

CALLING THE COURAGEOUS...

to be Christ's broken bread.

"Salvationism and Sacrament"

A sermon outline or soldiers' meeting message based on Unit C, Lesson 3 of the soldiership training manual:

Major Brian Slous. **Mobilized for Mission: A Study in Salvationist Doctrine and Practice.**

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"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:

to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

James 1:27

As society becomes increasingly secular and godless, people (even Christians) have tended to compartmentalize their faith. Often faith, or the expression of faith, is limited to the activities centred in the church or local corps. Other activities, at home, at school or in the workplace are often not necessarily "spiritual," and, in fact, they may clearly be identified as "secular." Days when the activities of the community are centred on the weekly calendar of the local church are no longer the reality for most. Today's church finds itself in competition with the world for the time and attention of its members. Consequently, what once was a way of life is now, in many situations, just one of the pieces of a very complicated puzzle that we call life.

Have congregation consider the level and type of impact that the following activities have on their relationship with Christ, considering the quality and quantity of time spent on each activity, both positive and negative:

Sunday worship
Personal devotions
Work/school
Church/corps activities

Television viewing
Community or political activities
Leisure time with friends/colleagues
Time spent on computer/social media
Meals

When people hear the word "sacrament" they will often think of the ceremonies of the church, such as "communion" or "baptism." The Salvation Army has often been identified by others in the Christian community as "non-sacramental." At times, we have even been misinterpreted as being "anti-sacramental" in our practice and position. In reality, the Army has worked diligently to present itself as an "ultra" or "pan" sacramental organization whose members not only portray but enjoy a living, vibrant relationship with Christ.

Because the Army's sacramental expression differs significantly from those around it, we will discuss the essential elements of the sacramental lifestyle. The uniqueness of the Army's expression and example on this issue are critical to our understanding of the same. In many circles of Christian faith, the traditional sacramental practices have been, and are today, a true source of blessing and encouragement in the faith, and we would be wrong to suggest otherwise.



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A key issue for The Salvation Army, however, centres on the danger that these symbols of faith can replace that for which they have been designed to represent. For example, some individuals believe that by using the right formulas or observing the right ceremonies they are saved, and not doing these things means their position in Christ is in question.

Is there a personal example from life or ministry that may illustrate this hurdle in the minds of people?

Salvationists should never think they are in a “superior” position because of their unique expression of faith nor think less of their spiritual position as a result on non-participation in traditional sacramental expressions. In fact, Salvationists should, at all times, consider their position as an opportunity to humbly witness to the saving grace of Christ and the empowering of his Holy Spirit given freely to those who ask.

Sacramentalism as a Rite

The first element of sacramentalism we want to explore is the concept of *rite*. Rites which many Christians associate with the church usually include such ceremonies as baptism, marriage and funerals. Some nominal Christians also think that the rite of baptism or a church funeral for instance, will somehow guarantee safe passage into heaven in the life beyond. For others, a church sanctioned marriage is somehow seen as an insurance policy toward the lasting success of the relationship, even if there is no real commitment of faith made by the couple.

A careful reading of the New Testament, however, will reveal some very different views on this subject from those commonly observed by many in our society. Scripture teaches that the eternal destiny of the individual is not dependent on the observance of a ritual or ceremony, but is entirely an act of God’s grace through the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross as stated in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)

The early church came out of a culture and religion steeped in rite and ritual. It was very difficult for many to understand that access to God’s saving grace came simply through an individual’s renunciation of sin and a confession of Christ as Saviour and Lord. This point is illustrated in the Book of Acts when Peter was a guest in the house of Cornelius, a Gentile in Caesarea:

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ‘Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’” (Acts 10:44-47 NIV)

It is at this point in the early history of the church that the Jewish Christians discovered the ritual of water baptism is not a prerequisite for an individual to be fully received by God and infilled by his Holy Spirit. In fact, it reveals that the Holy Spirit can truly enter the life of one who believes, without human ritual or intervention.

Refer to Acts 10 (*Use this as your primary Scripture reading, earlier in your service.)
as you consider the following:

For the Jew, keeping the Old Testament food laws was one way of ensuring one's position before God. However, Peter learned a new lesson from his vision of the sheet: that forgiveness is found by those who believe through Jesus' name. (Acts 10:43) The evidence had been demonstrated by the fact that the new Gentile believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. Baptism served as a public declaration of identification with the crucified and risen Christ, but was not necessary for their salvation.

Sacramentalism as a Ritual

Over the years, sacramentalism has traditionally been associated with ritual. A careful study of the New Testament model of the common meal or "Lord's Supper" will reveal something very different to the more formal communion ceremony or ritual practised today in many churches.

The first reference to the Lord's Supper is found in the Gospels. In fact, all four Gospels contain accounts of the events surrounding Christ's final meal with his disciples in the upper room. As Scripture indicates, Christ and his disciples had met to share in the *Passover meal* together. This Jewish ceremony celebrates the salvation of God as it relates back to the most significant event in the history of Israel—"the Exodus." During the celebration of this meal with the disciples, however, Christ takes the opportunity to project toward an even greater act of salvation which was about to take place. The wine, which spoke of the blood of the Passover lamb, now represented the blood of the Lamb of God through which the believer would pass from death into eternal life. The bread, which spoke of how quickly the Israelites would have left Egypt, now spoke of the immediacy of Christ's death on the cross—the breaking of his body for our sins. As the Jewish community continued to celebrate the Passover, it was hoped that those who came to recognize the greater Passover Lamb would reflect on his final act of deliverance for his people from this point forward.

