

“Together at Table”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
October 1, 2017

Old Testament lesson: Psalm 116:12-19
New Testament lesson: Luke 22:19-33

Having heard and read and studied and prayed about the words of institution of the Lord's Supper that we just heard in today's reading from Luke, Christians the world over have been celebrating Holy Communion down through the centuries.

One of the earliest records of people joining in this sacrament comes to us in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. There we learn that Communion was actually celebrated as part of an actual meal that Christians ate together. They ate to satisfy normal hunger, but at some point during the meal, they shared the bread and wine, probably with a prayer, to connect with Jesus' last supper.

The meal was something like a potluck supper. The problem was, some Christians in Corinth were better off financially than others, so they brought better food to the meal. The less-well-off people brought what they could, but it was more simple, common food.

And instead of everybody sharing what they had brought, those who brought the better food wanted to eat that food themselves without sharing it. Paul describes this in First Corinthians, saying, “For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.”

Obviously, this was not what Jesus intended. In order to better embody the spirit of what Jesus intended in establishing Holy Communion, let us turn to our New Testament lesson, which contains the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, and actually join in and receive Communion as our sermon time unfolds this morning.

Gathered with the apostles in the upper room prior to his crucifixion, Jesus *takes a loaf of bread*, and after giving thanks, he breaks it and gives it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

And he does *the same with the cup* after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.”

Do you see what is happening there? Jesus is reaching out across time and touching us right where we are, right now, gathered around the table – touching you right where you are, seated in your pew around this table where we find the common elements of bread and juice *and set them apart from all common uses for this holy use and mystery.*

Jesus is reaching out across time and gently touching you on the shoulder and saying, “Remember me, *and do not betray that memory.*”
We do remember Jesus, each week, in our Affirmation of Faith. *Let us do that now as printed in the bulletin. Will those giving voice to the gospel in other languages please come forward?*

All: I believe: ... God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

That one-line Affirmation of Faith heard and said by Christians the world over is fleshed out, so to speak, in one of the Affirmations we regularly use here on Sundays.

It’s titled A Brief Statement of Faith and says, in part, that: “We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, teaching by word and deed and blessing the children, healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted, eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.”

Do we remember that about Jesus, in how we live our lives? Do we trust in Christ, share the good news of what Jesus is doing in our lives *and* what he is ready to do in the lives of others?

Do we seek to be the key that sets others free from what’s holding them back? Are we a healing, comforting presence in sick and troubling situations?

Do we embrace those who are different from us, forgive others, and invite them to turn to Jesus in their hour of need and brokenness?

Of course, the answer is sometimes yes and sometimes no. Jesus says in today’s scripture lesson, “... The one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table,” and we are reminded that he is not only talking about Judas Iscariot. He is talking about us, too.

Jesus knows that we often forget him in the midst of our worldly upsets and struggles – that we too often do what we ought not to have done, and fail to do that which we should.

It's easy to forget about Jesus. It's easy to fall into despair, to take our blessings for granted, to pass others by in life without helping them along, to forget about those who are sick and troubled, to steer clear of those who are different, and hold grudges instead unconditional love and forgiveness.

That is why Jesus calls us to Communion in him and with all the faithful the world over. We need each other in our lives to be reminded of who we really are as followers of Christ.

We need to gather – together at table – and take Jesus into our hearts and minds and souls, so that we can share him with others. *Let us do that now. Let us join in Communion. Will the service please come forward?*

As we receive Communion today, let us practice “the first shall be last” method of serving and receiving. ... Jesus calls us to Communion each month, and really each week when we join in worship and each day when we encounter one another. Jesus calls us to Communion because he knows we need it to keep the memory of his sacrifice alive and to strengthen us in being the hands and feet and heart of Jesus.

Jesus called the earliest disciples to Communion because *he* desired their fellowship the night he was betrayed, because of the horror he was to face within just a few hours.

Scripture tells us that after supper, Jesus “came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.

Father God, we thank you for calling us to Communion in Christ, for the gift of your Word and this sacrament. May we be sustained and strengthened from our worship in community here today, from having heard your Word proclaimed and from feasting on the bread of life. So encouraged, may we continue to build a stronger and deeper faith, empowered to do whatever you call us to. Let us all do that this week and in all the weeks to come as we stay mindful of our communion in Christ as Christians. Amen.