

THE LORD'S SUPPER

... why am I spending time with you!?

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

WEFC May 16, 2010

People, ... not always do we appreciate those who make up God's family.

These are actual lines from performance appraisals:

1. Got into the gene pool while the lifeguard wasn't watching.
2. Donated his body to science before he was done using it.
3. Gates are down, the lights are flashing, but the train isn't coming.
4. If brains were taxed, he'd get a rebate.
5. If you give him a penny for his thoughts, you'd get change.
6. Some drink from the fountain of knowledge, he only gargled.
7. Wheel is turning, but the hamster is dead.

Reading minds is not a strong point of mine. It may be fun to hazard a guess as to the attitude we packed in our Sunday brain-basket as we came to meet with God's people.

... could it have been something like ...

Let's get the show on the road. Sing the songs, pass the plate and let the preacher get things off his chest ... Then I've got the rest of the day to do what really needs to be done.

Let me meet one or two friends ... shake a familiar hand or two, smile on cue, but since I don't know too many people this whole think of becoming a part of God's family makes us somewhat awkward.

Get me in; energize me; motivate me; then get me out of here ... on time, and don't expect me to get too close to anyone, and I'll be back next week.

Mess we me ... and I'm gone. Overload me ... and I'm out of here. Bore me ... once, ... I'll be gracious; twice, you are pushing it. I need something bite size, easy to digest, nothing too biblical or theological, something that rivets my attention like a TV thriller.

Nor do I need someone from the front telling me what is right and what is wrong.. Laying God's Word on me, making me feel guilty ... is pulpit verbal abuse.

... and as the service is going on ... and the preacher is making some dry theological point ... your eye catches sight of a person you slightly know.

My, look at their tan. Obviously they didn't need to work this week.

... and who got some new spring clothes. I'd hate to admit it, but it does look good on them.

... and over there, no, not there, just slightly to the left, ... no not quite so far over. Yes, there, ... those people are losers ... probably shouldn't say it that loudly, but I'm just being honest. .

Come to think of it, why do I even attend the same church family as they do? Why am I not with people who are more my style, with smarter people like me, people who have class and get the picture quicker?

Oh, today we are gathering at the Lord's Table. Lord, forgive me for being slightly arrogant.

Corinth had a group of believers ... maybe we shouldn't put it that way ... If we were to grant them the label - "group" – we would have to say that we were using that word loosely.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 may have been written close to 2000 years about, but it's similarities to today remain uncanny.

The people at First Corinthian Church had a problem that became all the more evident as they gathered for the Lord's Supper. This central event was not to be carried out by rote behavior, but was to be done in such a way that it sent a clear message.

Central to the Lord's Supper is Jesus Christ's death ... a decisive and historic event loaded with concrete benefits.

One of the spin-offs is that the Lord's Supper is to be an event that pulls us each out of our little, isolated worlds and gets us interested in each other as we come to see ourselves as, of all things - "family".

These paragraphs of God's Word take us in this direction

Key Thought:

We "gather together" for the Lord's Supper. Let's not eat it in isolation (each in our own little world).

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

The church got together for their services, but the get-togethers were counter-productive.

They physically got together, but in reality were pushing off of each other, disconnecting; in attitude they were become more distant of one another.

The Lord's Supper is an event where ...

1. Getting together is not to pull us apart 11:17-22

In today's popular terminology, the Church Family at Corinth was dysfunctional.

- Gatherings must, without question, be more helpful than harmful 17

By the time the service was over, people probably wished that they had NOT come to church.

They would have been better off.

It wasn't that the singing or the preaching were bad; it was a different matter.

As they left, some of them were bleeding, hurt, saddened. Others were more hardened, miffed, and adamant.

What was designed to be helpful and good ended up being harmful and ugly. When the service was over you WANTED to go home. You did not want to stay back and visit.

The reason that getting together was pulling them apart was because of one segment of their church's life.

- The church needs a live, small group ministry, but of the right kind **18**

At Corinth the small group ministry began naturally, but for the wrong reasons.

Their small groups were born out of divisive differences rather than honest harmony.

... and the small groups became a breeding ground for animosity and hurtfulness.

The problem was not with "small groups", but their curriculum.

They rallied together, but for the wrong reasons.

- We need to get it: this is more than an act **20**

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ...

They were intent on doing what Jesus had laid out for them.

That's a pretty safe way to live ... follow Jesus' directives.

