever, for all those we love are present; all those we thought we had lost we reunite with them and we gather with them as we, too, become part of the mighty cloud of witnesses. But this is not a sad day for us; this is a day of fulfillment and hope and eternal love; this is a day when the losses in life become gain; this is a day when the sadnesses of life become joy. The table is set for us; the marriage feast of the Lamb is made for us by a living Savior, He who was dead but is alive forevermore has promised and written that promise in His own blood. And gathered around that table are all our loved ones. What a day that shall be! What joy will fill our hearts! What songs shall be sung in heaven! The only tears that shall fall in that day are tears of joy and amazement that all that Jesus has promised is true. That we have not hoped in vain. The absence of those we love in this day is replaced by the presence of those we love, only now for all eternity. And there at the center of it all is the bridegroom. There is Jesus; He is present. The invited guest now extends the invitation to sit and to sup with Him in close fellowship and for all eternity.

Three tables; one Savior. Envision now within your heart and mind what sitting around that heavenly banquet table at the marriage feast of the Lamb must be like. Imagine how much love and faith and joy await us and abide for us. Could those three tables today move us from feelings of loss to feelings of joy? Could those feelings of absence where those we love are concerned be replaced with feelings of their presence here at this table? And could we consider that the promise of Jesus, held in three tables, that those promises might lead us from sadness and loss to joy and eternal victory today???????

The three tables, when you think of it, are remarkably the same. The people gathered about them are remarkably the same as well. Ah, but it is the invited guest, Jesus Christ, who is the same, and makes all the difference in the world

Three tables; one Savior.

Lord Jesus, we invite You to come and to sit at table with us today that one day, one day, we shall sit at another table, with all those we love, gathered 'round a better holiday table, and for all eternity. Lord Jesus, we invite You to come and sit and sup with us today that we might feel the presence of all our loves ones, near or far, sitting with us around this table today! Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*