

Trinity Reformed Church of Northwest Connecticut

Biblical, Traditional, Congregational

Lord's Day Worship for
January 18, 2026

*"The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live;
and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will
befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."* – Exodus 12:13



“*” = Please stand if you are able.

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

Call to Worship – Proverbs 9:1-5

Leader: *Wisdom has built her house,*
People: **She has hewn out her seven pillars;**
Leader: *She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine;*
People: **She has also set her table;**
Leader: *She has sent out her maidens, she calls*
People: **From the tops of the heights of the city:**
Leader: *Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!*
People: **To him who lacks understanding she says,**
Leader: *Come, eat of my food*
People: **And drink of the wine I have mixed.**
Leader: *Forsake your folly and live,*
People: **And proceed in the way of understanding.**

Prayer of Invocation and Confession

Gospel Absolution Text – John 6:54-58

***Hymn #427** – “Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands”

Scripture Reading – Hebrews 10:19-25

Ancient Creedal Proclamation – Apostles Creed (pg#845 in the red hymnal)

Offerings Presented

[Please put your tithe/offering in the plates before or after the service – Thank you!]
[Gifts labeled “Deacon’s Fund go to aid those in need in the congregation.]

***Doxology #731** (red hymnal)

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Sung Psalm #78D** – “Yet in the Desert Still They Sinned”

Prayers of the Church & Lord's Prayer (sins)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Reformation Creedal Reading – Westminster Confession, 27.2-3.

Leader:	<i>There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union,</i>	
People:	Between the sign and the thing signified:	Gen 17:10
Leader:	<i>Whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one</i>	Matt 26:27-28
People:	Are attributed to the other.	Titus 3:5
Leader:	<i>The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used,</i>	Rom 2:28-29
People:	Is not conferred by any power in them;	1Pet 3:21
Leader:	<i>Neither does the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that does administer it:</i>	Matt 3:11 1Cor 12:13
People:	But upon the work of the Spirit,	
Leader:	<i>And the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof,</i>	Matt 26:27-28 Matt 28:19-20
People:	A promise of benefit to worthy receivers.	

Ministry of the Word

Prayer of Illumination

*Sermon Text – 1Peter 3:21

*Gloria Patri #735 (red hymnal)

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.*

Sermon – “Sacramental Efficacy”

A Topical Sermon Series on the Lord's Supper

*Hymn #424 – “Shepherd of Souls, Refresh and Bless”

*Benediction

Everyone is welcome to Coffee Hour Fellowship downstairs after church today

Announcements

- Pastor Doug, Verna, and Rebekah, would like to thank everyone for their generous Christmas gift, it is a great blessing to serve TRC.
- *Regular Studies & Gatherings:*
Sunday School for all ages (9:00 AM) at the Grange.
Tuesday Study (10:30 AM – noon) – Augustine's Sermons, at Pastor Doug's house.
Wednesday Study (6:30 – 8:00 PM) – Topical Study on the Sacraments, at Pastor Doug's house.
 Gen-Alpha Club will return on the 2nd & 4th Wednesdays, at Pastor Doug's house.
Friday Young Adult Discussion Group (6:30 PM) meets on 1st & 3rd Friday, at Pastor Doug's house.
Saturday Morning Prayer Group at the Gabelmann's. (Please call Sheryl to confirm if the group is meeting that day, 860-309-7250.)

ONLINE RESOURCES

TRC's Webpage:	TrinityReformedCT.org
TRC's Facebook Page:	facebook.com/people/Trinity-Reformed-Church/61554974150922/
TRC's Youtube Channel:	youtube.com/@TrinityReformedCT
Pastor Doug's	youtube.com/simplyreformed
Youtube Channels:	youtube.com/@PilgrimsofPlunder

INTERNET PRAYER CHAIN

If you have any prayer requests for our prayer chain, please email them to Donna Ensminger at: trcnwprayer@gmail.com. (If you would like to join the Prayer Chain, also see Donna.)

