

Theme: Windows in the Gospel – The Denominations of Christianity
“Catholicism: Ritual, Reverence and the Power of the Eucharist”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton
August 18-19, 2012 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Worship Leader: A reading from the Book of Psalms, chapter 95, verses 6 and 7.

Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care.

Worship Leader: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please remain standing as we sing, “Alleluia” (Red Hymnal number 186)

Worship Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Worship Leader: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John, chapter 6, verses 53-58.

So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

All: Glory to you, Lord!

Worship Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Worship Leader: You may be seated. Children are invited to...

VIDEO Catholic Church Sermon Starter

SLIDE The Catholic Church

Please take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Medication Moments. The Message Notes are a place for you to take notes today and we hope that you will do that as we learn a bit about Roman Catholicism at the beginning of this sermon. We also hope that you will listen to how God might be speaking to you through the witness of our friends who are Catholics as well as through the Scriptures we have in front of us this morning. You might write down

any nudges that come from God upon your heart today. The Medication Moments you will find on the backside is a daily Bible study that takes about 10 min. each day. This week you will do a topical Bible study and each day you will focus on a different topic and read several New Testament Scriptures related to that topic. These topics are areas where Roman Catholics and Protestants sometimes struggle with each other, or at least struggle to understand each other. On Monday we will look at the Eucharist. On Tuesday we will look at Mary in the New Testament. Wednesday we will look at the importance of works and salvation and how those are connected. Thursday we will look at the role of the Holy Spirit and how that shapes church doctrine. Friday we will look at the role of Peter in the New Testament and on Saturday we will encourage you to simply be in prayer for those family members and friends of yours who are Roman Catholic.

As we have mentioned several times today we are continuing in a series of sermons, "Windows in the Gospel," looking at the gospel through the lens of various Christian denominations. I want to remind you right up front that our aim in this series of sermons is not to create a "straw man" for any one particular denomination and then tear it apart and tell you how much better United Methodism is compared to the other denominations. I don't personally believe that and that is not our approach these next few weeks.

Instead, our approach has been to say that all Christians who call upon the name of Christ in these various denominations have something to teach us. I wonder what we can learn if we listen to them and their faith tradition? I wonder if we could hear how they experience the presence of God and maybe in that way, learning from them, we might be more authentically followers of Jesus Christ ourselves? This is going to be our approach, to listen and to learn and to be more authentically the presence of Jesus Christ by virtue of listening and learning from other denominations.

As we focus our attention on Roman Catholicism today this is a sermon which has a great deal of personal interest to me and to many of you in this room. About one in five members of First United Methodist Church have had experience in the Roman Catholic Church in their past. Maybe you were baptized as a Catholic or maybe one of your parents was Catholic and so you have some experience with the Catholic Church in your past. I know that some of you have shared that you struggled to figure out how you put together your Catholic experience as you now find yourself worshiping in a Protestant church. Many of you here today are visitors and perhaps you are actively involved in the Catholic Church somewhere else. We are grateful that you are here tonight and our aim is

not to convince you to come to First United Methodist Church. If you are actively involved in the church and experiencing God in that place in a full and profound way than we want you to stay there. We also want you to know that you are always welcome here at First United Methodist Church and we are glad that you came today.

I actually have a personal connection to the Catholic Church because my father's family was Roman Catholic. My grandmother was actually born here in Durango at Mercy Hospital when it was down at the site of the new public library. She was baptized at St. Columba Catholic Church and so when I attended mass there this week I felt a strong warming of my heart just being in the sanctuary and hearing words and prayers echoed through the church. My father was baptized in the Catholic Church and was an altar boy and attended Catholic high school in the Denver area. He stopped attending church shortly after high school and when he married my mother it was her family's strong connection to Methodism that took our family to the Methodist Church as a child, however we did attend Catholic churches on occasion.

My mother and father divorced when I was six years old and my mother remarried someone who is Catholic and we attended mass with my stepfather several times. Sometimes I would go to mass with my grandmother when we visited her in Denver and while I don't remember going to church what I do remember was going to the spaghetti feast in the basement of her Catholic Church which included bingo and shuffleboard that was built into the tile floor of the basement of the church. There were nuns dressed in their full habits sliding shuffleboard pieces with long sticks and children running around with tomato sauce all over their cheeks! I must be honest with you and tell you that I don't remember much about going to mass as a child but I do remember those nuns and the Italian Catholic spaghetti dinners.

As I went to mass this week and sat in the chapel of St. Columba church afterwards I found myself simply praying, "God, help me to honor my grandmother's faith. Even though we were not very close, I am grateful for the life that she helped give me and my father."

Looking at Catholicism today I want to begin by reminding you about some church history. For the first thousand years of the Christian faith there was no Roman Catholicism, there was no United Methodism, there was no Eastern Orthodoxy. They were just, "Followers of the Way."