They got the main point.

The Lord's Supper rivets our attention on Jesus' death.

That's the main point of the Lord's Supper.

Main Point - Jesus draws us to Himself

But there are also SUB POINTS to the MAIN POINT.

If we get the MAIN POINT, then the SUB POINTS ought to be no-brainers. They flow clearly and logically from the MAIN POINT.

While they had the MAIN POINT, they would not let the MAIN POINT branch out. They were cutting back any good growth before it could happen.

The MAIN POINT is Jesus' death causes all of us to draw together at His cross. He is the prime personality. He makes it all happen. He is the reason.

Let us refresh our minds again with what is being conveyed.

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,

... for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

If Jesus Christ draws us together, then we should act like a family.

Gathering around Christ pulls us together ... that is a natural and logical outgrowth of His unmatched accomplishments.

In Corinth, they choose “not to get it”.

As we reconstruct the situation, the Corinthian Church Group was made up of a cross-section of people – some well off, others poor, with some in the middle.

In this particular situation, the better off people did not want to share with the poorer people a meal ... and apparently, they brought their food to the church supper and ate what they brought before the poorer people arrived.

... and when the poorer people arrived, there was little to do, but lick the bare bones.

The Sub-Point: if Jesus draws us to Himself, then we are to be drawn to one another.

The Lord’s Table is to primarily point us to Jesus, but it is not an exclusive view of Jesus only.

We are to be conscious of others who gather at this table ... and not just conscious of their presence, but their condition.

To gather at this Table and for me to sing, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow ...”;

... while the person next to me is trying to sing “Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it, Lord; come and quench this thirsting of my soul ...”

... not caring about their need, but living in my own world which right now is well-supplied ... means I am missing the SUB-POINT of the Lord’s Supper ... which no longer is a SUB-POINT, but a MAIN POINT ... because our behavior tears down the MAIN POINT.

- “Table manners” ... treat family as family

22

Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

We are not going to solve everyone’s problems in the church family.

In our homes we have some liberties and freedoms.

But when we are “gathered” we do not act like if we were at home by ourselves.

We act in light of the “gathered” family; we make allowances for each other.

It is rude to act otherwise.

It is to despise those who have the same Savior as do I.

It is to humiliate them and rub salt into their already difficult circumstances.

What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

Obnoxious behavior such as this is intolerable within the family. We do not put up with it.

We change it ... immediately.

If we get these “little things” right, these sub-points, then “getting together” will not end up pulling us apart.

... and the Lord’s Supper will be that rich family event that God intended it to be.

So, the Lord’s Supper, while it is about Jesus, is also about Jesus’ people.

The “quality” or “enjoyment” of the meal is to a degree dependent on what I think of the company with which I am eating.

An “external equality” is to evident at the Lord’s Table, which is to reflect a genuine “internal equality” created by Christ’s death.

These are **SUB-POINTS**, yes, but rather important sub-points.

During a phone conversation, my nephew mentioned that he was taking a psychology course at the university.

"Oh, great," I said. "Now you'll be analyzing everyone in the family."

"No, no," he replied. "I don't take abnormal psychology until next semester."

The Lord’s Supper is not just about Jesus, it is also about “family” ... and those that we could do without, but God has chosen.

Key Thought:

We “gather together” for the Lord’s Supper. Let’s not eat it in isolation (each in our own little world).

Get the SUB-POINTS ... and for good measure, since we are on the subject, let’s refresh our memory by taking a look at the MAIN POINT of the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s Supper is an event where ...

2. The Lord’s Supper retrieves Jesus’ greatest act from history’s archives that we me recall why we are at this point **11:23-26**

Right about at this point ... you are probably saying. “I know this part. Skip it and move on.”

This is the part of the meeting that is like getting on a plane and watching the safety demonstration for yet another time. We tune out; we don’t listen.

We’ve heard and seen it so many times we could do it just as well as the flight attendants.

A lady was on a flight returning from Utah. As the plane was a small puddle jumper, the flight attendants were required to demonstrate the life vest, the oxygen mask, etc. instead of turning on a video.

After they finished their presentation, one of them said "To those of you who listened, thank you. To those of you who ignored us, good luck."

Take the time to listen to what you have heard many times before.

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you:

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

To get the main point, we start at the end of this paragraph and will then come back to the beginning.