The Book of Acts records that the church experienced a great deal of persecution as it began to grow. One way to deal with the hardship was to pool resources.

Read Acts 4:32-35

This passage of scripture states that the Christians readily shared their possessions and took care of each other. Eating in fellowship was a way of life that ensured no one among them was going without the food they needed. As they met, they took the opportunity to thank God for his goodness to them and reflect upon the salvation that was theirs through the broken body and spilled blood of Christ.

In most Christian traditions, however, this meal, which was shared by the community of believers, has been replaced by a ritual celebrated as a reminder of Christ's sacrificial death—and so in a very meaningful way, people are invited to share once again in the message of the cross.

However, in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, it is discovered that the Lord's Supper, which was meant to unify the body of believers, had become a source of division and dispute. Attitudes of selfishness and greed crept in to the sharing of these meals, affecting the life of the church. There had been a missional aspect to this fellowship and "communion" that was being lost through their actions and attitudes. We ought to model, in our own experience of fellowship within the Body, the unity and care that was intended by those

first Christians in Acts 4.

Sacramentalism as a Relationship

Although The Salvation Army does not apply the sacramental life in terms of "rite" or a "ritual," it does promote sacramentalism in the context of a person's ongoing relationship with Christ. As we have established, one's position in Christ is not determined by rite or ceremony but in the acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Accordingly, fellowship with him, in his suffering and death, is also not a question of established ritual but of ongoing relationship. Salvationists are encouraged, therefore, to live out every area of their lives as a sacrament unto God.

In practical terms, Salvationists are encouraged to daily share in the death and resurrection of Christ. For example, every time Salvationists sit down to eat and drink, whether at home or as a body of believers, they should be given opportunity to reflect upon and remember the sacrifice of Christ. The "Army grace," which was pronounced at many meals shared by early Salvationists, afforded such an opportunity to link the story of the Passover with the ultimate deliverance from sin provided by Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

"We thank thee Lord for this our food,
Much more because of Jesus' blood.
Let manna to our souls be given,
The "Bread of Life" sent down from Heaven."

Glorifying God through the consistent use of the gifts and abilities given by the Holy Spirit will also serve as a continual witness to the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon an individual's life. Therefore, Salvationists are encouraged to model the substance of their relationship with Christ *at all times and in all places*. The wearing of the Salvation Army uniform can also serve as a consistent reminder to the Salvation soldier and to others of one's enrolment or "confirmation" of faith, which in many denominations is the term used to identify a "believer's baptism."

Times and situations remain where, through an act of commitment or a special ceremony, Salvationists are given an opportunity to reflect on God's rich blessings as well:

- The dedication of a small child will continue to serve as a reminder of the parents' commitment to provide a godly environment for that young life entrusted into their care.
- The public enrolment of soldiers and adherents serves to reinforce the realities of relationship with, and responsibility to, Christ.
- The Christian marriage ceremony is the beginning of a sacrament of love, modelling the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church.
- The Army funeral celebrates the "promotion to glory" of those who have followed the Lord faithfully here on earth.

As a final word on this issue, although the Army does not administer the traditional sacraments of baptism and communion, it is important to affirm that at no time should Salvationists ever feel discouraged to participate in such ceremonies while engaged in fellowship with Christians from other traditions. Ultimately "communion" speaks of the "community" of faith, of which we are an integral part. The Army's greatest witness to this community may be in its continual ministry and mission to serve "the least," "the last," and

"the lost."

John's account of the Last Supper that Christ shared with the disciples (John 13:1-17) is very different from the other Gospel writers. Although his account of the meal encompasses two full chapters, nowhere does he mention the incident with the bread and the wine. Instead, the most significant act of Christ, according to John, was that he took on the role of a servant and washed the disciples' feet. It is through his own self-emptying act of love that Jesus demonstrated the full extent of his love.

This is the courageous call to us today: to demonstrate a self-giving love in faithfulness to God and in service to others; to have our lives be seen as a sacrament of God's presence and grace through us and in our world. Consider the routine of your daily life. How can you make these areas living sacraments unto God? Are there further actions that would enable you to live more sacramentally before God? Are there actions or activities that you should discontinue, in order to more faithfully live sacramentally?

RESPONSE

Are you hearing the Spirit "Calling the Courageous..." to be Christ's broken bread, through your life?

The opportunity is given for you to make that public declaration of your obedience to his leading by coming to the Mercy Seat in prayer.

The Salvation Army Mercy Seat is perhaps one of the greatest sacramental symbols in our places of worship, symbolizing the direct access to God all believers have through the shed blood of Christ.

Matthew 27:51 reminds us that at the very moment that Christ died, **"the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"** (NIV). The "atonement cover" or "mercy seat" was now accessible to all who believe.

God is here and this "mercy seat" reminds us of that truth and the readiness of God to not only meet our needs but to hear and answer our prayers—to commune with us, in this place, or wherever our "mercy seat" may be in our daily lives. He is also ready and willing to provide us with the strength and power of his Holy Spirit to be all he has called us to be.

Claim that power today in your life as we sing...

"My Like Must Be Christ's Broken Bread..."

610, The Song Book of The Salvation Army. Albert Orsborn.

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