SLIDE "Followers of the Way"

The book of Acts calls those earliest Christians by this name. They were people who were following Jesus. When Jesus called people he called those who were uneducated. He called fishermen and tax collectors and he simply said this, "come and follow me and I will help you fish for people." He didn't teach them a bunch of doctrine or make them memorize Scripture. He summarized all of the Jewish law and the teachings of the prophet in two easily remembered sentences.

SLIDE ***"Love God with everything that is within you and love your neighbor as you love yourself."***

After his death and resurrection, Christians said that there is a creed which really stands for what we believe as followers of Christ. It was a very short creed and it was not the creed we learned about last week they came out of the Council of Nicaea. It was not the Apostle's Creed which was developed before that counsel. The Creed simply said this, "Jesus is Lord." The apostle Paul said,

SLIDE ***"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved."***

It was very simple and it was later that Christians began to develop more elaborate creeds to describe who they understood Jesus to be as they reflected upon his life and death and resurrection. One of those creeds was actually a symbol and it was the insignia of a fish.

SLIDE **Fish**

That insignia was meant to symbolize one who had put their faith in Christ. The Greek word for fish was Ichthus.

SLIDE **Greek Fish = "Jesus Christ, God's son, the Savior."**

Here is an early carving depicting this symbol from the first century. These letters in the Greek word stood for, "Jesus Christ, God's son, the Savior." That was kind of a creed, to say that Jesus Christ was the son of God and was the Savior of the world.

Christians began to form even more elaborate expressions of what they believed in the centuries to come. Eventually, the Apostle's Creed was formed and then the Nicene Creed in 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicaea that we learned about last week. Bishops from across the world gathered together in the city of Nicaea and began to ask, "How can we express best what we believe and what we think is essential to the Christian faith?"

The Nicene Creed has been important in just about every Christian faith tradition including United Methodism. If you look at our red hymnal that you find in the pews you will find the Nicene Creed as the first affirmation of faith on page 880. This is the core of the Christian faith that was understood in the fourth century and it is how we still understand it today. It is a point of unity between United Methodists and Roman Catholics and between Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians. All of us hold that the Nicene Creed is a summation of the Christian faith.

In those first centuries Christians began to have disagreements as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. Some of it had to do with language and there was a struggle between Christians who spoke Aramaic and those who spoke Greek. Later there was a struggle between Christians that spoke Greek and those who spoke Latin. There were tensions between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Nevertheless, there remained one church and one body of believers. They called themselves by certain adjectives.

SLIDE Holy, Apostolic and catholic

The word "catholic" meant universal and it wasn't the name of the denomination. It was used with a small "c" and was an adjective that describes all Christians. Everyone who called upon the name of the Lord were seen as brothers and sisters in Christ. It didn't matter what language they spoke or what part of the empire they lived in, they were all one family in Christ that were part of the universal, catholic church.

You will hear me talk today about Roman Catholicism. Catholics don't typically use that designation as they usually just refer to themselves as Catholics. Many Protestants refer to Catholics as Roman Catholics because we often refer to ourselves as catholic with a small "c" because we are part of the universal church which is the body of Christ in all places. I am a United Methodist catholic Christian. Some of you or Baptist catholic Christians, and some of you are Roman Catholic Christians. For Roman Catholic Christians, the center and the seat of power in the church and its teaching office is located in the city of Rome with the Pope.

In the first few centuries of the Christian church, the church in the city of Rome began to have more influence over the rest of the churches in the Roman Empire. We learned last week that this did not make the churches in the East very happy, but there was more influence that came from Rome. This is easy to understand because by the end of the first century there were more Christians in

the city of Rome than anywhere else in the Roman Empire.

Each city which had Christians had a leader that was called a Bishop. The Bishop who pastors the most Christians is probably going to have a little bit more influence than the others and so the Bishop of Rome began to have more influence. Rome was also the center of Imperial power. All roads lead to Rome so you can understand how the Bishop in the city of Rome might come to have a little more influence over the church. He was equal to all the other bishops but at that time the Bishop of Rome became **more** equal than all the others.

We can understand this today if you look at something like the Southern Baptist Church. In the Southern Baptist Church in the United States all southern Baptist churches have equal authority. There is no Southern Baptist which is the Pope or the Bishop of the others. They are all co-equal in authority but there are some Southern Baptist pastors who are more equal than others. Rick Warren, who pastors the Saddleback Church in Southern California which is one of the largest Southern Baptist churches in the world, has more influence than other Southern Baptist pastors. Many pastors and churches turn to Rick Warren for leadership. He teaches them and he guides them and he writes books that people all over the world read. He is not there Pope but he certainly has more influence than an average Southern Baptist pastor.

