

RECONCILIATION IN DEATH
All Saints/ Memorial Sunday –Communion
November 4, 2018 Romans 5: 6-11
The Church of the Covenant

If you're angry with someone today and feel unreconciled with them as a fellow Christian, you should not receive this sacrament today. There I've gone and done it; I've told you a truth you won't like. This sacrament is all about the reconciliation that God brings about through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, and you rob it of its holy power if you receive it, as the Apostle says in I Corinthians 11: 27 "in an unworthy manner" if you fail to "discern the body of Christ" in your receiving of the sacrament. We spend 20 seconds repenting of our sin and no time in preparation for the sacrament. In the olden days, "preparatory services" in advance of communion were stern affairs –an hour or more considering our fallen nature and identifying those people with whom we needed to reconcile BEFORE we received the sacrament the next day. So by having no repentance and having no identification of those with whom you need to reconcile, we drink the cup of reconciliation poured out by Christ "unworthily". In failing to discern the body, the broken-ness in the Body of Christ, in advance of receiving the sacrament, we drink condemnation on ourselves. No, I'm not reconciled with Christ if I'm not reconciled with my brother...

Is it any wonder why a communion Sunday is just another Sunday for us today? Is it any wonder why it is so difficult to get elders and deacons to serve communion? Is it any wonder why it becomes more and more difficult to find people who will take communion to the homebound? We have robbed it of its spiritual power to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We have stripped it of its power to bring reconciliation to the church, let alone to the world. No repentance, no reconciliation. No repentance and no reconciliation, no power for the church, no relationship with God through what Christ has done at the cross, the supreme act of reconciliation. How can we denigrate it so? Why is the world so broken and divided today? Because there is no reconciliation in the church. As Paul says in I Corinthians 11: 30 "that is why many of you are weak and ill"; many are spiritually sick and spiritually dying. The church has no power to induce reconciliation in itself, let alone in the world, because we refuse to be reconciled with those who we believe have hurt us. So don't drink this sacrament unworthily today, please. Don't make a mockery of the cross of Jesus Christ, please.

Several years ago in my home church it was in the process of dividing and part of the church decided it wanted to leave the denomination. As part of that process, the pastor of the departing church sent me a nasty email (and to this day I still don't know why) that ended, "O by

the way we're removing your parents from the rolls of the church tomorrow." I endeavored to write the nicest email I could muster to say that I was sure my parents wanted to remain members of a church they had served since 1951 and served as elders and deacons. My Mother wrote a letter to the session asking them not to remove them from the rolls. She called the man who was serving as Clerk of Session, who she considered to be a friend, and begged him not to remove them from the rolls. But the next day they did anyway. Just in case my parents didn't understand they weren't welcome anymore in their church, they were to receive TWO MORE LETTERS from the Session. Each letter hurt them terribly and they had no idea what they had done wrong to merit such treatment. They were as hurt as I have ever seen them. And you know how if someone hurts you, you can let it roll off you, like water off a duck? But when it hurts someone you love, it is much harder to forgive, let alone forget...

So two years ago my Dad passes away and my parents still have not purchased their cemetery lots. They had always wanted to be buried in Brush Run Cemetery, on the hill where most of the Brobergs are buried, above the church they had loved. I remember my Mother taking me on walks in that cemetery as a little child; I remember playing games for Vacation Bible School when I was little up in the cemetery, led by my Mother, who was in charge of VBS. But herein lies the rub. My parents were stuck—they didn't know where else they wanted to be buried. So before my Dad passed away I asked my Dad—"Don't you really want to be buried next to your family at Brush Run?" And he said yes. So I endeavored to call the cemetery board, chaired by the former Clerk of Session, who had harmed my parents and made a point of voting them out of the church. And I thought to myself: "Great, my parents get kicked out one more time, even in death." I had to eat some humble pie. I resolved to call and speak with him anyway; and if they told me they wouldn't bury my parents in their cemetery I resolved I wouldn't tell my parents, I would just make other arrangements. In talking with the former Clerk who had so harmed my parents, my heart softened. He shared how he was personally named in the ongoing lawsuit and that he had been hurt by the entire affair also. I had compassion on him and I forgave him in my heart. I remember praying before I spoke with him—"Lord, if there is not reconciliation in this life, at least can there be reconciliation in death"? And they agreed to sell my parents their cemetery lots and my Father was buried there. As a result of that I am more and more able to forgive them for the harm they caused to my parents and I have developed a friendship with their new pastor; who by the way, came to my Mother's funeral service and graveside to be supportive of me.

Just recently I have been poking through my Mother's Bible and I found her prayer list. I was happy to discover my name on it! I was also happy to discover a lot of your names on it. Every day without fail she would pray for those on her list, even as her mind failed and her memory

dimmed she still prayed for all the many people on her list. And then I was shocked to discover that she had prayed for the Pastor of her former home church who had so harmed her. And she had prayed for the former Clerk of Session, the friend who had so harmed her, and for others who had harmed my parents. It blew me away to think of my Mother praying for those folks and whatever residual hurt and lack of forgiveness in my heart fled away when I saw their names on my Mother's prayer list. Washington Presbytery and its churches are in steep spiritual decline and that will continue until all the lawsuits are settled and there is reconciliation between former friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. It robs everything and everyone of the power of the cross and even the spiritual power in communion to bring reconciliation. It doesn't matter who hurt whom. It doesn't matter what the legal and financial issues are. All of it needs to be cleaned up and reconciled in the name and for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ and so we no longer through our broken-ness drink condemnation on ourselves. And I need to call that Presbyterian Minister on the phone, the one who sent the nasty email threatening to throw my parents out of their church, and sit down with him and share with him how he hurt my parents and how much I need to forgive him in Jesus' name.

I love the fact that my parents' gravestone is right at the entry of the Brush Run Cemetery. Everyone in their diverse theological opinions have to drive by my parents every time they visit. BROBERG in giant capital letters! Deal with it! But carved into their headstone are the words, "Love never ends..." I Corinthians 13: 8 That's what we have to deal with. As our scripture says: "*We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received our reconciliation.*" (Romans 5: 11) There is reconciliation in death, to be sure. But O there is the possibility of reconciliation in life, which is far, far better. We can clean it up. We can forgive and be forgiven. But don't come to this table today and receive this sacrament if we won't resolve to go sit with that person who has hurt us and seek reconciliation, the mending of the broken body of Christ. Then we can eat this sacrament of reconciliation today WORTHILY, and expect Jesus to pour His power through our weakness, our broken and contrite hearts. We don't have to wait to have *reconciliation in death* –we can be reconciled in Jesus' name today. Amen and 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!*