Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

As I said a moment ago, our focus today is the second mark of the true church, which is the pure administration of the sacraments. And because our confession has dedicated articles on the sacraments, we will take it as read that the only two sacraments are baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and that they, together with preaching, are how God gives us His grace, and we will, literally, just focus on the **pure administration** of the sacraments. *Pure* means clean, correct, and unmixed, and *administration* is about how you do something and how it is supervised. So how are baptism and the Lord’s Supper done correctly, kept clean, and carefully supervised? are the sorts of things we will consider.

Now, I am sure that many of you have heard the old denominational joke that describes what took place when, during a meeting of all of the churches in one city, someone ran in and shouted, "The building is on fire!" The Pentecostals gathered for a prayer meeting, the Baptists looked for water, the liberals claimed that fire is just symbolic, the fundamentalists said it was judgment because of the nearby casino, the Anglicans put on robes, formed a procession, and marched out in grand style, the Hyper-Calvinists said the fire was predestined, the youth pastors toasted marshmallows, and the Presbyterians appointed a committee to investigate previous synodical reports on fire and to suggest procedural changes that could be ratified at the next General Assembly. And in case you did not know this, we in the RCNZ are basically Presbyterian in terms of how our churches are governed. So Presbyterians, according to the joke, are all about doing things properly.

Well, while anything can be taken to silly extremes, there is a very biblical reason why we believe that doing things properly is important. The passage we will spend most of our time looking at today is in 1 Corinthians 11 and it has to do with the Lord’s Supper. And if you know the letter to the church at Corinth, you will know that there was chaos in different areas of their worship services. So Paul wrote to them to show them what they were doing wrong and how to do it right. And you read phrases like this in 1 Corinthians – **7:17**, “*This is my rule in all the churches*,” **14:33**, “*As in all the churches of the saints*…[this is how \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is to be done].” And as Paul gets to the end of the topics he addresses, he says this in **14:40**: “*All things should be done decently and in order*.” And a bit earlier in that chapter, Paul gives the reason why all things should be done decently and in order in all the churches; he says, “*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace*.” So contrary to what many people allege, which is that this fixation with doing things properly is just about our culture or tradition, at its core it is actually about the very character of God. So doing things decently and in order is important.

But even if you accept that things should be done decently and in order, you might still be wondering What’s the big deal with baptism and the Lord’s Supper? Is it really all that complex or complicated?

* Well, at the time of the Reformation, one of the major issues of disagreement, not just with Rome but among the Reformers, was the sacraments. One group of Reformers rejected infant baptism and baptism by the sprinkling of water.
* And in 1529, the Reformers met at **Marburg** to debate various matters of disagreement. After four days, 14 significant points of agreement were reached. However, on the matter of what the Lord’s Supper meant, no agreement could be reached.
* And this issue affected whole denominations. For instance, in 1559, A governor, named Frederick, was busy trying to unite the various factions that had arisen among the Lutherans, particularly on the subject of the Lord’s Supper. On one side was **Hesshus**, the superintendent of the churches of the area and on the other side was **Klebitz**, an assistant pastor of the Holy Ghost church. And it so happened that both Frederick and Hesshus had to leave town one time and while they were away, Klebitz was given a degree in theology. Well, when Hesshus returned and found out, he was furious, calling Klebitz a “Zwinglian devil,” because of his Lord’s Supper views. So Hesshus suspended Klebitz from preaching, excommunicated him from the church, and ordered the civil officials to banish him from the country. But no one carried out his orders. The next Sunday the Lord’s Supper was to be observed. People filled the church. Klebitz came also, and he stood as usual at the communion table to help with serving the bread and wine. But when he took the cup from the table, Hesshus seized it from his hand and the two men fought before the horrified congregation. Can you imagine Elder\_\_\_\_\_ and me fighting up the front here over the Lord’s Supper cup?!! Well, eventually, Frederick, who was deeply troubled by this controversy, decided that the wedding of his daughter would provide the perfect opportunity for a public debate about Lord’s Supper theology. And so, after the marriage ceremony, two men who argued Calvin’s view of the Supper and two Lutheran theologians spent five days debating the Lord’s Supper while Frederick and many others listened!