This is what happened in the first century with the Bishop of the church in Rome. That influence continued to grow over time and by the end of the fourth century, in the late 300s, the Bishop of Rome came to be known as the "Papa" of bishops or the Pope. "Papa" as you can guess meant, "father." He considered the other bishops his "sons." That clearly articulated a certain hierarchy among the bishops.

The bishops who lived in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire and who spoke Greek were not very fond of thinking of the Bishop in Rome as being their father and they were all his sons. They still allow for this to happen then they gave a certain amount of authority to the Bishop of Rome. The friction between those two parts of the Roman Empire and the church as it developed in those areas began to grow over time. There began to be differences in the way Christians worshiped in the East and the West. There began to be differences in how they looked at certain doctrines in the church.

SLIDE Map of Rome Divided

As we learned last week, by the year 1054 this one holy, apostolic and catholic church divided into two. The Bishop in Constantinople, which is now the

city of Istanbul in Turkey, anathematized the Bishop in Rome or the Pope. The Bishop in Rome, the Pope, anathematized the Bishop in the Eastern part of the empire in Constantinople known as the Patriarch. The Christian church was now divided into two. The Eastern church was known as Orthodox and they spoke Greek. The Western church called themselves Catholics and they spoke Latin. That divide has continued into the present day.

SLIDE Orthodox Historical Timeline

Last week I shared with you how those in the Orthodox Church look at church history in terms of a timeline. You can see in this diagram how Orthodox churches believe that they are preserving the ancient traditions of the apostles. They are the faithful church and the only church that is carrying on the apostolic witness from the beginning of the church until the very present day. They believe it was the Catholic who broke off from the Orthodox Church, and then the Protestant church broke off of the Catholic Church. These groups have gone on their own path and they stepped away from the correct path according to how Orthodoxy looks at church history.

SLIDE Catholic Historical Timeline

Now let me share with you how Catholics see church history. Catholicism is preserving the true faith of the apostles and it carries that forward. It is the Orthodox Church in this timeline which is broken off from the Catholic faith, and then 500 years later the Protestant church broke off of the Catholic faith. Roman Catholicism is accurately preserving the true faith of the apostles.

You will find in each one of the sermons as we go forward that these arrows get really interesting, because almost all of these denominations believe that they are preserving the accurate, apostolic teaching. Are you following these diagrams?

I have no problem with these charts. I understand that Roman Catholics believe that they are carrying forth the true teachings of the apostles. Orthodox churches believe the same thing. If I believed that Roman Catholicism was the only way to be an authentic Christian then I would be a Roman Catholic, and I would be begging you to become a Roman Catholic as well. But I believe it is **A** authentic way of being a Christian. I appreciate Roman Catholicism. I am grateful for the witness of their faith. There is so much in it that we can learn from and draw from and I appreciate that. I also appreciate much from the Orthodox tradition.

I don't however see either one of them as having the corner on the truth and then all the rest of us are on the outs. I look at my friends who are Roman Catholic and I say, "You are my brothers and my sisters in Christ and I'm so grateful for you. We do see some things differently and I think the carpenter from Nazareth would say, 'That's okay.'"

SLIDE Doctrine in the Catholic Church

Let's talk a little bit about how doctrine is formed in the Catholic Church and where we do find some differences that begin to develop. In the Catholic Church the development of doctrine is seen as a function of the Holy Spirit working through the teaching office of the church. The Roman Catholic Church understands that the New Testament preserves for us the teaching of the apostles and it is primary basis for faith and practice of everything that we believe as Christians. For Roman Catholics the Bible is the starting point for all of faith and practice.

However, Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit didn't stop teaching us truth when the apostles died. The Holy Spirit continues to teach us truth through the centuries and all of that truth will be rooted and grounded in the New Testament, but the seeds that we find in the New Testament only come to fruition sometimes hundreds of years later. The church, through its theologians and bishops, finally see the connection between a certain Scripture verse and the truth and it is revealed through those people who are in the apostolic tradition. The Catholic Church looks at doctrine as something that is continually progressing and being revealed, always rooted and grounded in the Scriptures.

Protestants see things a bit differently when it comes to this. We believe that the Holy Spirit continues to work through the church, but Protestants tend to say, "Show me in the New Testament where was done this way. Show me in the New Testament that this is what the New Testament apostles believed or what Jesus believed and I will believe it or practice it. If it can't be demonstrated fairly clearly in the New Testament then don't tell me to something that I have to believe in order to be a Christian."

You can see how these two ways of looking at doctrine might lead to some friction. Even Protestants believe that the Holy Spirit works through the church to reveal doctrine that isn't completely clear in the New Testament. For instance, your New Testament that you find today in your Bible wasn't finally collated and agreed upon in terms of which books belong in it until about 382 A.D. Though the books were written in the first century it took some time for the church to agree

upon which books to put in and which books to leave out. As Protestants we believe that the Holy Spirit guided that process and worked through the church and the bishops.