The main point - **11:26**

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

- The Lord's Supper: Recalling history's most significant act

It is this event that changed history's course. This was the beginning of the new world order, a new future.

This is the basis of God's new kingdom.

This is what everyone needs to hear about – Jesus died for humanity's sin ... our sin.

God wants to give us what He always intended to give us, but was rejected – life as it should have been.

We are looking for it ... but in all the wrong ways.

We know what it should look like ... but we can't get it anymore than a sieve can hold water.

... and so God the Father assigned Jesus, His Son ... to become like us and show us how it is to be done.

Realizing that we are at a serious disadvantage, because sin has infected us and warped us in the DNA of our soul, in our very make-up, Jesus accomplished what we are unable to attain.

What He attained, He is willing to share ... fully and joyfully.

Since He has it and we do not, He gives it to us in a unique way.

We do not earn it; we "receive" Him; we let His life become ours.

On the flip side: He takes our dead-end life and removes it.

His death becomes the door to life ... for every person.

There is no other way into God's presence and the "good life" except through Jesus ... and what He attained in His death and resurrection.

This day, if you sense being nudged to Jesus, it is God ... explaining and drawing us to Himself.

Accepting Him is what brings us into His family ... He “saves” us ... a choice that anyone can make, even today.

Make that choice.

Histories most significant act: Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Why we are here: To refresh our minds of the richness of Christ’s efforts on our behalf ... what we all to often forget and never allow to shape us.

- The main point is conveyed by “bread” and “a cup” 23-25

This meal thing was Jesus’ idea.

He didn’t ask for fresh flowers to be put on a grave, but that we would remember His greatest contribution through the ordinariness of “sort of a meal”.

A loaf of bread that is broken – Christ was “broken” for us.

Jesus, upon creating this meal, gave it its meaning.

He explained that the “bread” was His body ... obviously, not literally, that much anyone could see on that day.

Bread ... a representation of the most basic food item by which we are kept alive,

Jesus is the one who gives us life.

The “breaking of the bread” recalls Jesus death ... how His body suffered on that cross ... to pay for the sin of every person.

It was a real body ... a body that screamed with pain as it was nailed to and then hung on a cross.

His body was wracked with intense pain and suffering.

It was no neat, tidy death in some hospital room, but before the eyes of people who merrily went on their way to work or to visit friends. He died in public for all to see.

Jesus died so that we might live.

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

“The cup” is filled with wine ... fruit from the vine. But the juice from grapes never just came by itself.

The grapes were trampled, squeezed, so that the tasty and flavorful juice might be extracted.

The “cup” – a new deal for humanity, of which its seriousness is highlighted in its being “signed” into law, not with ink, but Christ’s shed blood.

The seriousness and commitment of Jesus could not be better indicated than in Him spilling His blood.

This was not trivial act.

This is a life-losing act.

Anytime a person’s blood is drained from their body, we know what happens.

The significance of the event is heightened in that this is Jesus' blood.

Jesus was poked by a sword, flesh punctured by nails, and His very life ... His very lifeblood, flowed out of His body.

He willingly allowed His life to be drained out of Him.

The "cup" sets into effect a new legal agreement that stands up in the highest of courts of justice - the court of heaven.

This agreement was signed not in ink, but blood – Christ's.

Both **THE BREAD** and **THE CUP** explain for us that Jesus' death that brings us life.

We are gathered as a group of people IN JESUS' NAME because of this act.

We are a people so loved by the Prime Participant that He gave Himself to die on a cross, because through this act, we might live for Him for all of time and eternity.

The act took place long ago, but it explains why we gather here today as God's family.

We come to Jesus one-by-one, but we live out this new life together.

11:27 "Therefore ..."

3. The Lord's Supper is no ordinary supper; it is a meal with a difference. 11:27-34

... just how different is now explained.

What we are about to participate in is no trivial, drive-through, snatch-and-dash meal.

This is good stuff, but it is serious stuff.

... whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

- Participating in the meal implies agreement with more than the meal 27-29

To accept Jesus' invitation and join Him in taking the bread and the cup indicates that we are on God's wavelength.

We not only know what it means, but further, we "do", we "live out" what it means.

It is very possible to participate in the Lord's Supper and be wrong in attitude.

The result? ... rather than gratitude there is guilt.

We violate the meal.

It's like having a meal together and arguing all through the meal.

Meals are to be times to be enjoyed, a place of peace, not a battlefield.

