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Q&A#53 Echoes of the Eucharist?

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Today's question: "What would be a text that you would go to demonstrate the multifaceted elements of the Eucharist? Can you recommend any books or resources that explore the many symbolic and typological elements of the Eucharist, much like your book on Echoes of the Exodus? Perhaps an echoes of the Eucharist?"

Peter Leithart, 'Blessed Are the Hungry' - <https://amzn.to/2DjcBeL>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, what would be a text that you would go to demonstrate the multifaceted elements of the Eucharist? Can you recommend any books or resources that explore the many symbolic and typological elements of the Eucharist, much like your book on Echoes of the Exodus, perhaps an Echoes of the Eucharist? I think I would probably begin in places like John 6 or 1 Corinthians 10-11. One of the benefits of 1 Corinthians 10-11 is it has the words of institution recalled within it, but it also has a broader context in which the supper is treated in ways that recall the events of the Exodus.

So at the beginning of chapter 10 we read, Moreover brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ. So what we see within that particular passage is the account of the crossing of the Red Sea, the eating of the manna in the wilderness, and the drinking of

the rock as events that anticipate the event of the celebration of the Eucharist. And we have a logical connection between the Eucharist and the Passover, but this takes it even further.

It's not just the Passover, it's like the journeying in the wilderness, and that particular connection is illuminating. We see that they are baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. That helps us to understand in part what baptism into Christ means.

We can go back to the event of the Exodus and think of parallels and ways that that illumines what the baptism into Christ means. So for instance, baptism in the case of Moses, Moses was the one who was drawn out of the water as an infant. He was drawn out of the water, saved from Pharaoh.

He was the one who was his sister Miriam, was involved in that event. And then we see a repeat of that event as Israel is drawn out of the water, saved from the pursuing Pharaoh, and Miriam celebrates at the other end. And it's connected with a birth event.

So in both cases what we see is a baptism type event. First of all it occurs to Moses and then it occurs to his people. And so baptism into Christ, seen according to this paradigm, is baptism into Christ's baptism in the Jordan, Christ's baptism of his death, and Christ's baptism of the church, Pentecost.

So there's a threefold baptism of Christ and then we are connected with that. And that connection with the Old Testament, that typological pattern is illuminating in that context. But it also is illuminating for our understanding of the supper.

That the supper is related to the eating of the manna in the wilderness and it's also related to drinking of the rock. These events that preserved them in the wilderness journey, that pilgrimage as they were being tested. And that's the particular emphasis that Paul brings across in this chapter.

That we are being tested. Israel was tested. We should learn from their example not to fall in the ways that they did.

Later on in this chapter he brings out further elements of it. That it is a communion in the body of Christ. That to eat this bread and to drink this cup is to participate in the body and blood of Christ.

And he connects that with eating of the sacrifices on the altar. And so we have a further connection here. So we've got the connection with drinking of the rock.

We have the connection with eating of the manna. And we have the connection now with a communion sacrifice and the participation in eating the sacrifice and how that shows belonging. How that's connected with eating of the altar.

The food of the altar. When we get to chapter or actually even before that there are statements like the cup of blessing which we bless in verse 15 16. And that's interesting.

That the cup of blessing that we bless. The cup of blessing is in many respects something that can be seen in contrast to the cup of curse that we have within numbers and the right of jealousy. The woman who is accused of adultery and suspected is brought before God.

There is a cup of judgment or a cup of curse where the words of a curse are scraped up into it along with dust from the tabernacle floor. And she drinks that and there's a test that occurs as God tests her. Now what happens as a result of that is either judgment or vindication.

And there's also related to that. There is a sacrifice, a memorial sacrifice to call God's attention. And that connection is interesting here as well because we have a cup of blessing that we drink.

And as we drink that cup of blessing the anticipation is not judgment but blessing. And so we are calling. There's a memorial sacrifice type dimension to this.

The memorial sacrifice involves sacrifice of grain or some meal type, some rudimentary bread type substance or associated with that wine often libation or a drink offering. And so what we have is another sort of memorial offering. Something that calls for God to come and to judge.

But the anticipation in this case is that God will come and judge favorably. That God will bless us. And so again there's a typological pattern here underlying that.

Even further on as we get into chapter 11 we see the connection between Christ's celebration of the Lord's Supper and Christ's original institution of it within the context of his death. Now that's not the only connection that it has. It's interesting as we go in the Gospel of Luke for instance that Christ reveals himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread.

And after his resurrection is revealed in eating food with his disciples. And so there are joyful resurrection meals that also point to Christ's presence, Christ's revelation of himself and to our being his people. And so these themes need to be held alongside each other as I've commented before.

The cup as the new covenant in Christ's blood that draws our attention back to Sinai and the old covenant and the blood associated with that. Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner and calling for judgment again that's associated with the testing of jealousy. Israel received the testing of jealousy at Sinai.

The tablets of stone were broken. The water that came down from the rock, the dust of

the golden calf was placed upon the water and they had to drink the water. And the test of jealousy and many of them died as a result of that as a plague.

And so what we see is a very another background for the typology of the Eucharist. I think that within this context also we see a sense of the broader life of what the Eucharist means. It's not just a matter of the elements and we can often focus narrowly upon the elements but it is a meal.

It's eating and drinking together. It's eating this bread and drinking this cup and it also it's interesting that certain other elements start to come into focus. It's not just the bread and the wine.

It's the cup and the table and other things like that. Those elements that enable the core elements to have their significance and this can give us a what Peter Lighthouse has talked about as a wide angle lens upon what's taking place. This is not just about elements.

This is about us as the body of Christ, the people of God being constituted as such in our ritual meal. And as we participate in that ritual meal we are receiving Christ's body but we are also receiving his presence. He is our he is the host of the meal.

