The Best is Yet to Come

December 8, 2013
Travis Collins

The very word, “Christmas,” implies the act we are celebrating this morning. “Christmas” comes from “Christ’s mass,” with “mass” meaning the celebration of the Eucharist, or communion—the celebration of the body and blood, the death and grace, of Jesus. So, more Christmassy than chestnuts roasting on an open fire, more Christmassy than elves and reindeer, more Christmassy than malls and Amazon.com…is the celebration of communion, Christ’s mass.

Today I want to concentrate on the words of Jesus at the first communion—the sharing of the bread and wine in that upper room on the night before Jesus died: “I will not eat this bread or drink this cup with you until we do this again in the Kingdom.”

1) The Kingdom of God

“Kingdom of God” is a major theme in Jesus’ teaching. The Kingdom of God means God’s active, effective and complete reign. Jesus taught us to pray, for example, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” That’s a parallelism, an intentional redundancy with the purpose of saying the same thing in two different ways. Whenever you see something on earth that looks like Heaven, where the will and purposes of God are fulfilled, there is His Kingdom.

2) The Kingdom is now-but-not-yet

Jesus said the Kingdom had come in Him. Yet on that night when Jesus celebrated communion with his disciples, He said he would not celebrate “communion” again until “the Kingdom of God comes.”

So there is a “now-but-not-yet” nature of the Kingdom of God. God’s Kingdom—His sovereign rule—became uniquely present on earth at the birth of Jesus, but will become a full reality only on that day toward which history is headed—the second coming of Jesus. Then history as we know it will come to an end, and God will set things right. Then His Kingdom will come in its fullness. Forever beyond that moment things will be as God intends them to be.

3) And we have a call to expand the Kingdom now.

The Kingdom of God in its fullness awaits the future. But the Kingdom of God is not just pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by. And we’re not supposed to just sit around and wait for it. The Kingdom of God is to be spread here and now.
The Kingdom of God is about justice, ministry to human needs, and reconciliation. So whenever we work for the fair and just treatment of everyone, whenever we help heal hurts, and whenever we work to break down the walls that still divide us as races...we are expanding the Kingdom now.

The Kingdom of God is about changed hearts—meaning people here and around the world who are lost and far from God are given every opportunity to know and submit to the King. So whenever we have a spiritual conversation with someone, or give to support missionaries, or otherwise help people along their journey to Jesus...we are expanding the Kingdom now.

The Kingdom of God is even about ecology; it involves creation. The Bible says in Romans 8 that the earth has been groaning, waiting for the day when it will be restored. The fullness of God’s Kingdom is somehow going to mean a new creation. So whenever we take care of God’s creation...we are expanding the Kingdom now.

In this meantime of history we, the King’s imperfect subjects, work to unleash His Kingdom in limited but meaningful ways.

4) The best is yet to come

There is a futuristic element to communion. 1 Corinthians 11:26 reads, “As often as you eat the bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” So when Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” it means we are to remember not only that he came…but also that he’s coming.

When we celebrate communion we ought to remember: The best is yet to come.

Every once in a while we get a foretaste of what’s coming.

The people of Israel, for example, had been slaves in Egypt. Moses was Israel’s Mandela, and God used Moses to get the Israelites out of their bondage. Their destination was the Promised Land. But they messed up and forfeited the gift of going immediately there. (That’s kind of a long story.)

Then, when it looked like they were going to get to enter the land of Canaan, what we now call the Holy Land of Israel, they sent twelve scouts over to check things out. And here is what I want to point out from the scouts’ mission: they brought back grapes. A cluster of grapes. But not just any grapes. Not the kind of cluster you get at Kroger. This was “super cluster.” The one cluster was so large they put it on a pole and two grown men carried each end of the pole.

Can you imagine the eyes of the Israelites when they saw the grapes?! They sat around debating whether or not they should cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land...munching on grapes. Those grapes were signs of what was awaiting them on the other side. Signs. Symbols. Samples. Previews. Reminders. Foretastes. Of a Promised Land.

Every once in a while, we get a grape. A sign. A reminder. A sample. A preview. A foretaste of a land to come.

A hymn or song is particularly moving. And you get a grape.
A Christian friend is particularly caring. And you get a grape. A sign, symbol and sample of what is promised.

The first snowfall of the year comes and you don’t have to go to work or school and you sled down the hill and laugh and go get hot chocolate. And you get a grape.

You get a video on your phone of your grandson taking some of his first steps—waddling across the floor cuter than anything you can imagine. And you get a grape. A sign, symbol and sample of what is promised.

You wonder if you belong in church because everyone seems to have it so together, and then someone in your circle confesses their doubt, or their regret, or the skeleton in their closet, and you realize you aren’t alone. And you get a grape.

At Jesus’ invitation we join in line with, or sit among, other sinners to receive bread and juice that symbolizes the body, blood, and grace of Jesus. And you get a grape. A sign, symbol and sample of what is promised.

Every once in a while you get a brief taste of the truth that the best is yet to come.

*Say it with me: The best is yet to come.*

There is a story so often told that it’s worn out, and so corny it’s telling makes the teller sound corny, too. But I could think of no better way to make my point. So here goes, as I found it in Guidepost magazine…

There was a very sick young woman who had been given three months to live. She asked that her pastor come to her home to talk about her funeral service. She picked out songs and scriptures and planned the service.

Then, “there’s one more thing,” she said. “It’s very important to me. I want to be buried with a fork in my hand.”

He was puzzled.

She explained. “My grandmother once made an important point to me. Whenever you go to a social or dinner and when the dishes of the main course are being cleared often the host or hostess will lean over and say, “Keep your fork.” That was my grandmother’s favorite part, and mine, too, for when someone says, “Keep your fork,” that means something better was coming. A chocolate cake or apple pie or some other wonderful dessert.”

She continued, “So I want people to see me there in the casket with a fork in my hand and when they ask, ‘What’s with the fork?’ I want you to tell them this story. And tell them that, for me, the best is yet to come.

Sure enough, at the visitation countless people wondered aloud about the fork in her hand. And during his message the pastor told the story of his conversation with the young lady, and explained her assurance that the best was yet to come.
Say it with me: The best is yet to come.

“Eyes have not seen,” says 1 Corinthians 2:9, ears have not heard, and the human mind has not conceived the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”

Say it with me: The best is yet to come.

This past Wednesday in my Bible reading I came across Proverbs 13:12 which reads, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.” The deep longings of our souls are not fulfilled here, for we were made ultimately for another world. And there is a tree of life, a place as real as this, where longings are fulfilled, hopes are realized, and dreams really do come true. There we will celebrate communion with the Lord Jesus.

Say it with me: The best is yet to come.

This Thursday we had the memorial service for Les Hickory. I don’t remember a dying man having such a sense of humor. Cancer robbed him of his health, but not of his joy. But Les wasn’t naïve or in denial. The following words came to me shortly before we walked into the sanctuary for his service: Les was not disconnected from the difficult reality; Les was deeply connected to the ultimate reality, which is that, for those whose hope is in Jesus and not their own goodness—say it with me—the best is yet to come.