If we eat, but are not in tune with the meal, we become responsible for body and blood of our Savior ... rather serious.

- Misusing the meal is countered by personal examination ... not examining the other person.

To eat, with proper table manners, we need to reflect ... think about OUR OWN LIVES.

There needs to be an examination ... a sober assessment, unbiased, clear, penetrating look at ourselves.

The reference, at this point, to the body of Christ, is a reference to the CHURCH FAMILY.

If we do not recognize with whom we eat and if we are mistreating them, and yet eating ... our own actions condemn us.

Our incongruent actions become the evidence, the proof that God can use against us ... that we knew what the meal meant, but we would not apply its meaning to the people with whom we rub shoulders.

We participate, but we didn't let it penetrate.

Then he throws in an observation.

- Misusing the meal is not taken lightly by God

30

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

At times, weakness, illness and even the death of a believer could be attributed to God's discipline for participating in the Lord's Supper in the wrong way.

... that is why personal examination is a good thing.

11:31-32

... if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Our wrong attitudes can be corrected.

God can point out to us our short-comings.

Responding to His "discipline" saves us from a heap of trouble..

... so then ...

11:33-34

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

The words are rather sobering.

The warning is somewhat disconcerting.

We almost want to say, “If that’s how serious things are, I’d rather not participate in the Lord’s Supper. It is too risky.

1. Do not stop eating the Lord’s Supper together. Don’t cancel the meal.

The meal is never the problem; it is the participants.

The meal is good, rich in meaning and refreshing. It sets us straight in a cockeyed world.

Do not stop eating the Lord’s Supper together.

2. Jesus is the host, we are family gathered around Him

This is Jesus’ meal.

He sets the atmosphere and the way in which we are to participate in it.

This is His table.

This is done in remembrance of Him.

We cannot come to the table with our own agendas and our own set of rules.

We eat at this table with Him setting the atmosphere.

3. “Eating in an unworthy manner” refers to how we treat one another, so what we need to examine is, “How are we with one another?”

Jesus did the “big” thing: He died for our sin.

The removal of sin restores relationships.

If we come to this Table with those around us and our relationships are not right ... then personal examination would require one of two things:

- we do not participate in the meal

- we now make things right with those people or resolve that shortly after this morning we will resolve it

When I was a teenager, I stole a hat. What is worse, I arrived at the store with a wad of cash in my pocket. Staring at the price tag, I thought, *Hey, why should I spend my money on that hat? I can get it for nothing by pinching it, then save my money for something else.*

As I headed for the door, the store manager stopped me. I [suddenly] wished I were dead. The manager saw I was not yet a hardened criminal and sent me home with instructions to have my parents call him back with the news or he would call the police. I went home to take my lumps. To this day, I remember what my 18-year-old sister said when she overheard me confessing: "How totally embarrassing. I've got a brother who's a thief!"

She called me a thief! ...

[But] becoming ashamed of what we are as a result of what we do is a good thing and a necessary part of getting real about guilt. If you commit adultery, you are an adulterer. If you lie, you become a liar. I stole, and I had become a thief. It led me to my room weeping and ashamed of myself. But that was good! Painful, but good.

4. We do not just eat; we eat together

Though this is a solemn meal, it is still to be a celebration.

We are forgiven.

We are family.

Jesus has saved us ... and He has given you to me, and me to you.

When we gather for this meal, it is to be more than just a time of taking the bread and cup. It is to be a clear and honest declaration that as we draw close to Jesus we also draw close to Jesus' other followers.

When I was stationed at March Air Force Base (now known as March Air Reserve Base) in California, the technicians who took identification card photos were apparently fed up with complaints about the quality of the IDs. This sign was posted where it could be seen by everyone coming in for a new card: "If you want a better picture, bring a better face!"

If you want to experience the richness of the meal, bring along the right attitude ... towards Jesus Christ and towards Jesus' family.

Prior to the Bread being received:

Lord, we have examined ourselves and we are hesitant. How perfect do our relationships need to be to participate in this Table without misusing it?

We ask You who died to bring us together for cleansing, removal of pride, right attitudes towards our God-family.

Thank You that You became the payment for our sin. Your body was broken so that our body could be saved.

The paradox is that Your broken body unites us.

Your broken body make us whole.

Your broken body makes us “one”.

We eat this bread together, an indication that we are getting Your point – you accepted us - so that we might accept one another.

