







I wanted to say a word or two about the new communion table/lectern we're using in the sanctuary. The table is the craftsmanship of Seth Weizenecker. It is a beautiful and well-built piece of furniture that should serve us well for years to come.

With the new building, we wanted a communion table that "fit" our space and our "arts and crafts" architectural style well. When I was on John's fifth grade class trip to Washington, DC last February, we toured the National Cathedral and I saw a trestle table in one of the chapels that I thought would work well for our new building. I passed on a picture and the basic concept to Seth and he went from there, *vastly* improving upon my initial suggestion. The result is what you see front and center on Sunday mornings.

Why a trestle table? Trestle tables started to be used for the Lord's Supper at the time of the Reformation. The early Protestants dismantled (and often destroyed) the large, ornate altar tables that had been in use in the medieval period as a way of marking their rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation and other aspects of medieval theology. Trestle tables were easy to assemble and disassemble, and in many instances several tables were set up after the sermon and before the the communion meal began so that everyone could eat the Lord's Supper sitting at a table.

At the time of the Reformation, trestle tables were common in ordinary households so they were readily available for church usage. By bringing ordinary "family tables" into the liturgy, another

Reformed doctrine was showcased, namely, the sanctity of ordinary life. Many medieval Christians had a dualistic theology: if you were really spiritual, you would leave family and work life behind, and enter a monastery. Family life was for "second class" Christians.

The Reformers became convinced that the active life of marriage, raising children, and working a regular job pleased God just as much as the contemplative life of the monastery. Martin Luther went so far as to suggest that monastic life could be turned into a self-serving quest for salvation, rather than living a life of sacrificial, self-giving service to family and neighbor in the community. The Reformers argued that we do not need to abandon or escape our earthly stations in order to serve God; rather, we serve God and neighbor by carrying out these ordinary vocations with excellence. (Incidentally, while still reserving a place for monastic life and orders, the Roman Catholic Church has come to embrace the original Protestant doctrine of vocation in the main. See Lee Hardy's fine work, *The Fabric of This World* for details on this wonderful ecumenical convergence.)

The Reformers began using household bread, household wine, and household tables in church in order to symbolize the truth that one does not need to leave the world in order enter the kingdom; rather, God's kingdom comes into the world to bring about its comprehensive renewal and transformation. Whereas the medievals used "special" bread and "special" tables in church, the Reformers used "common" bread and "common" tables, pointing out that Jesus and the Spirit make what is common holy and pleasing to God (1 Tim. 4:1-5). The kingdom of God is not a realm separate from this world, but precisely this world restored, transfigured, and glorified.

Why does the pastor now conduct the entire service (including the sermon) from the table? We believe that the Lord's Supper is the climax of the Lord's Service each Sunday. This is not because the sacrament is more important than the word; if anything, they are equally important and one cannot properly function without the other in the liturgy. Rather, the Supper is the climax because it is the supreme act of covenant renewal. In communion, we receive Christ and experience fellowship with him and with one another in an utterly unique way. The sermon is to the Supper what cooking is to eating; if the sermon does its job, it whets our appetite for Christ, whom we receive in the bread and wine. In Acts 20, we find that when Christians gathered on the first day of week, they came together for the express purpose of breaking bread together (Acts 20:7). Sure, they heard a sermon too (and a very long one at that!) -- but the breaking of the bread was the culmination of the gathering. Luke's record is clear about the rationale for Sunday meetings: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..."

Since we come together in order to break bread, it is fitting for the entire service to take place at the table. We are a family; families gather at tables. The whole service is leading up to what we do at the table. Even the Scripture readings and sermon are "table talk," to use Martin Luther's term. Luther viewed the pastor as a father figure, speaking to children gathered around the family table. I do not think that metaphor exhausts everything preaching is supposed to be, but it's a helpful angle on what's happening in the sermon and suggests that preaching from the table is perfectly appropriate. The bottom line is that by conducting worship from the table, we are better able to integrate the service (no movement from pulpit from table) and call attention to the familial aspect

of the liturgical gathering.

Obviously, there is no biblically prescribed architecture or sanctuary furniture. But I thought you might be interested to know the historical roots of the design and set up that we now use.

Here are snippets from a few church historians on the usage of trestle tables at the time of the Reformation:

During this period in English Church history stone altars were dismantled and removed from English churches and replaced with "honest boards" supported on trestles or "frames," or legs. The use of the term "altar" with its sacrificial associations was dropped and replaced by terms like "the Lord's table" or "the holy table." The table was placed in the knave of the church or at the steps of the chancel where the congregation could hear and see everything. The table was placed lengthwise and the minister stood at the north side or north end of the table. Standing in front of the table, facing the east, was too strongly associated with the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass rejected by the English Reformers with the doctrine of transubstantiation.

The liturgical altar of the Roman mass gave way to the long communion tables of the Reformed rite flanked by benches upon which the communicants sat. At first, such tables were temporary structures, consisting of boards and trestles which were erected for the administration of the sacrament and were thereafter dismantled...(from *Scottish Post-Reformation Church Furniture* by George Hay)

The "communion table" is a table for the Lord's Supper, introduced by the Protestant Reformation as a substitute for an altar, and to mark their protest against the doctrine of transubstantiation inculcated in the Sacrifice of the Mass. At first, it was nothing more than a board set on trestles, and this was often taken apart and placed on one side when not in use; later it took the form of a domestic table.... (from *A Dictionary of Architecture and Building* by Russell Sturgis)