LEADERSHIP

Elders:	Rev. Douglas Aldrich, pastor	860-379-1147	douglas_aldrich@sbcglobal.net
	Bob Ensminger	860-485-8738	robert.ensminger@arthurgrussell.com
	Rich Gabelmann	860-605-7852	rgabelmann0415@gmail.com
	Rev. Jonathan Haulenbeek	203-709-0784	jhaulenbeek@icloud.com
Deacons: David Mattson (chair), Carl Bierce, Caleb Goodell, Mason Goodell, Dean Winters			
Sunday School:	Verna Aldrich	Music Coordinator: Cindy Rines	
Clerk:	Sheryl Gabelmann	Treasurer: Cindy Rines	

Trinity Reformed Church of Northwest Connecticut

Worship Starts At: 10:30 AM (9:30 AM in the summer)

Sunday Worship At: Winchester Grange (100 Newfield Rd; Winchester Center, CT 06098)

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 343; Riverton, CT 06065 – Phone: (860) 238-7399

Webpage: trinityreformedct.org – Email: trinityreformedct@gmail.com

Sermon Notes

1Peter 3:21

“Sacramental Efficacy”

A Topical Sermon Series on the Lord’s Supper

January 18, 2026

Introduction

- 1) We are going through a brief topical mini-series on the Lord’s Supper
- 2) Because the elders are finishing up a Lord’s Supper policy.
- 3) Today, I want to ask, and hopefully answer, one of the most important questions about the sacraments.
 - a) *Question:* Do the sacraments do anything?
 - b) Are they “*efficacious*”?
 - c) Efficacious means “*producing the effect intended; having power adequate to the purpose intended; powerful; as an efficacious remedy for disease.*”
 - d) Are they, to use the technical theological phrase: “A means of grace?”
 - i) Do they “magically” give you grace by just taking them?
 - ii) Do they do nothing, except help us remember Jesus?
 - iii) Is there a position someplace in-between?
- 4) To us moderns this sounds like a non-sequitur, silly, or superstitious question.

5) It is a hugely important question, however.

- a) It was one of the main points of debate during the Reformation (in the 16th century when the Protestants broke away from the Roman Catholics).
- b) It was this question, especially over the Lord's Supper, that caused the first split in the Protestant movement between the Lutherans and the Reformed (at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529).
- c) It was one of the secondary causes of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), which was one of the most destructive wars in European history.
- d) One of the longest sections in the Westminster Confession is about the Lord's Supper.

6) Sacramental theology, like all theology, takes discernment and maturity.

- a) Hearing all of what Scripture teaches about the Sacraments takes wisdom and study.
- b) Let's ponder this today by looking at probably the best single verse that gets at this question, 1Peter 1:21, though it is about baptism.

7) Baptism, however, and the Lord's Supper are closely related.

- a) Both are Sacraments, worship rituals commanded by Christ which proclaim the Gospel to us. Matt 28:19-20; 26:26-28
Acts 2:38-42; Rom 6:3-4
1Cor 11:23-26; 1Pet 3:21
- b) Baptism is that one time washing and joining of Christ's visible universal body. Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38-41; Rom 6:3-5
1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:4-6
- c) The Lord's Supper / Communion is the continuing fellowship meal of being spiritually fed by Christ. Matt 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20
John 6:53-57; Acts 2:42,46; 20:7
1Cor 10:16-17; 11:23-26

8) Let's look at 1Peter 3:21 and hear if the sacraments are magic, just memorials, or something else.

1Peter 3:21

1) 1Peter is the Apostle Peter's great letter to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor, i.e. modern Turkey. 1Pet 1:1

- a) I think 1Peter, along with such books as Ephesians, is one of the best, short (under 7 chapters) books to study as an introduction to the Christian faith.
- b) 1Peter is a call to the saints to endure suffering with holiness and hope, because though we are pilgrims and strangers in this fallen world, we are "*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.*" – 1Peter 2:9b

2) We read in 1Peter 3:8-17 that Christians must endure persecution and suffering in a godly way.