We eat in remembrance of You.

Prior to the Cup being taken:

Blood that pours from a body indicates the loss of life.

You did not lose Your blood, you gave it for us.

A “thank you” is far from sufficient for such a great act.

May our thanks be verified by the way we treat one another, as we have learned how You treated us - when we were Your enemies, You shed Your blood to make us family members.

We drink this cup, in remembrance of You.

in this part of God's Word is re

1. Do not stop eating the Lord's Supper together. Don't cancel the meal.

The meal is not the problem; ... the participants are.

This, though, is a different kind of meal.

This is not us doing what makes us comfortable.

This is not our supper. We are not the hosts.

Jesus is.

This is His table, His meal.

What He anticipates happening is what we need to work out.

- **Coming at the meal in the wrong way makes us guilty of much more than disrespecting our Lord – we are guilty of sinning against our Savior.**

This is obviously not a good thing.

To change things, to see improvement, we ought to ...

- **Before eating we need to “examine” / scrutinize our heart / mental state towards God's family ... those He has invited to His meal.**

The word EXAMINE

... we cannot fake it before God

- to help us get the point, he makes it rather clear.

- Do we accept, wait for, and anticipate the privilege of eating with those who have gathered?
- Miss the point of the meal and the meal bits you – judgment
- That, at the Corinth church resulted in people poor health and even death.

... indications that when we don't like those whom God has invited to His Table, God notices ... and removes from His Table ... presumably, so that there attitude does not spread.

- Rather serious consequences ...

- But they are avoidable.

- **If we would seriously reflect on the Lord's Supper, the original, then we could avoid missing the point and make adjustments in our lives.**
- **God “judges” us ... to spare us a worse verdict.**

CONCLUSION

- **Keep coming together.**
- **Make personal adjustments that highlight the value you have for other family members.**
- **Wait for one another**

Do not mess up that gathering.

This is a great meal ... a good meal.

The Lord's Supper is a meal with attitude.

We do not sit down at the Lord's Table by ourselves / individually or with our set of friends.

How we eat is just as important as what we eat ... for the two are inseparable.

The Church's diet is intricately tied to its demeanor.

If we celebrate getting together to eat, eating together better be a celebration.

A great meal, minus the atmosphere equals individualism at its worst.

The Lord's Supper is not a meal of convenience, but

The Lord's Supper (the meal) preaches a message, and the message is found in the correct understanding and practice of the meal.

Actions without recognition, or understanding, equals ritual.

Action with recognition equals refreshment or richness.

The church's diet

If we are what we eat, then either we need to change what we eat or change who we are.

The Lord's Supper is more than a meal. It is a meal with an atmosphere.

As important as the Lord's Supper is, approaching it correctly is just as important.

The Lord's Supper is a full-meal deal. It is more than two course meal. It is a two course meal with a atmosphere.

... ambiance ...

The Lord's Supper is a meal with a difference.

We all have to eat, but there is more to eating than consuming food.

There is no spiritual peptobismal - The Lord's Supper ...

No spiritual Tums ... or Roloids

To get the point of the table we need to get the point of the meal.

Junk food makes a junk church.

When we “come together” than “come together” 11:17 - 22

There is recognizable difference being “coming together” and “being together”.

God is not interested in a meeting of individuals, but is interested an individuals coming together.

Coming together is a physical act ... that creates expectations.

Coming together in presence and not together in “heart” defies our spiritual DNA.

Getting together better be good, or it may be good not to get together.

The encounter with the risen, ascended Lord Jesus Christ enables the church to live in the world but as participants in the reign of God. We are in but not of the world.

Both of these-the relationship with God through the ascended Christ in the way of being in the world while under the rule of God-are effected in our lives through the work of the Spirit. What we ask for when we pray for the gift of the Spirit is known and experienced in the holy meal. Or to put it differently, would we ask for the Spirit, what we long for is precisely what is offered to us in the Lord's supper.

We participate in the Lord's supper in the spirit, and as we leave, we pray that we will return to the world in the fullness of the Spirit.

This meal is a means by which we see, feel, and taste what we are in this together. We need one another. We depend on one another. Together we will know God and good faith, hope, and love.

We can certainly read the Bible together and serve together and participate in a number of activities that enable us to experience God together, but nothing quite like the Lord's supper so enables us to declare and experience our common faith.

Communion
the human person is not designed to be alone.

