

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

BUT WE DO SEE JESUS

In the latest issue of *The Presbyterian Outlook* there is an article entitled *Moon Supper*. The author, Richard J. Mouw, was responding to a reporter's question as to whether it was legitimate for a Presbyterian pastor or elder to serve communion alone to himself or herself? He answered by saying our Reformed theology says that communion takes place in a congregational context. It has to be connected to the preaching of the Word, and the Word and Table go together. Also, the Lord's Supper requires at least one elder assisting the minister. Thus, a pastor or an elder serving communion to himself or herself in an isolated setting does not make good sense to us theologically.

When he gave this response, the reporter shared the context for the question. As a part of the media coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of the first moon landing, Buzz Aldrin celebrated the Lord's Supper alone on the moon's surface. Was that out of line? Richard Mouw said it certainly was different, but then he noted that Buzz Aldrin, a Presbyterian elder and member of his church's Session, had been granted permission in advance to receive the elements in this way. In fact, he celebrated the Lord's Supper shortly after his congregation in Webster, Texas did so back home, thereby extending the reach of the Table a quarter of a million miles.

Mouw went on to say: The fact is that Aldrin was not really celebrating the Supper apart from the Church. He was doing it as one commissioned by the church to do so. He was, in a profound sense, eating and drinking in communion with his fellow believers in the presence of the Lord, thereby bringing the church to the moon. I like the theological feel of that. Christ died for sinners, but he also died to rescue a sinful creation. The "world" that Jesus came to save, according to John 3:16-17, is the cosmos. And the moon is a part of the cosmos to which the Savior came, not to condemn, but that it might be redeemed by his atoning work. I hope that when Elder Aldrin held the bread and the wine on the lunar surface, he said the words out loud: "The Body of Christ broken for you. The blood of Christ shed for you." The moon, too, needs to hear that good news! (*The Presbyterian Outlook*, Vol. 191 No. 33, October 5, 2009, p. 43)

With that thought in mind, let me say that most of us are aware of a certain tension within us as well as around us. The tension is this: there is the world as it should be (as God created it to be), and there is the world as it really is. We have a sense of the ideal, of the perfect world that we carry around within us, but then there is also the reality, the way things actually are – and there is a vast gap between the two. We yearn for Paradise, but we actually live in a long-gone or a not-yet kind of world that knows its share of pain, evil, and suffering.

If we are honest with ourselves and with the Lord our God, we will confess this disconnect between the ideal and the imperfect within each one of us. We are not the persons God created us to be. Sin drives a wedge between where we are and where we want to be. And, beyond ourselves, we note with tremendous sadness the sense of Paradise lost when we learn of gruesome, senseless murders in Farmville, VA or of another angry country with nuclear capabilities and the capacity to deliver their vengeance on their enemies. We are conscious of our imperfect world when we see sick or starving children, the homeless, those with mental disorders, the evil of addiction, the

greed of some and the needs of so many others, injustice in any form, or the death of a loved one. We see the world at war with itself as some areas around the earth face drought or raging wildfires while other areas are overwhelmed with torrential rains and flooding. The world is not as it should be, as God created it to be; and, the resulting suffering spreads throughout the world and the cosmos.

And yet, that's not all there is to say about the human condition and the cosmos. There is the ideal and there is the actual - the way things truly are in the world. But, there is also the unfolding redemption that is wrought by Christ Jesus. Here is the good news for the moon and for humankind! There is a new heaven and a new earth and they are underway!

In the midst of the Hebrews' passage, the unknown writer speaks glowingly of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and his work to bridge the divide between God and humankind. Jesus is the final and highest revelation of God. Through him and his suffering on the cross, he brought many children to glory and he is the pioneer of our salvation. The Hebrews' author quotes Psalm 8 and celebrates the lofty status of all human beings and how God subjected all things under their feet. Then, he says, "As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus (who is) now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

While there are far too many vivid reminders that our world is not completely under the lordship of Christ, nevertheless, "we do see Jesus" and we know (by faith) that the victory is secured and Paradise will be restored. Someday there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and they might just come along sooner if we will work in partnership with God in Christ. While not all evil, pain and suffering are subdued and there are setbacks, aggravations, and all the big and little evidences of evil, we believe that Jesus is Lord. We have not seen the final and full vindication of God's gracious love. We have not seen the complete victory of the reign of God among us. But we do see Jesus, and that's enough to go on and give us hope that Christ is the sign of the creation of a whole new world. It won't always be this way. It's this way for now, but eventually and ultimately Christ will win because he is Lord, the One who redeems and brings all things back together and makes them new.

On this World Communion Sunday, we are all too aware of the many, many denominations and divisions within Christ's one Body. Some say they alone are Christians and all others are damned. There are loud factions of conservatives and liberals shouting at each other and there is a not-so-sure majority somewhere in between. All of these are human-made obstacles; they are certainly not of Christ! And then, there are days like today, when we catch hold of the vision and we do see Jesus and his one body of believers throughout the earth. We are united, not because of what we say and do and believe, but because of what Christ has done for us on the cross and through the open tomb. When our focus is on the grace of God, instead of on our own sinful thoughts and actions, there is hope for us yet. When we see Jesus is Lord, all things are possible.

A minister said: In my pastoral rounds, I often visited an elderly woman in a nursing home who was originally from Russia. She spoke virtually no English. I spoke absolutely no Russian. When I first visited her, I tried to indicate who I was. I showed her my Bible and the communion kit for communing with the homebound. I was moderately successful in this and she seemed to perceive that I was a priest or some such

thing. While I could not converse with her in any usual sense, she seemed graciously to put up with my babbling in English. I could see by the warmth in her smile and the way she stroked my hand that she was grateful for my visits. Not much passed between us by way of shared information. I could not let her know that I wished to hear her story and learn about her Orthodox faith. But, there were moments of crystalline communication. These occurred when we entered the communion liturgy. Suddenly, all confusion and miscommunication fell away. We both entered into the language of the church. At the Lord's Prayer, we would recite together, English and Russian blending as if in perfect unison. Then, we shared the body and blood of Christ. No words were needed. There was a 50-year difference between our ages. During most of our lives, we would have been considered political enemies. Neither age, nor language, nor ideology divided us in those moments when the Holy Spirit drew us together in communion with one another and with Christ. (William Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, June 4, 2006, pp. 47-48)

As millions of Christians around the world come to the Table this day, as we sit and sup with Jesus Christ our Lord and our Savior, we invariably draw closer and closer to one another. Let us keep our eyes wide open so that we can see Jesus. And, if we will do that, more than likely, we will look once again and see other Christians as our brothers and sisters in the Lord. As Jesus Christ brings us all together, may we rejoice and give glory to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Randall C. Stevens
First Presbyterian Church/Martinsville, VA
October 4, 2009