But again, you are probably thinking, Yes, but that was then and this is now. Are baptism and the Lord’s Supper really such complicated issues *today*?

* Well, many churches today still disagree with baptizing the children of believers and with sprinkling as a legitimate mode of baptism.
* But there are other questions too: If someone was keen to join our church and they said they had already been baptized elsewhere, what would we need to know about their baptism to be sure that it was proper? In other words, What makes a baptism legit? And even if sprinkling is legit, should it be three sprinkles – F,S,HSp? Or is just one sprinkle ok?
* And with the Lord’s Supper, you probably know that within our own federation of churches, some churches use wine, while others, like ours, use grape juice. Some use a common cup and some use individual cups. Some use unleavened bread wafers and some use leavened bread. Some use bread chunks and some use a loaf that everyone tears a chunk off. And some serve the Supper in the pews while others, like us, gather around a table at the front. Is there one right way to serve the Supper?
* I once attended a US mega church where the way they served Lord’s Supper was to send round baskets with little juice cups that had a foil seal that had a wafer thing in it. They said take as many as you like and give them to your friends – takeaway Lord’s Supper. Is that OK?
* At a local Christian school, they occasionally serve Lord’s Supper to the students during school assembly. Is that OK?
* And one of my children came home from school once and said that a school friend had recently got engaged at a picnic and to celebrate the moment her and her new fiancé shared the Lord’s Supper together. Is that OK?
* And why do we read a preparation form the Sunday before Lord’s Supper and another form on the day of the Supper? Isn’t that just OTT?
* And a few years ago we made changes to our guests at the Lord’s Supper policy, which generated a lot of discussion and upset. And at the heart of that discussion was the pure administration of the sacraments.

So, is this an important topic for us today? Absolutely. Are there complex matters that need to be thought through? Yes there are. And I hope you can see that we can’t possibly address every aspect of the pure administration of the sacraments or even all of the questions that I have just listed today. So we will look at some of the key issues and some of the biblical principles that are relevant to these matters. And of course, this is not a lecture on church practice; it is a sermon. So may the Lord help us to see that this matter is an important part of how the Lord Jesus Christ gives us His grace.

Now, we are already well into our allotted time for this afternoon’s sermon so I just want to make one or two comments about baptism and spend most of our time on the Lord’s Supper and 1 Corinthians 11.

1. So first of all, the pure administration of **Baptism**.
   1. One baptism question I asked earlier was: If someone was keen to join our church and they said they had already been baptized elsewhere, what would we need to know about their baptism to be sure that it was proper? In other words, What makes a baptism legit? Well, there are three things that make baptism legit:
      1. First, it must have been performed by an ordained office-bearer of a Christian church. In **Matthew 28:19-20**, Jesus said to the Apostles, who were foundation office-bearers of the church of Christ, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them*.” So baptism is an official task of the church. And so, for example, if a person was baptized by their father at home or by a study group leader at a youth camp, we would say that that was not baptism and the person would be baptized if they became a member here.
         1. Now, by way of clarification, this is not to say that baptisms can only happen on Sunday in church. For example, there have been times when new born infants who are unwell and stay at hospital for sometime are baptized at hospital. And this is not done because you cannot go to heaven without being baptized but because the Lord commands believing parents to baptize their children and if the weeks go by then you do it hospital. But it is done by the minister and the whole congregation knows it is happening and a good number of people are present. So it is still a church thing, not a private thing.
      2. Secondly, Jesus continued to say to the Apostles, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*.” So to be proper a baptism must be in the name of the F, S, and HSp.
      3. And thirdly, baptism must use water. To be a sacrament there needs to be a sign that symbolizes the spiritual reality, and water is the sign of the cleansing blood of Jesus.

So they are the three things that make a baptism proper: By an ordained office-bearer, in the name of the F,S,HSp, and with water.

