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# The Appointment: A Communion Sermon

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*Text: 1 Corinthians 11:26*

I want us to think about something St. Paul wrote to his friends who were having a bit of trouble knowing how to behave at communion services. Paul wrote:

Whenever you share this bread and drink from this cup you boldly proclaim that the Lord died (for you), until that day when you come into his presence (my translation).

I want to talk a bit this morning about that appointment you and I have with our Lord, the day after our bread-and-wine-communion with him ends and our face-to-face-communion with him begins.

But first, I want to ask you a question. When you think about pastors, what one book do they all have which:

tells them what to do each day,  
which runs their life hour after hour,  
and without which they couldn't be pastors at all?

Well—if you answered “The Bible” are you ever gloriously wrong! Fact is, far too many pastors go days at a time without ever cracking open their Good Book for directions and for connections. But one book we cannot get through the day without is our DAILY APPOINTMENT BOOK, that red-covered calendar which tells me where I'm supposed to be and who I have to see and what I have to do. You never see pastors get together at a meeting without at some time reaching into their pockets and getting out their little appointment books to see “when there's a free day”.

Well, a lot of us are busy writing down meetings and appointments on calendars and in little books, but no matter how

busy we get or how stacked up our schedules become, each one of us has an appointment we *will* keep whether or not we especially want to; and the hairy thing is, not one of us knows where we will be or when it will come—only with whom!

Of course, I'm talking about our Super-Appointment with God. The Scriptures tell us, and Billy Graham is ever so fond of reminding us that they tell us, "It is appointed unto each man to die, and then, the judgment." Jesus, in his great parable of the final judgment (which I like to call the capital "B" Big, capital "A" Appointment) said that the whole world, everybody and every nation that ever lived, owed God's king an account of what we did with our life on this earth. A lot of people didn't like what they heard about themselves, Jesus said, and a lot were surprized pleasantly, but everybody gets called before the One who gave us a life on loan, a trust to work out for God's greater glory, and everyone has an appointment with the Creator on a Day which no one but God knows. My appointment with God is in God's Book, and my Good Book, the Bible, tells me I would be a quadruple fool to forget that Appointment, even for a minute.

Now let me talk a bit about how we keep our appointments. Some we dread. Some years back I had a dental appointment. The dentist told me I would have to spend 45 minutes in the chair getting drilled—and this time without novocaine! Of course, you can imagine my feelings every time I looked at the chart and saw D-Day getting closer. Finally the morning of the big Drill came, and folks, you who know me know I am a coward when it comes to pain. Forty-five minutes of pain is no way to spend the day, so I cheated a bit. If the dentist wouldn't give me some chemicals I'd pop a few of my own I had left over from before. Well, two 292s and 45 minutes of Nitrous Oxide later and I didn't want to leave. I was feeling so loose and lively and laid-back I had him pull a wisdom tooth to boot. Of course I floated out of the office at a 30 degree angle and wound up walking home across lawns and through hedges, but I had an appointment which I dreaded, so I drowned it out with some chemicals called drugs.

Now of course we need to notice something. The biggest drug pusher in Manitoba is—guess who—the Manitoba government! It sells so much brain-haze called booze that we almost forget that the same bunch we pay taxes to is also the

biggest dispenser of drugs. That's right, our friendly bunch in Winnipeg pays for more mood-altering drugs than anyone else, probably even more than the Mafia!

In ancient Rome the government gave the bored bread and circuses. Our day goes it a bit more with booze and prescription pills, but the outcome is the same, for government is a sort of super-person, and as a group, we demand to dull our heads to get us through life, seemingly believing that we can push out of our thoughts that big appointment ahead when God holds up a mirror to us and says, "My child, this is what you did with your life!" And then, right away, when we look into God's eyes, we *have* to compare it with what God did: out of love, God died for us to bring us back to that abundant Life we were meant to submerge ourselves in just as a walleye swims in our Winnipeg River!

Well, not only do we sometimes haze out our coming appointment with God, but sometimes, in fact, we positively *dread* it! Back in the last Ice Age when I was a young man just out of college I found myself teaching high school in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. Now this was the very same high school I had attended just a few years before. Can you believe it, over the P.A. system the principal's voice said, "Mr. Bence, report to the office immediately!"

I nearly fainted! Michael Jackson never moved his knees like mine went as I wobbled my way to Judgment and Destruction, and yes—that hallway was just like that hit tune of the day, "We're on the Road to Destruction". Or so I thought. Actually, he wanted to offer me a job!

But I had grown up in a day when a summons to the principal's office meant that you had better get your affairs in order, for life as you had known it was over.

Now the thing is, a lot of Christians still feel that Judgment Day is like my feared death-march to the strap! Oh, we grow up, and we hear a lot about grace, and we read about the parable of the prodigal son's welcome home by the divinely loving Dad who sat and waited, but when rubber hits the road, when the old Pastor starts in preaching seriously, guilt spreads like Dutch Elm disease and soon everyone's got it, and we all inside feel, "Heaven help me, I'm really a rat at heart, and God, if he looks at me at all, would probably say, 'Boy, am I ever disappointed in you!'"

I used to feel in my heart of hearts that it was totally impossible to get some of my flock to quit coming to the Lord's Supper as if they were on their way to Jesus' funeral service. No wonder some old time congregations would only observe communion every season: four times a year is about all they could stand to bury their best friend! For make no mistake about it, guilt and sadness speak in muffled tones about our unworthiness, but St. Paul told us to cry out to the world about something greater, about Jesus Christ and his love for sinners, a love greater than his own desire to keep on living, if he had to live in heaven without us!

That brings us to the third way I feel about appointments, the way I felt one Sunday evening in December of 1970. There was only one appointment in my book for that day—get to Saskatoon to the Seminary Chapel by 7:00 p.m. and marry the most wonderful young woman in the world! I was stirred up when I got out of bed at dawn. I cut short my morning hymns and liturgies—yes, my beloved parish first made me conduct two services that Sunday morning! I drove like a bat out of Arizona all the way to Saskatoon, not even stopping to put on my parka when I had to get gas. I got to the chapel, and my heart hit about 180 beats per minute when the bride of my youth came down the aisle on the arm of her Daddy. If my best man hadn't held me down I would have floated right up to her for sure! And friends—praise God—I still feel the same way seventeen years later!

For there in my beautiful bride was something so rare that it has become the most precious commodity on earth—commitment. Here was love that would never quit, never forsake the other, that was a living testimony to that little congregation and to the whole world for that matter: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine"—someone to count on and to be with until only Death could tear us apart!

Yes, only Death can tear us apart for a season, a painful winter called grief and aloneness. But for us who are the Bride of Christ, not even Death can tear us from our Lord, and we see in our graves nothing more scary than a doorway, the other side of which has organ music belting out wedding music, as all of God's children march in to a feast, where no tears mar the menu, and no pain dulls the appetite for life, where the Spirit

himself becomes a tree for the healing of the nations, and where our best Friend is there to welcome his family home!

Friends, how are we thinking about our Appointment with God right now? Is our communion meal nothing more than a little sip of wine that usually we use to drown out our calling to live as children of God? Do we come to the table with a dread inside that really, we don't belong here at all? Or is this a little appetizer of our greatest hope and delight, to see Jesus and to dwell with the Father forever?

May the Bread of Life so multiply in us all, that already we *can* really sing, "THIS IS THE FEAST OF VICTORY FOR OUR GOD! ALLELUIA!" For already we have been won to look forward to our God as does God's Son! Amen.