- a) How can a Christian do this?
- b) Peter immediately goes to the Gospel, the power of God. 1Pet 1:2ff
 - i) And that we have new life because now we are in the Holy Spirit.
 - ii) 1Peter 3:18 – "*For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit;*"
- c) To emphasize the point the apostle turns to Baptism.

3) 1Peter 3:21 (NASB) – “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”

- a) I like the wording of the NKJV: “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”
- b) Baptism is like the opposite (the antitype) of the flood waters during Noah’s time. 1Pet 3:20
Gen 6:3ff
 - i) Which was mentioned in the verse before, in 1Peter 3:20.
 - ii) Where the flood brought God’s judgment on the world.
 - iii) Baptism brings salvation.

4) Does that phrase bother you?

- a) That “baptism brings salvation”?
- b) Aren’t we all Protestants?
 - i) Do we not believe salvation is by faith alone!
 - ii) Aren’t you making out baptism to be a magical ritual, like the Roman Catholics?
- c) But what does the text literally say, “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you . . .”
 - i) It doesn’t say “Baptism represents salvation if you believe.”
 - ii) It doesn’t say, “Corresponding to that, faith now saves you, as an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”
 - iii) Peter, like all the biblical writers speaks of the sacraments in a far more powerful way than the sacraments just being a mere memorial ritual.
- d) Note, the verb “saves” is not in the subjunctive mood, which presents an action as potential, contingent, or envisioned, often dependent on conditions, purpose, or exhortation.
 - i) It is in the indicative mood which asserts reality — a statement of fact.
 - ii) “Baptism now saves you” is a statement of fact.
- e) So, the sacraments are magical?!
 - i) Well, they are more than mere memorials, they are powerful.
 - ii) But they are not magical, to see this keep on reading.

5) Peter immediately gives a caveat, a qualifier.

- a) 1Peter 3:21b – “not the removal of dirt from the flesh”.
 - i) So, it is not the ritual act of applying water that makes Baptism powerful.
 - ii) But what is it?
- b) 1Peter 3:21c – “not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”.
 - i) The focus of the “efficacy” or “power” of the Sacraments is not in them by themselves.
 - ii) The power is through what God has done through His Son in the resurrection.
 - iii) Which is received by faith (i.e. “an appeal to God for a good conscience”) alone.

6) But why does Peter speak about “appeal” and “conscience” instead of simply writing “faith”?

- a) An appeal (or request, response, answer, pledge to God, etc.) is clearly rooted in faith.
 - i) Peter clearly teaches that salvation is by faith throughout his letter. 1Pet 1:5-9,21; 2:6-7
1Pet 5:9,12
 - ii) They are very similar terms.
- b) But why use different terms?
 - i) Faith is the instrument by which we are justified, which Peter clearly teaches.
 - ii) It seems Peter wants to focus on a faith that includes not merely an inward act of trust, but also: A faith that leads to a life of holiness because the believer already stands accepted before God in Christ, not in order to become accepted.
- c) You can see the subtleties in how you can translate this verse.
 - i) It may be rendered *“but an appeal to God for a good conscience”*. Which emphasizes a faith calling upon God for cleansing and acceptance.
 - ii) Or, *“but an appeal to God from a good conscience”*. Which emphasizes a faith that can approach God without hypocrisy because it rests on Christ.
 - iii) Without entering into grammatical technicalities, both senses express complementary truths present in this verse.

7) All this is only possible because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ where He triumphed over death, sin, the world and the devil. Matt 28:5-6; Rom 4:25; 6:9-10
1Cor 15:17,20-26,55-57
Col 1:18; 2:12-15; 3:1

8) And the powerful work of Christ’s victory over death by the resurrection is proclaimed to us in the Sacraments. Matt 26:26-28; 28:19-20; Rom 6:3-5
1Cor 11:26; Col 2:12; 1Pet 3:21

9) So, the sacraments are not magical but they are powerful, they are efficacious.