This does not discount both the legitimacy of the need for solitude. And solitude we are in fellowship with the Creator, and a connection with God is a necessary precursor to true communion with her fellow human beings.

But the tragedy of the fall is that solitude becomes an autonomous act. We were created to hunger after God for fellowship with the Creator; this intimacy is made possible through radical dependence. Out of this dependence on God we are called into community with one another-a fellowship that, in

turn, sustains her fellowship of God. The affirmation of community and the need for fellowship with God, therefore, are not the denials of the individual person and the need for solitude. We must not confuse community with communalism that destroys or compromises the distinctive identity of each person. True solitude is necessarily complemented by community.

In the Lord's supper, we are not merely eating; we are eating together.

Covenant
two words-kingdom and covenant.

The Lord's supper is the right-the tangible corporate act-by which the terms of our baptism are renewed and sustained in our lives. Every time we come to this table, we partake in remembrance of Christ's death, of the establishing of the covenant through the shed blood of Jesus. We come to the table of mercy to receive forgiveness for the many ways in which we have failed to live as people of the kingdom. But this table is also the place where the covenant is renewed.

Each time we come to the table we establish our identity as the people of God, people who are alien to this world and his values. We come for a realignment of our lives with our confession of faith.

The Lord's supper was intended from its inception to break down divisions, for everyone who was to drink from the common cup of Christ's victory amidst victimize a ship

The only purpose of the gospel is to reconcile people to God and to each other. A gospel that doesn't reconcile a person to thei God should be no gospel at all. But in America it seems as if we don't believe that. We don't

really believe that the proof of our discipleship is that we love one another. No, we think the proof is in numbers - church attendance, decision cards. Even if our "converts" continue to hate each other, if they will not worship with their brothers and sisters in Christ, we point to their "conversion" as evidence of the Gospels success. We have substituted gospel of church growth for a gospel of reconciliation.

And how convenient it is that our "church growth experts" tell us that homogeneous churches grow fastest! That welcome news seems to relieve us of the responsibility to overcome racial barriers in our churches. It seems to justify not bothering with breaking down racial barriers, since that would only distract us from "church growth." So the most segregated racist institution in America, the evangelical church, racks up the numbers, declaring itself "successful," oblivious to the fact that the dismemberment of the body of Christ broadcasts to the world every day a hypocrisy as blatant as peters at Antioch - a living denial of the truth of the Gospel.

We have been seduced by success, and we will downplay confronting race and class barriers to grow churches quickly. Many evangelical church leaders believe that the best way to bulk up like churches quickly is to make the members feel more comfortable rather than comfort them with across the breaks down the divisions between God, us, and others. Churches cater to people's consumer passions to get what they want, when they want it, and at the least perceived cost to themselves. However, the cross creates a transforming harmony, not comfortable homogeneity of the status code intent on "moral (white middle-class) majorities.

As we consume Jesus through his Word, and his body and blood through the bread and wine of the Lord's supper, he consumes us. And as Jesus consumes us, he graces us with the nobler vision: to remove disunity from his body the Church, including race and class divisions.

The Lord's supper is as much about the real presence of Christians to one another as it is about the real presence of Christ to believers.

This view of the Lord's supper adds new meaning to the old saying "you are what you eat." By feasting on the body and blood of Christ together in faith and through the Spirit, we go deeper into the reality of our disposition in Christ and one another.

Marva Dawn:

Before it seems to me that if we need the body and blood of Christ inexpensive churches without care for the hungry, the sacrament is no longer foretaste of the feast to come, but it trivialized picnic to which not everyone is invited.

Christ calls us to set aside her personal grievances toward one another and move beyond our affinity groups as brothers and sisters in Christ. We can choose our friends, but not our siblings.

And so it is with the church: we didn't choose the people who would come into God's family, but Christ shows us just as he chose them. Ahead of the bodies blood running through us is thicker than our affinities, and he expects us to share the meal with all her brothers and sisters.

Sacraments are visible and physical acts of God's self giving love.

John 1:14 - in Christ, God's love was made visible. God knows that we could give nothing to him, so God gives to us. God knows that we have failed to find him, so God finds us. God knows we cannot, on our own, returned to him; so God turns to us. He says, "have some bread, takes of wine. This is my body and my blood, your nourishment that your life." Self giving love.

Communion is as much a something which God does as something we do. It is a gift of love.

