

This Week's Theme: Holy Communion

This Week's Memory Verse: *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:26*

Monday, June 23

Scripture Reading: John 13; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

It is interesting what today's texts have in common. One, they both center on the act of worship Jesus shared with His disciples the night before His death. He broke the bread, passed the cup, and gave these elements of the Passover meal new meaning. The bread represented Christ's body that was broken for us. The wine represented His blood that was shed for us.

A second common thread among these texts is that they both grew out of circumstances of disunity. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, they were arguing about who was/should be the greatest. The church at Corinth was a church in discord ("there are divisions among you," Paul wrote in v.18).

Somewhere along the way this worship ritual received the name "Holy Communion." The "Holy" certainly represents the fact that this practice came directly from the Holy One Himself, Jesus. But what about the "Communion" part – why was this word chosen? I think it is precisely because of the commonalities of today's passages. First and foremost, participating in the Lord's Supper links us to Christ and the disciples that last night before Jesus' crucifixion; it links us to believers throughout the ages; and it links us to believers all over the world who partake of the Eucharist each week. We commune with these brothers and sisters as we share Christ through the bread and cup. "Communion" is defined as, "an act or instance of sharing; intimate fellowship or rapport." When we share communion we share intimate fellowship with Christ and His followers. It is an act that transcends generation, cultures, and languages.

The Lord's Supper is also a call to unity within the Body that partakes together. It is a reminder of why we are in fellowship with one another, of what bonds us together, of what we are all striving for. Communion must transcend petty differences and personality clashes; it must leave behind hurt feelings and theological disagreements. Paul said when we share the Lord's Supper we must recognize (respect, acknowledge, link ourselves to) the Body or else we eat and drink judgment upon ourselves. This is not a private act; it is a communal act.

This week, as we explore some aspects of Holy Communion, we must keep this context in mind. The Lord's Supper is first about the Lord – His body and blood. It is next about the Body of Christ, and the bond and unity we share. It is a call to create unity from disunity. And finally it is about me and my own standing with God (but more on that later). c.2008 by Craig Taylor

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Tuesday, June 24

Scripture Reading: John 13

What was the driving force behind Jesus' last supper with His disciples? Of course, His love was behind it all: He used this occasion to show them the "full extent of His love." But what was it from this night the disciples would remember? What would make the greatest impact? Would it be the argument they had as the evening began? Perhaps it would be Jesus' mood, or some of the words He spoke. What about Judas' abrupt departure from the meal, or even the meal itself? No, clearly one act stood well above the others.

Jesus washed their feet.

Jesus took on the role of the lowliest servant. In His moment of greatest need, he served them.

When we think of communion with God we typically think of prayer and meditation, or Scripture reading, or being in a worship service. And, yes, those are certainly times to commune with God. But, according to John 13, the picture of communion we are to carry in our hearts as we celebrate Holy Communion is a picture of service. We are perhaps never more connected to God than when we serve others; when we **demonstrate** the full extent of our love. When we serve others, we are truly following Jesus and enabling His Spirit to deepen and transform our lives.

Richard Foster writes, "More than any other single way, the grace of humility is worked into our lives through the Discipline of Service. We do not need to go through life faintly hoping that someday humility may fall upon our heads. Of all the classical Spiritual Disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility. When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirits . . . The risen Christ beckons us to the ministry of the towel. Such ministry, flowing out of the inner recesses of the heart, is life and joy and peace. Perhaps you would like to begin by experimenting with a prayer that several of us use. Begin the day by praying, 'Lord Jesus, as it would please you bring me someone today whom I can serve.'"*

*Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 130, 140.

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Wednesday, June 25

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

In 1 Corinthians 11 we get a glimpse into first century worship as Paul addresses the practice of the Lord's Supper. In those days the observance of the Lord's Supper accompanied a common meal called the "love feast" (Jude 12). The problem in Corinth was that the meal, which was designed to bring all believers together in unity, was actually a place of class distinctions and disunity in the church. The lower class people would not be served while the upper class people would eat and drink to excess. Not only was their practice dishonoring to God, but it was the exact opposite of what Jesus intended.

This was at the root of the "unworthy manner" Paul references in verse 27. They were partaking of communion in a sinful way, literally bringing separation and judgment into this sacred practice. That is why they were drinking judgment upon themselves. They were sinning against the church and against the Lord Himself. They were nullifying the very purpose of the Lord's Supper.