The doctrine of the Trinity is another example. The idea that God is revealed through the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit is not clearly spelled out in the New Testament. We read about all three of these in the New Testament but the relationship of them to each other is not clearly explained. It takes the church several hundred years to begin to put into words and expression of that which makes sense to people. We believe the Holy Spirit works through people to help us understand these things. But Protestants tend to say that if the connection is not fairly clear in the New Testament and it gets a little hazy then we will be cautious.

On Tuesday morning I attended mass at St. Columba Catholic Church in the early morning. Afterwards I had a chance to sit down with Father Jim Koenigsfeld who has served as the priest there for 10 years. Father Jim and I have been having lunch together for the last 10 years as part of a pastor's group in town and I can tell you firsthand that he is one of the most wonderful and faithful church leaders I have had the privilege of knowing. Father Jim has a genuineness and humility that is engaging and he is a deeply faithful man. I asked Jim if he could explain to our congregation how it is that Catholics see the development of doctrine. This is what he said.

VIDEO Catholic Doctrine

SLIDE Doctrine in the Catholic Church

Catholics base their development of doctrine on the Scriptures to begin with and then it is the leadership of the church including the councils and the bishops which continue that development. They always link the doctrine back to the seeds that we find in the New Testament. Sometimes those seeds are not very clear and we wonder how they made the connection between a certain doctrine and the Bible. It is that those points were Catholics and Protestants tend to bump up against one another.

SLIDE The Doctrine of Mary

I will give you one example and that is the doctrine of Mary. When Protestants decide, "What we believe about Mary," they open up New Testament and they do a word study. They used their computer program or they look through a concordance and they find every verse in the New Testament the talks

about Mary and they study it. I have done this on several occasions, especially around Christmas and Advent. They read all of those verses and they ask, "What do those verses tell us about how the apostles and the New Testament church understood Mary, the mother of Jesus?"

They come away from that and they recognize that Mary was an early leader in the church. She was there on the day of Pentecost. Mary is to be revered because she is the holiest of all women who ever lived. God chose her to bear the Christ child and that makes her special. But Protestants stop at that point, revering Mary and recognizing her as a great example of a woman leading in the faith.

Our Roman Catholic friends take the doctrine of it further. There are two doctrines that I would mention to you that you probably have heard of which come from the Catholic Church and their understanding of doctrine.

SLIDE The Immaculate Conception

One is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which claims that Mary was immaculately conceived. This means that Mary was conceived by her parents without the stain of original sin. According to Western theology, all other human beings have been born with original sin, but Mary was born without original sin according to this doctrine. She was preserved from this so that the human nature of Christ which came from Mary as his mother would also be preserved from human sin and would be perfect. This does not come out of New Testament teaching, but instead he comes out of theologians in the early church reflecting upon the nature of Jesus and the nature of Mary.

Protestants tend to look at that doctrine and say, "Can you tell me where I would find that chapter and verse in the Bible that tells me this is true? How can you ask me to believe that is something that I have to believe in, in order to be a faithful Christian when I can't find it in the Bible?" We might say that it could be true but Protestants would say that we shouldn't have to believe that in order to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ because it is not part of the New Testament faith that we find in the Scriptures.

SLIDE The Ascension of Mary

Another doctrine that we struggle with would be the Ascension of Mary, that she was bodily assumed into heaven after death and her body experienced no decay on Earth. This was part of the second century tradition of the church. The understanding was that Mary, when she died, was taken up into the heavens

by the Angels and her body did not experience the kind of the decay that your body or my body experiences when we die. This doctrine was passed on through the centuries and finally proclaimed doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church so that a Christian must believe this in order to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Once again, Protestants would look at that and say, "Well, that's a nice thought, but it is not in the New Testament. Since it wasn't something told by the apostles or witnessed by any in the early church, we are willing to say is that it might be true. But don't tell me that I have to believe it in order to be a Christian."

Does that make sense in terms of how Roman Catholics and Protestants look at the formulation of doctrine differently?

Let me remind you that in terms of the world body of Christians, half of all Christians in the world are Roman Catholic. One out of every two Christians in the world and 23% of the population of the United States are Roman Catholic Christians which is 60 million. The next largest body of Christians are Southern Baptists with 16 million members. Roman Catholics outnumber Southern Baptist four to one in the United States and they outnumber United Methodist 8 to 1. There are a lot of Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in this country and around the world and I am grateful for this body of believers.

With that in mind, let me turn now and talk about three things that I think we need to learn from our Roman Catholic friends when it comes to being faithful followers of Jesus Christ. There are many more than this but I only have time to lift up three for you today. These are things I think are very important for us to remember.

