

“Community & Communion”
1 Corinthians 11:23-32
World Communion Sunday
October 7, 2018
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1 Corinthians 11:23-32 (NRSV) The Institution of the Lord’s Supper

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for^[a] you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Partaking of the Supper Unworthily

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For all who eat and drink^[b] without discerning the body,^[c] eat and drink judgment against themselves. ³⁰ For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.^[d] ³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined^[e] so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

There are small churches, all over America, like ours. Some are even smaller than ours, and their pastor might even have another “real” job.

Sometimes, when it’s an “off the radar” kind of church, a pastor might stay for decades; another “til death do us part” kind of relationship. And then, a replacement may come along.

I read about one of those little churches that had experienced the retirement of their longtime pastor who was replaced by a young student pastor who wanted to do well and even though they did everything by the book, after several weeks, it was apparent that folks were upset about something, so they asked one of the old-timers.

Turned out the people were upset with the way the pastor was doing the Communion service. It wasn’t so much what was done, but what wasn’t.

The pastor didn’t touch the radiator.

What?

Seems the OLD pastor used to touch the radiator before serving the bread and the cup. And because they weren't, the young pastor made the people feel like something had been left out.

So, the young pastor called the retired pastor to ask "what was it about touching the radiator during communion?"

The old pastor said, "Yep, I did that. Before serving with the chalice, I touched the radiator to discharge the static electricity so I wouldn't shock them."

Over the years, "something" had become tradition; the congregation had forgotten what communion is really about.

In today's reading, that's about the same thing Paul is accusing the Corinthian church of....that they'd let a "something" become more important; they were eating, drinking, and partying!

Paul says "in an unworthy manner."

And that's not just the partying but their attitude as they approached the Lord's Supper. In fact, when the Corinthians came to the table they were fighting among themselves!

So Paul has to remind them that there is ONE loaf....and that they should come to the Table as one body.

Guess we can't be reminded enough either.

When we come to Communion we become united in one body.

The Lord's supper unites US with all Christians everywhere...with those at Trinity, or Bethany Lutheran or a Greek Orthodox church in Budapest.

Today is World Communion Sunday.

While we slept, Christians in the Congo left their homes, came to their places of worship, and saw their pastor take bread in their hands and declare, "This is my body."

In Jerusalem: “This is my body.”

In Paris, France and Paris, Texas, a hush fell across the congregation as they heard “This is my body.”

Throughout the world, churches of all Christian denominations, in all nations, in many languages, are celebrating the Lord’s Supper declaring together that “This is His body” and that we are one in Christ.

Paul is saying, first and foremost, **that’s how** we are to approach communion. As a unified body.

Next, Paul challenges his listeners AND us to come with respectful awe of what Jesus has done for us.

It’s why we come and some of us kneel at the rail.

It’s why the elements are set on the altar...to remind us of Christ’s sacrifice for our sins.

I like the way The Message translates this verse:

What you must solemnly realize is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt.

This morning we can come to this table knowing we aren’t alone, but united with other Christians,

...knowing Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins.

We don’t have to be perfect and fixed first!

Did anyone ever have to go to bed without supper because you did something bad?

Well, Dear Ones, when we come to Jesus seeking forgiveness, we’re gonna find that AND restoration, **and** an invitation to His table. (You’ll hear my version of the invitation in just a few minutes.)

Some people figure they're too unworthy to participate, and they'll pass up the bread and cup.

But, hear this: NONE of us are unworthy, if we've trusted Christ. We're eligible.

HE is the one who invites and authorizes us to come to the table.

How'd you do on the quiz in the bulletin? I'll share the answers if you want them later.

We celebrate the Lord's Supper once a month.

Some churches celebrate it once a quarter; some once a week.

Here's one answer: John Wesley took communion 4-5 times a week – not just when the bread was fresh!

It's today, World Communion Sunday, the only time all year that we, as Christians, gather to celebrate and remember what Jesus did for **all** on the **same** Sunday.

No matter how often we partake, WE CAN'T take it for granted.

We can't forget the implications of taking the bread and juice...

OR the impact it has on our lives.

Some people (I'll admit I'm one of them) think that special occasions include food. Or that any FOOD is a special occasion!

Today's meal IS a special occasion!

It connects us with Jesus, because it *recalls his last supper with* his disciples.

With reverent awe, we are here to observe and remember, more than any other memorable meal, what he did for us.

And to remember; to eat this "supper" and do it in remembrance of him.

This meal is one that only Christians partake of.

It reminds us of his broken body as it hung on the cross...

...and the blood that flowed from his body as he offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

In closing, I want to share a story from a book called Iowa Parables by Jerry Schmalenberger. You know I'm partial to Iowa stories! A dear friend from college had told me about this event; her grandma had lived in the town where it happened and the book provided a few more details.

In 1900 more than 250 hobos, tramps and freeloaders came by train to a little, northwest, Iowa town for what would become the first annual National Hobo Convention. The hobos ate free food, drank free beer, stayed in free accommodations, played games, drew up a political platform and, get this, nominated a candidate for the 1900 Presidential election.

The National Hobo Convention happens, TO THIS DAY, in Britt, Iowa! The people there have been inviting the hobos, bums, and freeloaders every year, not because they deserve it or because in some way they have earned it. The recipients get their free food and all the special treatment *because* they are hobos, nothing more.

That's what makes the annual Hobo Convention different. They didn't deserve it, ask for it, or encourage it. It's always been freely given even if the hobos haven't worked. Many are lazy, crude, dirty, dishonest, probably been arrested, chased out of public parks, and roused for vagrancy.

But in Britt, for one weekend in August, the hobos are kings. For a brief time they're loved for who they are: fellow human beings.

Jesus says "come and eat all is ready."
Come, he says, not because you deserve it, not because you've earned it, come because it is freely given.

Whether you like the analogy or not, we come to this table as the hobos come to Britt.

Not deserving but accepting.

We come to this *grace banquet* to celebrate God's victory, not ours.

We come to celebrate our humanity in Christ.

It's "whose we are" not how we're doing.

We are invited by God, through Christ, to come and eat and drink not because we're great, but because God's love for us is great.

We come though we've been lazy in our calling to follow Jesus, are dirty with sin, and have been dishonest with God and each other.

GOD STILL INVITES US...

AND HE STILL ACCEPTS US!

JUST. AS. WE. ARE!

And like other Christians, ALL over the world, today we come as forgiven people, who are nourished, renewed and refreshed.

We don't come as perfect people, but as forgiven people.

Christ's love and forgiveness is present at this meal; this "special occasion" meal. Jesus assures us of that when he says, "This is my body, this is my blood, given for you".

This bread and this juice are nonverbal signs, and a reminder of God's great love for us.

And when we leave the rail today, we take, inside of us, a reminder of God's love, God's grace, a piece of Jesus.

So come.

Come, as people all over the world come today, who are celebrating the grace of God through the body and blood of Christ.

"Come, for all things are now ready."