While it is easy to look at this passage and feel a bit underwhelmed by the Corinthians actions, we need to be careful to use this passage as a source of accountability for our own lives rather than a source of judgment against the Corinthians (after all, if we find ourselves feeling superior, we have fallen into the same trap they did). The Lord's Supper needs to be seen as a communal practice first and foremost; it is a time to consider myself in light of the Body God had placed me in. Am I standing off from the Body, or do I do my part to create relationships? And are those relationships a source of service and ministry, or a source of judgment? Do any of those relationships need forgiveness, reconciliation, or a new start?

And what about my own life? I first examine my life in light of the Body, but then I need to examine my life in light of my relationship with Christ. Do I live my life in remembrance of Him, or do I largely ignore him in my daily living? Do I live of life of service toward others that reflects the servant life of Jesus, or do I mainly serve my own needs?

Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. Pray that God might help you see your life as He does, and that he might give you the direction and courage needed to both examine and align your life with the life of Christ.

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Thursday, June 26

Enjoy the lyrics of the beautiful hymn "In Remembrance of Me," by Ragan Courtney and Buryl Red. Let the words both inspire and challenge you.

**In remembrance of Me eat this bread
In remembrance of Me drink this wine
In remembrance of Me pray for the time
When God's own will is done**

**In remembrance of me heal the sick
In remembrance of me feed the poor
In remembrance of me open the door
And let your brother in, let him in**

**Take eat and be comforted
Drink and remember too
That this is my body and precious blood
Shed for you, shed for you**

**In remembrance of me always love
In remembrance of me don't look above
But in your heart, in your heart
Look in your heart for God**

**Do this in remembrance of Me
Do this in remembrance of Me
In remembrance of Me***

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Friday, June 27

Enjoy this story from Max Lucado:

"When I was a young boy, I was part of a church corps which took communion to the shut-ins and hospitalized. I must have been ten or eleven years of age when we went to one hospital room that housed an elderly gentleman who was very weak. He was asleep, so we tried to wake him. We couldn't. We shook him, we spoke to him, we tapped him on the shoulder, but we couldn't stir him.

One of the young guys with me observed that even though the man was asleep his mouth was open. Why not? we said. So we prayed over the cracker and stuck a piece on his tongue. Then we prayed over the grape juice and poured it down his mouth. He never woke up.

Neither do many today. For some, communion is a sleepy hour in which wafers are eaten and juice is drinken and the soul never stirs. It wasn't intended to be as such. It was intended to be an I-can't-believe-it's-me-pinch-me-I'm-dreaming invitation to sit at God's table and be served by the King Himself.

It is the Lord's table you sit at. It is the Lord's Supper you eat. Just as Jesus prayed for his disciples, Jesus begs God for us. When you are called to the table, it might be an emissary who gives the letter, but it is Jesus who wrote it. It is a holy invitation. A sacred sacrament bidding you to leave the chores of life and enter his splendor. He meets you at the table.

Think about that the next time you go to the table."*

*Max Lucado, *And the Angels Were Silent* (Portland: Multnomah, 1992), 149-150.

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Saturday, June 28

Scripture Reading: John 13:1-17

I love what Jesus says in verse 17: *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.* And what exactly is He referring to?

Clearly in this context He is referring to what He has just done – washing the disciples feet. The blessing comes when we humble ourselves and serve others and do the dirty work; the blessing comes when then needs of others are placed ahead of your own needs; the blessing comes when we fight over who can serve first, not who is the greatest and should be served first.

It's a powerful word for the disciples and just as powerful for us. But let's not limit it to this one brief passage. We know so many things that Jesus taught, but the blessing comes in doing those things. In other words, the blessing comes through obedience; the blessing comes when we live the Gospel, not just know it or even talk about it. Imagine what would happen if we really did:

- Love our neighbor as ourselves
- Go and make disciples
- Hunger and thirst for righteousness
- Go the second mile
- Minister to the "least of these"
- Forgive our debtors
- Store up our treasures in heaven
- Bless those who curse us
- Seek first God's Kingdom
- Repent
- Come after Jesus, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow
- Love each other the way Jesus loves us

We'd change the world – that's what would happen.

Sunday, June 29

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

John 6:1-15