* 1. Now, in terms of **sprinkling vs immersion**, we have looked at that in a previous sermon and we may come to it with a later confession article, but as we have seen, what is vital is water, not how it is applied. So while we typically sprinkle, we actually believe that both sprinkling and immersion are acceptable ways to be baptized. And whether it be three sprinkles or one sprinkle, or one dunk or three dunks are matters that every local church has full liberty to make their own choices about.
  2. And, the other significant issue is, of course, **the baptism of the children of believers**. And we may come back to this matter in a later sermon also but the key point today is that we believe this is *commanded* of God. So, for believers to not baptize their children is a matter of disobedience to God’s command.
  3. Well, what this means then is that if you have been baptized by an ordained office-bearer, in the name of the F, S, HSp, with water, and you believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, praise God that your elders (and parents) took the pure administration of the sacraments seriously. You have been given something very meaningful and precious. This morning we talked about the benefit of calling to mind salvation truthes. And brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, there will be many times when you have sinned and you are crushed by your guilt. Well, you can tell yourself, I have been washed by the blood of Jesus as surely as water washes away dirt; I am a forgiven sinner, I am an adopted child of God, I am a member of Christ’s church. And I know this because I have been baptized.

1. Well, that brings us secondly to the pure administration of the **Lord’s** **Supper**. Let’s read **1 Corinthians 11:27-30** (p.959): “*Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died*.”
   1. Now, most or all of you will know that the Lord’s Supper was **instituted** by the Lord Jesus on the night of His arrest. He was eating the Passover meal with His disciples and He took bread and He broke it, and gave it to His disciples, who ate it. And then He took a cup of wine and He gave it to His disciples and they drank from it. And He told them that the bread and wine are His body and blood, and they were to do this in remembrance of Him and be reminded that all of their sins are completely forgiven, and that they were also proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes. And you will see that Paul rehearses all of this in vv23-26.
   2. So with that in mind, let’s begin with a couple of general points:
      1. And we begin with the same point we began our baptism considerations with, which is that the Lord’s Supper is a gift of Christ **to the church**. Again, the Lord Jesus instituted the Supper with His disciples, the first office-bearers of the church of Christ. But look also at v17ff where Paul begins his instruction about the Lord’s Supper: “*But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church*…” And drop down to v20, “*When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat...*” and then he goes on to explain that it was not the Lord’s Supper because they were not doing what Jesus had instituted the right way; they were misusing the Lord’s gift to His people. So what is clear is that the Lord’s Supper is a *church* activity; part of the gathered worship services of the congregation. The Lord Jesus did not give the Lord’s Supper to individuals or families to use privately or for schools to use, etc; it is for the church; it is for public worship.
         1. Now, just like the point we made about baptism and infants in hospital, sometimes we celebrate the Lord’s Supper with those members of our church who cannot come to church anymore. But we tell you we are doing this, and we gather with a few of us, and we sing a song and read Scripture. So again, it is a church thing, not a private thing.
      2. But our second general point is that while a common cup was passed around among Jesus and His disciples, and while they sat at a table together, and while it was what we call wine and some form of bread, what is essential is eating bread and drinking the liquid produced by grapes, together, in worship. Whether it is leavened or unleavened bread, chunks or a common loaf, gluten or non-gluten, fermented grape juice or non-fermented grape juice, from a common cup or individual cups, served around a table or served in the pews, these things are not essential to the pure administration of the Lord’s Supper. They are matters for local churches to decide.
   3. So that brings us, lastly and more specifically, to **vv27-30 and the matter of self-examination and session supervision of the Lord’s Supper table**.
      1. If you look again at v27, it is clear that it is possible to eat the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner, and by implication, also in a worthy manner. So there is a right way and a wrong way when it comes to the Lord’s Supper.
      2. And these two ways are explained in vv28-29 – the right way is to examine yourself and to discern the body and the wrong way is to not examine yourself and/or not to discern the body. And because we talk about what examining yourself and discerning the body in the forms we regularly read prior to celebrating each Lord’s Supper, I just want to focus today on the consequences of coming to the table in an unworthy manner, which is what many in the Corinthian church were doing. Look at **v30**: “*That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died*.” So failures in the area of the pure administration of the Lord’s Supper in Corinth had lead to members becoming ill and some even dying!