- a) There are numerous biblical texts, in both Old and New Testaments, that speak about the efficacy of the Lord’s Supper. Ex 12:13; Prov 9:1-6; Is 25:6-9
Matt 26:27-28; Luke 22:20
John 6:23,31-35,41,48-58; 1Cor 10:16
Eph 5:29; Heb 10:19-20; Rev 19:7-10
- b) To give one example: John 6:53-56 – *“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.’”*

10) Keeping the powerful/efficacious nature of the sacraments, without slipping into superstition, is difficult: As the history of the church shows.

The Debate

1) A high view of the Sacraments was the norm from the ancient church through thousands of years.

- a) They clearly thought the sacraments actually do something.
- b) They were not plagued by our hyper individual, anti-supernatural, skepticism of the modern age.

2) Also true, more and more superstition soon crept into sacramental theology.

a) See this is modern Roman Catholic practices:

- i) A "tabernacle", a small cabinet in the church, where the wine and the bread is kept, which are to be bowed to when one enters the church.
- ii) To have a Communion paten (a dish with a stick) so no bread may hit the ground.
- iii) If the wine spills, the priest should lap it up with his tongue.
- iv) The idea that only the bread is for the laity and the cup is only for the priests. (Which is really wrong, since all Christians are priests.)
- v) So, the priest has to drink all the wine (Roman Catholic) or it is poured down a special drain to the ground called the *sacrarium* (Lutheran).

b) None of this is in Scripture and much of it is directly against Scripture.

c) Superstition is a sin which quickly leads to the deadly sin of idolatry. Deut 18:10-12; 1Sam 15:23; 2Kgs 17:9-12 Matt 15:9; Acts 17:22-23; Rom 1:21-23

3) This is because one of the major points of debate in the Reformation was over the Lord's Supper.

a) Rome argued the mass (the Roman Catholic name for the Supper) is a propitiatory sacrifice.

- i) That Christ is literally sacramentally offered by the priest.
- ii) Because the bread and wine literally turn into the body and blood of Christ. (This is the doctrine of transubstantiation.)
- iii) Instead of the biblical teaching that the Supper proclaims the once-for-all sacrifice already completed by Christ on the cross which is received by faith alone. Luke 22:19-20; John 19:30 Rom 3:25; 5:6-10; 6:9-10; 8:32 1Cor 1:23-24; 5:7; 10:16 Heb 7:27; 9:12-15,25-28; 10:10-14,18

b) For Rome, the Supper, gives *infused* grace – to help with the process of adding one's works to try to earn justification.

- i) Which destroys the Gospel.
- ii) Because Christ's *imputed* grace fully covers all our sins which is received by faith alone. Rom 3:22-25; 4:5-8,22-25 Rom 5:1,18-19; 2Cor 5:21 Gal 2:16; Eph 1:7; 2:4-9,13

c) For Rome, the sacraments work *ex opere operato*.

- i) Literally, "by the work that has been done."
- ii) That the sacraments confer grace by the act itself.
 - For Rome, how do you receive grace in the Supper? With your mouth.
 - Instead of the Reformed view where you receive it by faith.
- iii) So, baptism for Rome, literally makes you born again because of the ritual itself.

d) Finally, for Rome, the Eucharistic ritual and elements themselves should be adored as a pious action - essentially worship, as we read above. Which is against the first four of the Ten Commandments. Ex 20

4) These medieval heresies caused some Protestants, starting with Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), to go hard the other direction.

- a) That the sacraments are only a memorial.
- b) They're important but they don't do anything powerful or supernatural.
- c) This has become the default of most modern Protestants, whether liberal or evangelical.

- 5) The Reformed tradition, I believe correctly, tries to find a middle road, to hear all of what Scripture teaches.
 - a) To avoid the superstition and heresy of the medieval view.
 - b) While not going too far the other direction, and still hearing the sacraments are powerful, that they proclaim salvation and are a “means of grace.”
- 6) To tremendously oversimplify a very complicated and historical debate, let’s break this down into three categories:
 - a) **Medieval View** – A superstitious view of the sacraments. (Still held by Roman Catholics, and mostly by Eastern Orthodox, and even Lutherans – who are Protestant.)
 - b) **Modern View** – That the sacraments are just memorials. (Held by Baptists and most modern Evangelical Protestants.)
 - c) **Reformed View** – An in-between position.