SLIDE The Power of Ritual

The first thing I would point to is the power of ritual. In the Protestant Reformation which happened in the 1500s part of what the reformers found in the 16th century was that many of the people in the church were going through the motions of the Christian faith. They were doing all of the ritual on the outside but they had not internalized their faith. There was no sense for many Christians of a new birth that happen in their lives and in their hearts. They didn't have a sense of justification by faith and the Holy Spirit did not seem to be active in their lives, transforming them into the likeness of Christ.

To the reformers, people in the church seem to be going through the motions of the ritual without letting it touch their hearts. They looked at the

church and saw a dead ritualism and the reaction to that in the Protestant Reformation was to cast out much of the ritual. People began to think they were justified simply by doing the rituals and so the reformers said, "Let's not do those rituals anymore and give people a false sense of what it means to be a follower of Jesus."

Unfortunately, many times during the Reformation the baby was thrown out with the bathwater. The reality is that ritual is very important in our lives. You know that because you have rituals, even if you don't recognize them. You get up in the morning and some of you immediately go to the kitchen and you make a cup of coffee and you sit down and you read the newspaper or your iPad. That is a morning ritual and those rituals give us a rhythm to our lives.

Rituals are habits that we can get into and sometimes those habits can begin to shape our soul. Good ritual does just that. I shared one of those last week when I talked about my great-grandmother who came to be my nanny when I was six years old and she had me read Psalm 118:24 before every meal because they were imprinted on our napkins. "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it," were words that were part of my ritual before each meal and here I am 42 years later and those words still affect my heart.

There are rituals within the Roman Catholic Church that we practice here at First United Methodist Church. For example, we observe the seasons of Advent and the season of Lent. There was a time when many Methodist churches would not observe those seasons or recognized Ash Wednesday or Maundy Thursday because they were too Catholic.

But those seasons of the year are rituals which get us into rhythms during the year that help us turn our hearts to God. I am so grateful that four weeks before Christmas we observe the season of Advent and we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of the Savior. Remember during that season that Jesus will come again and we use that time to remind ourselves that Christmas is not about all the things that we buy for other people but about the gift we can bring to Christ.

I look forward every year to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent. It reminds us of the start of spring and during that 40 days and seven Sundays before Easter we come and we confess our shortcomings and our brokenness to God. We impose ashes upon our forehead in a sign of the cross and we write out our prayers of confession and we burn them. We pledge to walk with Jesus for those 40 days towards his cross. That makes our spiritual lives much

more rich and meaningful when we walk through those seasons. I don't know where I would be without those seasons to mark my spiritual life and my walk with Christ towards his death and resurrection.

I think of other rituals in the Catholic Church that we have often rejected but have deep meaning. The Rosary is one of those. Many Protestants are uncomfortable with the rosary because many of the prayers within it are the, "Hail Mary," even though the Hail Mary comes from the gospel of Luke and we have no problem in locating that prayer at the end of a football game! What many of us don't know is that when Catholics pray the rosary they are reflecting upon not only Mary but upon the entire life cycle of Jesus.

There are four sets of mysteries that are remembered when you pray the rosary. Catholics reflect upon the birth of Jesus and the **joyful** mysteries in the first part of the prayer as he comes into this world. Then they reflect on the **sorrowful** mysteries, his suffering and his death. They then turn to the **glorious** mysteries which include his triumph where Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Finally they reflect on the **luminous** mysteries which were added by the Pope not that long ago and are meant to reflect upon who Jesus is and his earthly ministry and what he taught about himself.

When our Catholic brothers and sisters pray the rosary they are not just praying a Hail Mary and they are not just praying the Apostles Creed and they are not just praying the Lord's Prayer, but they are also praying over the lifecycle of Jesus and these powerful mysteries that remind us that the life of Jesus intersects with our life today. These prayers internalize how Jesus is a part of our lives today.

A number of years ago, as part of my ordination process we went to the Sacred Heart monastery outside of Denver. We lived in total silence for three days except for five times a day when we were invited to pray with the monk's. We would pray through the Psalms and after words we would have a meal with fellowship and talk about God and theology. We would then go back to silence and meditation and it was very hard for me as someone who is constantly chattering and full of energy. But by the third day those prayer ties became a rhythm in my life and there is a part of me that wishes I could figure out how to put that rhythm back in my life today.

Let me ask you this. What rituals do you follow that help you grow in your faith? What you do that helps you reflect upon Jesus on a daily basis or what it means to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world? We need these kinds of

rituals. I am not sure what they look like for your life but I know that the Roman Catholic tradition can give us hints as to how we as Protestants can add ritual to our lives.

SLIDE The Power of Reverence

The second thing that I think we Protestants can learn from our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters is the power of reverence for things that are sacred and holy. I fear that many times as Protestants we have left behind any sense of sacredness or holiness. We look at Jesus and we talk about, "What a friend we have in Jesus." We look at Jesus as a friend who sticks closer than a brother and how wonderful it is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We emphasize that in the Protestant traditions and many times in Catholicism that hasn't been emphasized very much. Jesus became some far removed figure and so Catholics have been learning from us Protestants what it means to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ where our hearts are strangely warmed by his presence.