The other thing that's interesting is the connection between what has happened in the past and what will happen in the future. So there's memorialising Christ's death, a memorial sacrifice until he comes. So there's connections with the peace offering.

There's connections with the memorial sacrifice and then there's also the anticipation until he comes. This is pointing forward towards something yet to come. The celebration of the Passover meal was something which did not just look back.

It looked forward. It anticipated the type of the type of deliverance that God will bring about in the future. Something that's striking as we look in the story of Exodus is the way that chapter 12 breaks the narrative flow.

And so you've had this narrative flow of the story of Israel in Egypt and then suddenly that pattern is broken by this intrusion of when I'll read the the verse that introduces it which is quite interesting. Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying this month shall be the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year to you and then goes into the whole institution of the Passover and then the memorialisation that that involves.

Now the interesting thing is that introductory verse breaks us with the original the surrounding context. So the surrounding context we know they're in Egypt but what we have here is an imaginative situation of the reader outside of Egypt in the land looking back on that experience in Egypt and then re-situating them within that story. And that's in many respects what the Passover did.

It brought them back, placed them in that context again and they recalled that event but recall that event as one with the energy of promise and purpose that drove them forward into the future. And that's what we're doing when we celebrate the Eucharist. We're celebrating an event that draws us back, recalls us to the original event, the founding event and then pushes us forward towards the future as that event is an expression of divine purpose and the destiny of us as the people of God.

The other passage I draw attention to is something like John 6. John 6 begins again with an Exodus motif. After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed him because they saw his signs which he performed on those who were diseased.

And Jesus went up onto a mountain and there he sat with his disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. So we have the time of the Passover, we have crossing over the sea, we have having performed signs in the land, people follow him, a great multitude and then he comes to a mountain and he feeds the people at this point.

It's the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 which is associated with the manna. Jesus immediately goes on to speak about that. Now John doesn't have an account of the Lord's Supper, the institution of the Lord's Supper as we have elsewhere in the Gospels.

But what we do have is Christ in this context saying he takes the barley loaves and the two small fish and he says make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place so the people, men sat down in number about 5,000. And Jesus took the loaves and when he'd given thanks he distributed them to the disciples and the disciples to those sitting down and likewise of the fish as much as they wanted.

Now those words should immediately resonate in your mind. Jesus took the loaves and when he had given thanks he distributed them. Those are familiar words and again what we see here is the pattern of the supper.

The pattern of the supper placed somewhere else. What else is interesting here is the reference to grass. Why the reference to grass? Jesus has led the people out and he has led them across the sea and he leads them to this hill where there's a lot of good grass.

Now the grass relates to the theme elsewhere that Jesus is the good shepherd. He leads his people out so that they will find good pasture. And so the supper is in many ways Christ feeding his people, feeding the people in the wilderness where there is no other food to be found.

So again we see a theme taking place here. Jesus then relates this to the event of the feeding of Israel with the manna in the wilderness and he connects that and then juxtaposes the manna in the wilderness with the true bread from heaven, with the bread that he represents. And so again we see a juxtaposition but also a connection.

The connection is now that we participate in the supper and we are participating in the true bread from heaven. We are participating in Christ and his presence as he is our host and he is also our food, the one that we feed upon by faith. And then we see other themes coming to the surface.

Do not labour for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to everlasting life which the Son of Man will give you because God the Father has set his seal on him. And then this is the bread of God that comes down from heaven. The bread of God was associated with the sacrifices.

The Levites offered the bread of God. The bread of God are the sacrifices that are offered on the altar and Christ is the true bread of God. Christ is the true sacrifice and we participate in that.

Other themes that this is something of which you eat and live forever. Eating and living forever that's the theme of the tree of life. Christ is the true food that is the tree of life that gives us life that wells up eternally.

And then you have the connections with these various other themes of ascension and the spirit and Christ is the bread of life. All these themes are at play within that chapter. So that's one of the chapters I'll go to.

I think there is a lot there that can really help us to understand what's at play in the Eucharist. It can help us to draw further connections. So we can draw the connections back to the exodus to the manna to the Passover.

We can draw connections back to the tree of life. We can draw connections back to eating of the drinking of the wine in the garden. Noah's drinking of wine in the garden.

Israel as the vineyard. Israel also as the field. And these themes are important too.

We can think of it as the connections with the grapes of Eshcol. These grapes that are taken from the land and Israel gets to participate in anticipation of the fruits of the land that they are about to enter. We can think about it as the bread and wine that Melchizedek gives to Abraham in the celebration of his victory over the kings.

Or a meal eaten in the presence of enemies. It's God as the good shepherd or Christ as the good shepherd, the one who lays down his life for the sheep and the one who is our shepherd and the one who sets a table before us in the presence of our enemies just as he sat at that table with his enemy on the night that he was betrayed. And then we can see it as connected with the feast of wisdom.

Wisdom inviting people in in Proverbs chapter 9 to taste of her bread and her wine. And all these themes I think build up and help us to get a bigger picture of what's taking place in the Eucharist. The sacrificial themes, the themes of exodus and deliverance, the

themes of victory, the themes of provision and nourishment in a place of difficulty.

And it can also help us to understand the broader dimensions of the supper. That it's not just about the bread and the wine. It's also about the table and the cup.

It's also about Christ as our host. It's about eating together with each other. It's about those actions, the taking and the breaking and the drinking and all these sorts of things.

And so I would suggest starting off with things like that and moving out. There's a lot of different ways you can go from there. If you want a book to get into this I highly recommend Peter Lighthouse's *Blessed are the Hungry* which presents a series of reflections upon the supper and I've found incredibly useful on these issues.

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Thank you very much for listening and Lord willing I'll be back with another question and answer tomorrow. God bless.