Conclusion – The Reformed Position

- 1) The Reformed Position on the sacraments is not simple, but is much more complete.
- 2) It holds the tension that the sacraments do something, they are efficacious, but are not about superstition.
- 3) So, the sacraments in general, and the Lord’s Supper in particular are:
 - a) They are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace. which are directly commanded by Christ.

Rom 4:11; Gen 17:7,10
Matt 28:19; 1Cor 11:23
 - b) They proclaim Christ and His mercy and salvation to us.
 - i) Thus, they are a sign, a visual aid, by God that we are saved.
 - ii) *“This is My body which is given for you; This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”*

Matt 26:28
Luke 19:19-20
 - iii) Always remember, first and foremost, the direction of the sacraments is God to us.
 - iv) And that the Gospel is for Christians because it is the power of God.
 - v) And they are God’s seal on us.
 - c) They are done “in remembrance of Him”, so they are also a memorial.
 - i) The mistake is to think they are only a memorial and mix up the direction, and the need for Christians to be evangelized (literally gospelized).
 - ii) Thus, they are “*to confirm our interest in Him*”.

1Cor 10:16; 11:25-26; Gal 3:17,27
 - iii) *“An appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”*
 - d) They put a visible difference, a sign, between us who claim Christ and the rest of the world.

Gen 34:14; Ex 12:48
Rom 15:8
 - e) And they remind us to engage in the service of God in Christ, according to His Word.

Rom 6:3-4
1Cor 10:16,21
- 4) So, the sacraments are powerful, they are efficacious.
 - a) They have to be done correctly.
 - i) With the preaching of the Word.
 - ii) With the right elements (water, bread, the fruit of the vine).
 - iii) Administered by someone lawfully called to the Gospel ministry.

b) The sacraments are not tied, however, to:

- i) The elements themselves, as if they were magical.
- ii) Whether those who administer them are a true Christian or not, as if they are magic-users.
- iii) Or, necessarily the time when they are given.
 - If you are baptized as an infant and you don't receive saving faith until an adult, the sacrament of baptism still was efficacious.
 - Or all those times you took the supper without understanding it, were you not still at the King's table, feasting on His gospel?

c) The sacraments are very powerful, because they proclaim Christ to us.

- i) Baptism is being washed by His blood and buried with Him in His death.
- ii) The supper is eating His body and His blood which is true food.

d) Their power, is received by faith alone.

e) But when received by faith, which is by God's grace alone, they strengthen us.

5) By the way, I just gave you a brief outline of the Westminster Confession's chapter on the sacraments.

6) To give a very simplistic analogy.

- a) The **Medieval View** is like going to the capitol in D.C. and thinking by just standing in the White House you will magically be given power. This is clearly wrong.
- b) The **Modern View** is like going to the Lincoln Memorial and remembering what a blessing it is to be an American.
 - i) Which is true.
 - ii) But it misses the main point and the power.
- c) The **Reformed View** is like going to Washington as a condemned criminal, and the President grants you an official pardon.
 - i) The pardon does not depend on your feelings or understanding, but if you refuse to believe it is real and reject it, you do not benefit from it.
 - ii) But if the pardon is truly granted by lawful authority and you receive it in trust, it decisively changes your standing, not because of anything you did, but because of the authority and promise behind it.

7) One of the main reasons we moderns so wrestle with understanding the sacraments is because we have been so trained by the world to start, and focus, our thinking on ourselves.

- a) If you remember that critical rule of understanding Scripture and everything . . .
 - i) Which is the heart of Reformed theology . . .
 - ii) That we must be God-centric in our thinking.
 - iii) To start with God and work down.
- b) That is why the Bible is so strong in its sacramental language.

8) To paraphrase the Apostle Peter: The Lord's Supper nourishes believers—not as the eating of bread and drinking of the cup, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, with angels and authorities and powers subjected to Him.