But what we need to learn from our Catholic friends is that the one who is our "friend who sticks closer than a brother," is also our King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We are intimate with Jesus but at the same time we respect him and we approach him with reverence. The Scripture tells us this in the Psalm we have before us today. It is typical of what the Bible teaches us about reverence for God.

SLIDE *Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God.*

I appreciate that when Roman Catholics walk into the sanctuary of their church, they look towards the tabernacle which contains the consecrated bread, the body of Christ. They genuflect and they kneel before that as a way of honoring Christ. I appreciate how they cover themselves when they cross themselves and how they say before they read the gospel...

SLIDE *"The Gospel be on my mind and on my lips and in my heart."*

This is a powerful way of honoring what God is doing. Sometimes in our churches I feel that we miss that. Every once in a while I will see someone leave a coffee cup or some other common item on our communion table and alter and I wonder this, "If you went to see the President of the United States, would you leave a coffee cup or some other common item on his desk in the Oval Office?" My guess is that even if you are a Republican you would dress nicely and you would think carefully about what you were going to say. When the President

walked in the room I'm guessing that you would stand up even if you didn't agree with him because you would honor him and respect him as the leader of our nation.

The point I am trying to make is that as we gather for worship in this place we are coming to meet someone who is far greater than the President of the United States. You come here to meet the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. How do we honor him and reverence him? I think this is an important question for us to contemplate as we are Christians who seek to honor and serve the Lord.

SLIDE The Power of the Eucharist

The last thing I would mention is the power of the Eucharist. In every Roman Catholic worship service the Eucharist is served. As a matter of fact, it is the climax of the service. The sermon is not the focal point and most priests will only preach 5 to 15 minutes because the focal point is to take you to the Eucharist so you can experience the presence of Christ in Holy Communion.

I remind you that the Last Supper, Jesus sat down with his disciples and he took bread and wine and he shared a meal with them. Remember that this was the Passover Seder which was celebrated once a year by the Jewish people as a way of remembering how God had delivered them from slavery out of Egypt. Jesus transformed the meaning of that meal and he said, "From this time forward I want you to remember that this is my body which is given for you. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."

From that time forward Christians have wondered how often we should celebrate that meal. Some Christians believe that when Jesus said that, he was saying that, "every time you sit down at the table with bread and wine you should remember me." Remember that in ancient times bread and wine was served at almost every meal and so they believed that the mealtime grace and pausing to pray before a meal was a moment in which you remember that Christ was the bread of life and that he gave his life for you. You should pause and invite him at every meal to be a part of your life. That's part of what we do when we have our mealtime blessings today. Early Christians believe this is what Jesus was talking about and so they would literally have the Eucharist at every single meal at the end.

It is clear from early Christian documents that every time the Christian church gathered they would celebrate the Eucharist, whether it was for a worship service or for a meal together. Certainly on the first day of every week as a

gathered for worship they would break bread and they would share the Eucharist together. In our own church here at First United Methodist Church we celebrate communion in all of the services the first weekend of every month.

For our Roman Catholic friends this is the climax of worship and worship is not complete without receiving the Eucharist. Holy Communion is also understood very literally in the light of John chapter 6 that we read a few moments ago. I asked Father Jim if he could explain to our congregation how important the Eucharist is and what it means for Roman Catholic Christians and here is what he shared.

VIDEO Catholic Eucharist

SLIDE The Power of the Eucharist

For Catholics, when they look at the Eucharist, they don't believe that Jesus is being re-sacrificed for their sins right now but that you are being transported back 2000 years. You are connecting with an event that happened 2000 years ago in a very literal way in which Jesus looks down upon you from the cross and he offers what he did on the cross for you and for your sins. You are joining together in the Eucharist in that event.

Catholics believe in what we call the doctrine of transubstantiation, which means that at a certain point in the Eucharistic prayer, when the priest holds up the host and pauses for a moment, the host or bread becomes the actual flesh of Jesus. It still looks like bread and it tastes like bread but it becomes mysteriously the flesh and the substance of Jesus Christ. When the cup is held up it is believed that at that moment when the priest blesses the cup that the wine becomes the blood of Jesus. It still tastes like wine and it looks and smells like wine, but it becomes a mystical substance and the actual blood of Jesus. When you're receiving the elements you are literally doing what Jesus says in John six. You are taking the body and blood of Jesus into yourself. You are saying to him, "Come Lord Jesus. Fill me!"

This is one of many places where Catholics take the Scriptures more literally than we Protestants do. Once again, look at the Scripture passage at the top of your sermon notes.

