

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2011 EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 111:3,4

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 84:1, 1

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Psalm Scripture versification 2-1: 1,2 [Luke 15:18-24]

**Scripture reading:** Luke 15:11-32; Heidelberg Catechism Sunday 30:81

**Scripture text:** Luke 15:17-20

**17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!**

**18 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,**

**19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." '**

**20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.**

(Luke 15:17-20)

**Heidelberg Catechism: Question 81**

**Who are to come to the table of the Lord?**

A. Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the

suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and those who do not repent eat and drink judgment upon themselves.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] I Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32

**Theme:** We have an inexorable duty to join the table of Holy Communion.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, to sit at the table of Holy Communion is not something that you can just neglect should you feel like it. Christ commanded us to celebrate Holy Communion. We also state this in our confession, Sunday 28, answer 75 and as well in the question we consider this evening. The question reads: **Who are to come to the table of the Lord?** Every true believer is thus commanded by Christ Himself to celebrate Holy Communion.

It is so that for many years we follow the habit of celebrating Holy Communion every three months. Should we refer to a habit it does not necessarily mean something bad or wrong. We would rather call it a good habit of celebrating Holy Communion every three months. We believers should be continually strengthened in our faith, because we otherwise would easily fall into doubt – doubt whether we really are children of God, doubt about the love of God. In fact, we must celebrate Holy Communion as often as possible. Calvin had the idea that a true believer should celebrate Holy Communion every Sunday. Because the Holy Communion is one of the ways used by the Lord to strengthen our faith, the habit of celebrating Holy Communion every three months is a good habit.

But this matter has two sides. To be in the habit of celebrating Holy Communion every three months could also have a wrong effect on a believer. Let us now not misunderstand each other. It is not the regular celebration of Holy Communion that is wrong. The fact that the regular celebration of Holy Communion is a habit to us may cause us to start doing things automatically.

As an example, somebody driving a car for many years does not consider every step taken from entering the car until driving in top gear. To such a person, driving a car is something that happens automatically. You will agree that it is good to be so used to driving a car. But celebrating Holy Communion is not driving a car.

This is the trap set for us by the Satan. Because, for many years, we are in the habit of celebrating Holy Communion every three months we could easily handle this celebration in the same way as driving a car. We do not carefully consider every step leading to sitting at the table. We also do not intensely enough experience every step of our preparation for Holy Communion. The elder just visits us ever three months and asks whether we have the desire of celebrating Holy Communion and automatically we confirm. Well, that is what is expected from us, it is our habit.

Beloved, because habit could also have a wrong effect on us, may the Holy Spirit tonight again point out our inexorable duty of joining the table of Holy Communion. We use the pointers of answer 81 of our catechism in listening to what the Lord teaches in the parable of the lost son. We learn what a reborn believer does when it comes to Holy Communion.

Firstly something about the parable of the lost son. This parable, together with the preceding two parables, forms a unit. All three parables deal with something that got lost. In the first parable it is one sheep that got lost through foolishness. Here it is one out of a hundred that got lost, thus one percent. In the second parable it is a coin that got lost for no reason. It was one of ten coins that got lost, thus ten percent. With the third parable Jesus brings the matter of desolation to a climax. Here it is a son who, due to his headstrongness and obstinacy, got lost. He is one of two sons, in other words fifty percent.

Come, let us now use the pointers of answer 81 to see what inexorable duty to join the table of Holy Communion we have. The first pointer: **Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins** must come to the table of the Lord.

Brothers, sisters and children, regarding this first pointer, which is also the first step on the road to the table of Holy Communion, we are greatly lacking. We do not like being displeased with ourselves. Being displeased with yourself means that you must detest yourself, and that we do not like doing. We much rather consider ourselves as people worth something. Should you detest yourself, you are breaking down your own self-image. But this detesting of yourself deals specifically with our sins. Due to our sins we must detest ourselves.

Still, because we do not like regarding ourselves as sinners, it remains difficult. Sinner sounds so ugly, like somebody who is rejected. We would rather want to say that we are humans ... prone to mistakes. And here lies the great lacking. Because we do not like speaking about ourselves as sinners, it often happens that we also do not like reflecting upon our sins and therefore are unable to detest ourselves.

The father's youngest son also did not like considering himself to be a sinner. He wanted to be independent, on his own. He wanted to go and do his own thing in the world, unsupervised by his father and away from his older brother. He, at least, was a man capable of doing his own thing. So said and done. After receiving his share of the inheritance, he made it into money and departed to a distant land. This newly found freedom did not last very long. Soon all his money was squandered on his so-called freedom which in fact was nothing else than profigacy.

There he was totally broke and the so-called friends he had when money was no problem also disappeared like mist in the sun. Even after squandering all his money and possessing nothing he still was unwilling to consider himself a sinner. And to compound his poverty even further a heavy famine came to that land. Even when he had to volunteer himself to slave labour he still did not want to realize himself being a sinner. His downhill road had to go even further. He had to sit amongst the pigs watching them enjoying their husks whilst he was starving. Due to the famine the pigs had to be given their food without anybody being allowed to share in it – not even the pig herder.

Only when he sat dirty and hungry amongst the pigs did he start thinking. Firstly he thought about the labourers working for his father, having enough to eat. Then he realized where and what he in fact was. He is a sinner. Because he was not a manager of his property, he sinned

against God. Because he, through his conduct, scorned his father's upbringing and leadership, he sinned against his father. He is not worth being called his father's son. This son had to first sit amongst the pigs, dirty and hungry in the mess before he came to repentance, before he detested himself.