      3. And we saw something similar in our earlier reading from **Numbers 21**. Because the people of Israel grumbled and complained, “*The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died*.” So there were serious consequences then for the misuse of God’s gracious gifts.
      4. And flick back again to what we read earlier in **ch. 10**. In preparation for what Paul is going to say about the Lord’s Supper, Paul refers to the people of Israel and mentions baptism and eating spiritual food and drink, and he reminds the Corinthians that Israel’s misuse of these sacramental gifts made God displeased with them, such that “*they were overthrown in the wilderness*,” or, as the NIV puts it, “*their bodies were scattered over the desert*.” And I want to you to see the awful reality of what this meant. In Numbers 1 Moses was told to count all of the men who were twenty years and older. There were just over 600,000. And we can assume that there were a similar number of women, which means around 1.2 million adults. And it was soon after that that the spies were sent out and most of them came back with a defeatist report and all of people grumbled again. So the Lord said that none of those adults were allowed to enter the Promised Land; they would have to wander around the wilderness for 40 years until that generation had died off and then they could enter. Do you remember that? So if you divide the 1,200,000 by 40 years, that means that there was an average of 82 deaths every day for 40 years. Can you imagine that? Life was a funeral service. And this was God’s judgment on their misuse of His sacramental gifts.
      5. And so Paul continues in **v6**, “*Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did*.” Are you starting to see why the pure administration of the sacraments is very important?
         1. This is **why we read a preparatory form on the Sunday before Lord’s Supper Sunday and another form on Lord’s Supper Sunday**. And don’t get me wrong, I am not saying that the Bible says we have to read these forms; it doesn’t. The point is that because we are called to serious self-examination, and because of the consequences of coming to the table in an unworthy manner, we believe that this tradition that has come down to us through the history of the church is a spiritually beneficial practice in keeping with what we read here.
         2. But congregation, this is also a part of the reason why the elders must also supervise admission to the table. If there was a rail crossing and a sign that warned about the dangers of crossing when a train came and barrier arms, but someone was trying to climb over the barrier, would you just stand back and let them climb because the sign is there? Or would you reach out to pull them back? And in the same way, because elders are called to oversee and supervise the flock of God, because of what is at stake, it is a loving thing for elders to tell people who will partake in an unworthy manner that they should not come. And this is why, for example, we require guests who are at church on Lord’s Supper Sunday to talk with an elder about coming to the table. This is what we say in the note in the bulletin: “We do this because we love all those whom God brings into our church, and we do not desire for anyone to suffer or struggle due to ignorance of what God requires.”
         3. And it is simply not enough to just ask people if they believe in Jesus as their Saviour. Listen to these Scripture verses:
            1. **1 Corinthians 1:10**  *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment*.
            2. **1 Corinthians 5:11**  *But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler- not even to eat with such a one.*
            3. **2 Thessalonians 3:6**  *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.*
            4. **1 Timothy 6:3-4**  *If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.* **2 Timothy 3:1-5**  *understand this, that in the last days … people will be [long list of different sins]. Avoid such people.*
            5. **Titus 1:10-13**  *For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers … They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach … Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith*.
         4. And these instructions were given to church members *and to elders*. They are why elders must supervise the Lord’s Supper table.
   4. Now, it goes without saying that none of us can look into each other’s hearts and none of us are sinless. The Lord’s Supper table is not a table for the perfect. What we are talking about is when sin *is known* but there is no effort made to deal with it. And that will bring serious consequences.

So brothers and sisters, praise God that your elders take the pure administration of the Lord’s Supper seriously. By God’s grace, when we partake in a worthy manner, which includes self-examination and session supervision, we believers are reminded that all our sins are forgiven, we are fed with our Lord’s crucified body and shed blood by His Spirit and joined more closely with Christ and with each other, and we are reminded that He will come again to take us to be with Him in glory. Amen.