

Our theme for this morning's meditation is 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper.' These are the two sacraments which we acknowledge within the CNI as these were ordained by Jesus himself. Sacraments are outward signs of an inward grace. God works in our hearts and minds through the power of the Holy Spirit and to acknowledge that, we use symbols to communicate that.

What does baptism signify? Three metaphors help us to understand the sacrament of Baptism. The word itself comes from a greek word *baptidzo* which means 'to dip'. In baptism we are **grafted** on to Christ. He is the vine and we are the branches who are grafted on to him either as infants or as adults. We draw our strength and sustenance from Christ himself. So when someone is baptized that person becomes part of the body of Christ. We are grafted on to his body. Secondly, baptism can also be understood with the metaphor of **adoption**.

Christ takes us to be part of his family, as his children. Paul writing to the Romans says, 'The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father.'" The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Rom 8:15-16 NIV). So the right to become children of God is given to us who believe in him. Baptism is an outward symbol of faith. Thirdly, baptism is the beginning of a **new life**. As we go through the waters of baptism we die to our sinful self and rise again with Christ. All of us as members of the body of Christ have been baptized with the same Holy Spirit. We are therefore called to celebrate this unity.

The second sacrament is the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. This sacrament also challenges us to reaffirm our unity with other believers in the body of Christ. St. Paul admonished the church at Corinth: "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you"

All of the letters in the New Testament were written to churches who were struggling with certain problems. The reason Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthian church was to correct the problem of *disunity – division*. The church was divided over differences of theology, (1:10-13), differences of giftedness and style (chapters 12-14), differences of social rank, differences of racial and cultural heritage. This is very similar to many of our churches today. And when the church at Corinth gathered for communion, those divisions became obvious. The Lord's supper or Communion calls us to reaffirm our unity as Christians. The very root of the word *communion*, means to "share in common." We share a common loaf and cup. If the communion celebration is supposed to be a symbol and witness of Christian unity, one can understand why Paul had some stern words for the Corinthians in their practice of communion. While they came together to symbolize their oneness in the Lord's Supper, their attitudes and actions were a blatant denial of it.

Communion is a time to remember what *unites* us as Christians. It is a time to reflect on our *relationships* to see what is broken or fractured. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you," said Jesus, "leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24). When our relationships are right with our Christian brothers and sisters, then the communion we celebrate is communion indeed and not an act of public hypocrisy.

When we come to the Lord's Table we need to examine ourselves: Do we harbor resentment in our heart towards anyone? Is there anyone from whom we would withhold the forgiveness and grace which we ourselves want to receive? "Forgive us our sins," we pray, "as we forgive those who sin against us." The sacrament reminds us that our very own sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ on the cross. Likewise we too are called to forgive others. The bread is symbolic of God's sustaining grace in our lives. As we come to the Lord's table may God continue to unite us as his body, sustain us by his grace and use us for his glory.