SLIDE *So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my*

flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

Many of us Protestants read that passage of Scripture and we believe that Jesus was speaking figuratively. The bread and the wine don't mystically change substance but instead in eating them you are symbolically and spiritually receiving Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus Christ is truly present in this meal but it represents the body and blood of Christ at is not the actual flesh and blood of Jesus.

SLIDE The Power of the Eucharist, a converting Sacrament

Some of you come from a more revivalist take background and you'll say to me, "Pastor Jeff, I love First United Methodist Church but I wish you would give an altar call. I wish you would invite everyone to come forward and to give their life to Christ in an altar call."

I appreciate that and my response is always the same. We do give altar calls at First United Methodist Church. Every month we give an altar call in the form that the New Testament church gave an altar call. We invite people to come and to accept Jesus Christ by accepting the bread and the cup. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called this a "converting sacrament." When you come forward, by your very act of receiving the bread and the cup, you are saying, "I have chosen to follow Jesus. I have chosen to accept his gift of grace and mercy in my life."

Jesus is saying to you in this meal, "Everything I have done on the cross I did for you." In that moment Jesus Christ fills you and he covers you with his grace. You come forward bearing your brokenness before him and he is setting you free, giving you forgiveness and grace.

This is what we believe about the Eucharist and it leads me to this conclusion today. Some of you might be sitting there wondering, "Do I really need the Eucharist?"

My answer to you is very simple. The longer I am a Christian the more clearly I see how much I need the Eucharist. I need God's grace and God's mercy. I need what Jesus did on the cross for me. I struggle with sin and brokenness in my own life. I am not perfect and I make mistakes every day. The longer I am a Christian the more I see how much I fall short and how often I say things I wish I hadn't said or do things I wish I hadn't done. I can have this tendency to talk about someone when they're not there and it causes hurt. I sometimes don't do

the things that I know God wants me to do.

All of these things are part of who we are and there's not a single person sitting in this room who doesn't struggle. I don't care how pious you think you are and how great you appear to everyone else, the more righteous you are in the closer to Christ you feel you are getting, the more clearly you begin to see why you need a Savior. There is not a person in this room who hasn't gone through something that has caused brokenness in the past week. We are broken and this is just who we are.

But God does not leave us to our brokenness. He doesn't condemn us to an eternity of brokenness. What God says is that, "I love you so much that I will do whatever it takes to save you from yourselves. I don't want you to walk around with guilt and shame all the time. I want you to experience joy."

That is what this meal is about. This meal is not about you feeling terrible about yourself. This meal is about recognizing that you have a burden or a sin you bring before the Lord and you say, "Lord, I need what you offer. Forgive me and wash me clean."

This meal is about the Lord who has taken away your sins already on Calvary. Your sins are forgiven and God has set you free. Would you pray with me for a moment?

SLIDE Prayer

As your heads are bowed and your eyes closed, I want you to pause for just a moment and be honest with yourself. What are those things in your secret thoughts that no one else can see except for God? What are those things you have entertained this week that you really shouldn't have—lust or jealousies or anger or hatred or pride or arrogance? Pause...

What are the things that you have said that you shouldn't have said? Are there words or gossip you have said behind someone else's back—little white lies or big whoppers? Pause...

In what ways has God called you to do something and you failed to respond—failed to reach out—failed to sacrifice of yourself or someone else—ways in which you failed to live obediently? Pause...

Where are those places when he knew that when you were doing it you are stepping across the line? Where have you struggled in your walk with Christ this week?

Lord Jesus, you know our sins. You know that we have been thought, word or deed stepped across the line too many times. We are not worthy of your grace and yet you came to save sinners. You ate with sinners and tax collectors and prostitutes in public. You come across and looked at those who crucified you and said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

You came to seek and save those who are lost. We are the law so many days. Today O God, as we come before this holy table and as we receive the bread and the cup, make these elements before us the body and blood of Jesus. Let us O Lord accept him as our Savior. Let us O God receive your son as our Lord and take away the burden of our sin. Set us free and fill our hearts with joy. We asked these mercies in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SLIDE Communion

SLIDE *Pastor: Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.*

SLIDE *All: Blessed be God for ever.*

SLIDE *Pastor: Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.*

SLIDE *All: Blessed be God for ever.*

SLIDE *Pastor: God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon these gifts of bread and wine. May they be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

SLIDE *Pastor: The Lord be with you.*

SLIDE *All: And also with you.*

SLIDE *Pastor: Lift up your hearts.*

SLIDE *All: We lift them up to the Lord.*

SLIDE *Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.*

SLIDE *All: It is right to give him thanks and praise.*

SLIDE Pastor: It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets. And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

SLIDE All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

SLIDE Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the spirit. When the Lord Jesus ascended he promised to be with us always, in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, Our Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

Likewise, when the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Drink from this, all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

**Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."
And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith:**

SLIDE All: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

**SLIDE Pastor: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body
and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of
Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with
Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly
banquet.**

**SLIDE Pastor: Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with your Holy Spirit in your Holy Church,
all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father,
now and forever.**

**SLIDE Pastor: This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the
world. Happy are those who are called to his supper.**

**SLIDE All: Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and
I shall be healed.**

SLIDE Pastor: The body of Christ.