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one of the things which angered Jesus critics was his choice of dinner companions. The way Luke tells it, his friends were a motley crew: tax collectors, Pharisees, harlots, common fishermen, assorted women. The Pharisees kept telling Jesus, "you've got to be more careful whom you eat with."

You've got to be careful.

The dinner table is such an intimate, holy, transforming, mysterious place - you've got to be careful whom you eat with.

Doesn't Jesus know that you must be careful to make distinctions? Where would I be, for instance, if I did not make careful distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust? I make such careful judgments. I teach my children to do the same.

You must be careful, we said.

But there was one, the Scriptures say, was more caring than careful, one for whom I petty boundaries, distinctions, and judgments, meant little. Harlots are tax collectors, male or female, Gentile or Jew - he would eat with anybody.

Every time the church gathers today for the Lord's supper, it joyfully proclaims that, wonder of wonders, Jesus still chooses the same kind of simple, disreputable dinner companions which ones got him in so much trouble. Thank God.

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The holiness of food

it is a sad commentary upon our society that are basic human hunger and emptiness are revealed not so much in our hunger caused by lack of food, but rather in our ravenous gluttony. Watch the way we eat. Food has literally gone to hell in our society of curbside rush orders, minutes stakes in microwaves, instant breakfasts, and TV dinners gulp down with her eyes fixed upon the tube.

Eating has become a lonely affair for many of us. In our urbanized, technological society, most of us are cut off from the basic acts of food production and preparation. We have no sense of our food as a group product, divine gift, the result of the common labor of many hands, the gift of the good Earth. The ones convivial feast has been reduced to the private, individualized, plastic packaged "McFeast".

For some time now many have noted that "we are what we eat." Our hunger for human relationships readily finds expression in patterns of eating and drinking. Caught in a daily treadmill of harried competition for daily bread, the superficiality of transitory relationships, and meaningless acuity, it is little wonder that we eat as we live - hurriedly, competitively, meaninglessly.

Over eating often stems from our temptation to think that because food fills our physical void, it can fill our emotional-spiritual void as well. As we have instant oatmeal and instant potatoes, we also seek immediate gratification of all personal needs. We consume sex friends, and experiences as if they were snacks along the way, instant soft drinks in nonreturnable cans with no messy leftovers. We glut means die by bread alone. We gluttony reveals the deeper contradictions, the frightening emptiness, our hearts.

all of the preceding suggests the positive value of our daily experience of hunger. Every time your stomach growls and you feel pangs of emptiness, it reminds you that you are a creature dependent upon the gifts of a Creator and the gifts of others. You may have achieved much in life that is worthwhile and enduring, but you have not overcome your basic human need for food and for love. You are still needy, dependent, and vulnerable as far as your most basic needs are concerned. Enrich or being adult or being relatively self-sufficient does not change this basic human condition. You still hunger and thirst, you still long for love, you still grow old; your illness, your life, is still terminal.

Beware, therefore, of any religion that claims to help us rise above and somehow overcome this basic human condition. Beware of any faith that claims to raise us to a higher philosophical level that we will be exempt from the human condition. Jesus, who was hungry and thirsty, put him square in the middle of humanity. It does the same for us. It continues to remind us of our basic lack of fulfillment, our basic fragility, our basic dependence.

You have heard it said, "the family that prays together stays together." I say to you, "the family that eats together stays together."

When evaluating communion at your church, ask yourself, "how do we make guests feel welcome at our dinner table?"

we have another breakthrough - communion without communion!

How interesting that Paul's test for the validity of our worship is not the qualifications of the celebrant, correct formula, proper rubrics, or other liturgical tests we often apply! The test is in the quality of the community's life together. Contrast Paul's view of worship with that held by many today. Many people see Sunday morning as primarily a private time for "me and Jesus" - individualism and subjectivism. Individuals come and sit in individual pews with their individual thoughts and each individual bread.

Pvt., personal meetings with God have their place and time. But church on Sunday is not the time or the place. Sunday is family day. It is a joyous day to get together, to reform and read-form the body, to meet one another, and to meet God.

Sunday worship is corporate worship, corporate and corporeal. It forms the body. Some churches are victims of worship which fosters private emotionalism; some are victims of private rationalism. Both are missing the point of Sunday. On Sunday, we come together and not as a conglomeration of individuals, but as a body to pray with one heart and one voice.