



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# They Have No Wine

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

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*Hebrews 9:11-15*

*John 2:1-11*

The cup. When we last celebrated the Lord's Supper, the bread was the subject of the sermon. Today, let's consider the cup.

Movies have been made and many books have been written about the search for the Holy Grail, the cup that was used by Jesus at the Last Supper.

But as it has come down to us, we have silver goblets, beautiful pottery, and in the land of the pandemic, whatever you may have at home: maybe a juice cup, a coffee cup, a little wineglass.

When we served communion in the courtyard, we had small plastic containers.

The cup. I remember one church I served; they used glass cups to serve the congregation. At a worship committee meeting, one of the ladies who was in the group that set up and cleaned up communion, suggested that the church begin using plastic, disposable cups.

The Chair of the committee, a very nice man who had grown up in the church, said that the church had always used glass and it just seemed to be proper to do what they had always done.

She responded, "Well, then, you come to church on Monday and wash all those cups!" He replied, "How much do the plastic cups cost and when can we get them!?"

The cup. Let me also say something about what is poured into the cup.

Up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, wine was used in Communion by all Protestant denominations until Methodist dentist and prohibitionist Thomas Welch applied new pasteurization techniques to stop the natural fermentation process of grapes.

Yes, Welch's Grape Juice! Christians who were part of the growing temperance movement pushed for a switch from wine to grape juice, and the substitution spread quickly through the churches.

The question of wine or grape juice became a major issue for Presbyterians back then, and the General Assembly, after great debate said the Bible was clear that wine should be offered.

That being said, I grew up with grape juice in the Presbyterian Church and of the 13 churches I've served, including this one, only two have offered wine, along with grape juice for communion.

Now, I'm not advocating one way or the other, but as I've thought about it over the past several months, with you where you are and whatever cup you have, to argue wine or grape juice or juicy juice or pinot noir misses the point, or in this case, the cup.

As always, you know my thoughts, let's see what the Bible says, and especially in this case, what Jesus says.

That's what Paul did in his letter to the Corinthian church when he gives instructions for the Lord's Supper.

Paul says Jesus gave him the words about the bread and the cup: *“This bread given for you... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

Those are the words we hear in Matthew, Mark, and Luke as they tell the story of Jesus and his disciples around that table on the night of his betrayal: Jesus says, *“This cup is the new covenant, my blood poured out for the many for the forgiveness sins.”*

It’s that word “covenant” that Jesus uses to describe the cup, not what we pour into it, but what he does for you and me.

And that’s our passage from Hebrews...a little Bible study. Its title in the Bible is “The Letter to the Hebrews”, but it doesn’t have the format of a letter.

I follow the lead of the scholars who see this more as a sermon than a letter. It’s a sermon about the person of Jesus, God’s son given a ministry on earth, what he does for you and me.

And one of the ministries of Jesus, as the preacher of the sermon says, is that of a priest, *“...a high priest of the good things that have come...”*

One of the priestly duties is to oversee the sacrifices, but Jesus the high priest does not make the sacrifices with goats and sheep, but the sacrifice of himself, as the preacher says: *“...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God.”*

I believe that preacher is directing us to this cup of the Lord's Supper, and the next verse is the direction signal: "...he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance..."

The preacher is saying that our entry into the presence of God is not dependent on anything that human hands could build or human minds devise.

This is the amazing good news, the presence of the risen Christ is forever with us in this new covenant: A presence not dependent on our purity but on his grace, a presence not dependent on our ritual sacrifice but on his sacrifice for us, his death for us, his blood shed for us.

A presence not dependent on our going to Jerusalem or to any other place, but dependent upon Jesus Christ coming to us, where we are, how we are, where we are, just as he came to Cana and that wedding.

You see, John does not have the same Lord's Supper story that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have. He tells the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet on that night, nothing about breaking the bread and pouring the cup and saying, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*"

But on the other hand, John, I believe, tells the same story, maybe in a different way and in a different place, but he, just like the preacher to the Hebrews, like Paul and Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is telling us about who Jesus is and what he does for you and me.

Let me say it now: I believe that this story of Jesus and the wine at the wedding in Cana is John's way of telling the

story of the new covenant, of Jesus the high priest of the good things that have come in him, with him for us.

You heard the story: Jesus is at a wedding in Cana, and his mother sees that the wedding party is running out of wine.

She leans over to him and says, “They have no wine.” He says, “Is this any of our business, yours or mine? Don’t push me, it’s not my time.”

But being a mother, she ignores what he says and tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

She expects Jesus to do something, to help. He sees six water jars, and he asks the servants to fill them up to the brim with water. And then somehow, miraculously, the water is changed into wine.

This is “*the first of [Jesus’] signs,*” John writes that “*revealed his glory.*”

At this wedding where the covenant for a new life is made, let’s put it this way, Jesus was providing wine in abundance for new life in the new covenant between God and God’s people in the person of Jesus Christ.

Long before John wrote it down, maybe the preacher to the Hebrews had heard this story when he called Jesus “...*a high priest of the good things that have come...*”

“They have no wine” is a reminder that when we feel empty, Jesus can provide everything that we truly need, everything that we need to live fully now and forever.



This is the cup, here and now, that Jesus fills to change our minds, change our lives, change our ways, to fill us with hope, with joy and certainty for the future.

This is the cup of salvation.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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