Brothers and sisters I am convinced that we do not need to physically stray so far before we realize how sinful we are. So that we may take our first steps on the way to the Lord's table, He gave His word to us. Although it could be a painful process, every true believer should test, piece by piece, his life to the light of God's Word. Pray for the Spirit to open our eyes so that we may inspect the dark corners of our hearts and detest ourselves.

At least we are true believers, therefore we are also responsible people. And a responsible believer does self-censure. Such a person soul-searches himself and he starts with these first steps on the road to the table of Holy Communion. It goes without saying, somebody who has not experienced a true detesting of himself will also not have a true need of Christ as Saviour.

Let us now investigate the second pointer: **The people that yet trust that these sins are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ**, must come to the table of the Lord.

Only after the youngest son finally realized in what mess he has landed himself, did he understand that he needed somebody to ensure his deliverance. By himself he could not rise from this mess, but he did not sit down, feeling sorry for himself or became dejected. He had trust in his father. Therefore decided to return to his father. And when he arrives at his father he would not even beg for deliverance, he would confess his sins against God and his father. Unconditional repentance is at any rate the logical step to the recognition of sin. Then his father must deal with him, as he deems fit.

Although the young son knows that he, in the eyes of God and his father, is deeply guilty he still has the trust that his father would not reject him. He trusts his father because he knows his father to be a just man, even towards his employees.

The young son did not stop at intentions. He immediately acted, arose and returned to his father. And when he arrived his father gave him no opportunity of saying all the words he planned to say. Shortly after confessing his sins and saying that he is no longer worth to be called a son, his father interrupted him. His father, because his son was dead but is now alive again, had preparations done for a feast. His father forgave him, therefore he did not want to hear what the son intended to tell him. And although the son, due to his own pigheadedness, strayed, he remained the father's son.

Beloved only when a person has properly taken the first step on the road to the table of the Lord, and really experienced it, will such a person realize his need to a Saviour. And we believers know our Father. Since childhood we know that Jesus Christ was sent by His Father to die for our sakes on the cross.

Therefore the true believer who really experienced the first step of the preparation and knows for a fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sakes of sinners, will be able to have full

trust in Him. The trust in Christ encompasses the following: I have full faith that Jesus Christ did not only for other people died on the cross, but also for me and my complete remission of all my sins. Through His spilt blood and and broken body He earned my forgiveness by God the Father as well. The believer who has come so far as to take this second step to the table of the Lord, will be able to, in full faith and together with David, say:

**10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.**

**11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;**

**12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.**

(Ps. 103:10-12)

Brothers, sisters and children, there is still one remaining pointer. The third pointer is: **Those who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life**, must come to the table of the Lord.

There the young son, in his poverty and misery, realized that even his father's labourers have a better life than he has at the moment. Because they are obedient to his father they have an abundance of bread. But he, because he was disobedient to God and pigheaded towards his father, lacks. Therefore he desires a better life. Even should his father treat him as one of his labourers, he would be better off. Therefore he intended telling his father: **Make me like one of your hired servants.** (Luke 15:19) Hereby he also indicates that he wants to better his life. He wants to be, and remain, obedient to God and his father.

When the son eventually arrived at his father and his father greeted him with so much inconceivable generosity and love, the realization of his sin was deeper than ever. Therefore his eventual words to his father was not only an unconditional confession, but also a cry for strengthened faith: **Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son**, help me! (Luke 15:21)

Beloved, we true believers, knowing and trusting that God's unconditional love and generosity is also granted to us, will also have the desire to strengthen our faith and better our lives. In fact, we know and believe that Christ also died for us on the cross and reconciled us perfectly to God. Let us thus now, through our faith, reveal the desire to be continually strengthened and to better our lives.

Only by the means granted to us by God Himself would we be able to strengthen our faith. These means are the Word, Sacraments and Prayer. To better your life is not similar to plastic surgery. Filmstars undergo facial plastic surgery in aid of appearing younger and more beautiful, but the signs of aging remain on the rest of their bodies. Somebody, who desires to improve his life, lives like the branch grafted to the true vine. He lives by the power of the Spirit and Word of God, flowing from Christ into him.

But... the person not properly experiencing just one of these steps, the person devoid of true repentance for his sins, but still joining the table of the Lord must know that he is shamming.

To such a persons (hypocrites) not turning to the Lord the following warning: **For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.** (1 Corinthians 11:29)

By these words the Lord does not want to keep us away from His table. In fact, He commands us to celebrate Holy Communion. Therefore He teaches the three steps of preparation to Holy Communion. He wants to have His family of true believers at His table. Because of this reason a believer may not just stay away from the table. Somebody staying away without any specific reason from the table is busy hardening himself to one or more of these steps of preparation. Such a person does not detest himself and/or has no faith that his sins were forgiven for Christ's sake; and/or has no desire of strengthening his faith and bettering his life.

Brothers, sisters and children, this evening the Holy Spirit puts three questions we need to ponder on: Firstly, do I realize that in the eyes of God, I am a sinner, and do I realize how severe my sins really are? Secondly, do I truly believe the promise that Christ and His cross is my only hope? Lastly, do I desire living for Him and Him alone? The Lord's table of Holy Communion is not open so that anybody, who wants to, may join. Christ, however, commands us to join and the Holy Spirit, so that we can obey the command of Christ, guides us by these three serious questions.

**Amen!**

Closing prayer.

Closing Song: Scripture versification 2-1:5,6,7 [Luke 15:18-24]

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

Rev CCA Vrey  
11 September 2011  
Scripture Modern King James Version