SLIDE All: Amen!

SLIDE Pastor: The blood of Christ.

SLIDE All: Amen!

*Sermon Series: Windows in the Gospel: The Denominations of Christianity
Sermon Title: "Catholicism: Ritual, Reverence and the Power of the Eucharist"*

Psalm 95:6-7; John 6:53-56

**Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our
God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care.**

(Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – August 18-19, 2012 – page 21)

So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

Meditation Moments

This week we’ll study several Biblical themes that relate to Catholicism but which there was not time to discuss in last Sunday’s sermon. Enjoy!

Monday, August 20 - The Eucharist in the New Testament – As we learned last weekend, the Eucharist (Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper) is the climax and central focus of worship in the Catholic Church. It is believed that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, so that one is receiving Christ himself in this meal. The Eucharist mysteriously makes present the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that we might accept it as our own. Today we invite you to do your own study on the Lord’s Supper as described in the New Testament. Make notes as to what you learn and how God speaks to you through these passages: Read Matthew 26:17-30, John 6:48- 58 (most believe Jesus is speaking about the Eucharist here), Acts 2:42 and 2:46 (the “breaking of bread” is thought to be a meal which included the Lord’s Supper), Acts 20:7 (the first day of the week is Sunday), I Corinthians 10:14-22, I Corinthians 11:17-34. There are other passages but these are among the central passages to our understanding of the Eucharist. What did you learn from these? How did God speak to you through your reading today?

Tuesday, August 21 – Mary in the New Testament – Catholics have a very high view of Mary.

Her title, “Mother of God,” is not found in scripture, but comes from reflecting upon the nature of Jesus. It is an affirmation that Jesus was, in fact, God in the flesh. If he was God in the flesh, then Mary was the Mother of God when God came to us in Jesus. The New Testament gives special place to Mary, but its teaching regarding her is much more humble than the church’s later affirmations. We’ll take a look at several NT passages regarding Mary. Read Matthew 12:46-50, Luke 1:26-55, Luke 2:16-19, 25-35, Luke 2:41-51, John 19:25-27, Acts 1:12-14 (this last scripture demonstrates that Mary was with the apostles and the other leaders of the church). What do you learn about Mary in these verses? What example does Mary set for you?

Wednesday, August 22 – The Importance of Works to Salvation in the New Testament – Catholics are known for an emphasis on the importance of works in our salvation – they do not teach that we are saved by our works, but that works both produce saving faith, and are closely intertwined with saving faith. This weekend we’ll see why Luther and the Reformers were focused on making clear the distinction between faith and works with regard to our salvation. This debate about the role of faith and works in our salvation was already taking place during the time of the New Testament. Read James 2:14-26. How does this passage speak to you?

Thursday, August 23 – The Role of the Holy Spirit and Councils in Shaping Church Faith and Practice – Catholics believe the Bible is our primary authority for faith and practice, but they also recognize that the Holy Spirit speaks through the Church and continues to guide us into truth. Let’s take a look at a couple of scriptures that are important in this regard. Read John 14:15-26 and notice here the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers into truth. In this next passage we see how the early church worked, and how it made doctrinal and other decisions – it had no New Testament to turn to – instead the apostles gathered as a council and sought God’s will. This is the very thing Catholics claim has continued to take place in the church through the centuries, as she has called together Councils to make decisions about faith and practice.

Read Acts 15:1-35. What was at issue here?

Friday, August 24 – The Role of Peter in the New Testament – In Catholicism Peter is seen as the first Pope and figurative head of the church. Because Peter died in Rome, the Church claimed that his successors, the Bishops of Rome (Popes) were inheritors of Jesus’ words to Peter about his spiritual authority. As you read Jesus’ words to Peter, reflect on their meaning for him and then discern if you believe Jesus meant these words to apply to the Bishop of Rome in perpetuity. Read Matthew 16:13-27 (you may recall that the insignia of the Catholic Church includes two keys – drawn from this passage). What is the meaning of what Christ says here to Peter? Read Matthew 26:69-75, John 21:15-19, and finally, let’s read some of Peter’s own words, read I Peter 1:1-25. What do you learn about Peter? How does his life and witness speak to you about your life and faith?

Saturday, August 25 – Read Ephesians 2: 19-22. In this passage the apostle Paul talks about the reality that we are all one in Christ Jesus. This is a great passage to carry with you and remember during this sermon series as we look at the different expressions of the Christian faith. Do you have friends or family who are Catholic? If so, spend some time in prayer naming them and asking God to be present in their lives through the Holy Spirit. Give thanks to God for each of them and their faith.