

1 Sermon, September 5, 2010

Texts: 1 Corinthians 11:18-26, John 6:1-14

Title: "The Meaning of Holy Communion"

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, calling them on the carpet for the way they celebrated the Lord's Supper.

Because some were eating a feast and showing off, while others had almost nothing to eat and were sitting by hungry. Some were getting drunk on the wine, and needed to be carried out. It was not what it should be. Instead, the Lord's Supper should be simple, repeating the words that Jesus said when he blessed the Last Supper.

Paul told the Church at Corinth that they should use only bread and wine; nothing else, and do it with the kind of dignity that is fitting as a representative of Christ.

Paul was very practical. There should be respect and remembrance.

The one who wrote the Gospel of John, however, lets us know about the Lord's Supper in a roundabout way, by telling the story of Jesus and the feeding of the 5,000.

The story from John goes this way:

Jesus had been in Jerusalem, and a large crowd attended to his words, and saw him heal the sick. When Jesus left, many in the crowd followed him, perhaps to see more miracles.

And Jesus didn't just go across the block, he left town, and walked for 70 miles, and still people followed. He crossed Lake Galilee, which is about 4 times the size of Lake Mendota, and went to the other side, which was not Jewish territory, but Gentile territory. Still many people followed, either walking around the lake, or paying passage on boats.

Then we're told it was almost time for the Jewish feast of Passover, and Jesus went up on a mountain with his disciples and sat down.

We get the picture of Jesus trying to get away from the crowds, traveling a long distance, over a lake, which would certainly discourage many onlookers, and even going to foreign territory, where many Judeans would not want to go.

Jesus sat down on the mountain (or really big hill), ready to eat the Passover feast with his disciples, which is really a family meal celebrating liberation from Egypt, and they see more and more people coming to see Jesus.

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So what did Jesus do? He decided to take this family feast and turn it into a feast for everyone, for all who would come. He decided to provide food for the masses of people arriving. So he asked Philip, "Where will we get enough food to feed all these people?" He didn't ask this as a practical question, because he knew what he would do. He asked the question to check out Philip's spiritual imagination. Could Philip see the possibilities? Evidently not.

Philip answered on a practical level, with perhaps a bit of desperation, "Don't you know that it would take almost a year's wages just to buy only a little bread for each of these people?"

Meanwhile, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, had a little more open outlook. He had already discovered someone who wanted to provide something for the masses. Andrew said, "There's a boy here who has five small loaves of barley bread and two fish. But what good is that with all these people?"

But Jesus didn't pay attention to the negative. He acted as the host of a feast. The ground was covered with grass, and Jesus told his disciples to have everyone sit down. Jesus, out there on a remote hillside where sheep would graze, was setting the table. There were no tablecloths, but there was a covering of grass. The other gospels say that Jesus had them sit in groups.

Then Jesus, amid this crowd of five thousand men (plus women and children), took the bread in his hands and gave thanks to God. Then Jesus himself passed the bread to the people, and he did the same with the fish, until everyone had plenty to eat.

Jesus served them, and there was more than enough. The people ate all they wanted, and Jesus told his disciples to gather up the leftovers, so that nothing would be wasted. The disciples gathered them up and filled twelve large baskets with what was left over from the five barley loaves.

And seeing what had happened, the crowd thought even more highly of Jesus, saying "This must be the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

It really is a story about the Lord's Supper, also called Holy Communion.

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We come to Jesus, sometimes after a roundabout route, sometimes after trying to do it all ourselves and finding that doesn't work, sometimes after trying many other things, and finding them empty.

We come hungry, seeking for a nourishment that we do not find elsewhere. We come thirsty, as after a long journey, thirsting for living water.

And there is Jesus, and he sees us, and he invites us to a family meal; a sacred family meal. Jesus makes room for us, gives us a place in the group, and he blesses the bread.

The bread may have come from a humble source, but it represents the amazing wonder of what God can do with simple things. The bread represents all that God provides in abundance.

And Jesus himself serves us. We are guests, honored guests, and the host himself serves us. This is no second-hand miracle, but Jesus himself comes to us and offers us the gift of looking into his eyes; the gift of receiving from him a gift of love — *knowing* that we are loved.

And there is plenty. Our hunger is satisfied. Our thirst is quenched. We are somehow complete.

And we look around, and we see that everyone is included. Nobody is left out. This is a big family; a family of thousands and more. All are fed.

And we hear Jesus asking those who are closest to him to gather up the crumbs, so that nothing will be wasted. No good thing will be wasted. Every precious moment, every good deed will count. What we do will be valuable.

We participate in a mission to gather together the crumbs, and find them to be twelve baskets full – twelve baskets representing the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve baskets representing the whole world.

We may just put a small crumb into the basket, but our contribution will add up.

We have found an end to our search, we are served, we are fed, we are loved and we are part of a large family; we are given a mission to gather together the lost, the left-over.

We realize all this and are amazed. We discover Jesus is amazing. We plan to continue to follow him.

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That's the story for us. Like Philip, we can't comprehend in advance what Christ will give. But when we sit down in the place prepared for us, when we receive from Christ himself, we receive more than we expect.

We can look at Holy Communion the way Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians; as something to be done the right way, with dignity, with equality, with simplicity.

But we can also look at Holy Communion the way it is told in the Gospel of John; as a time in which Christ *himself* satisfies our hunger, and we are part of a family meal whose table welcomes the world.

John 6:1-14 (Contemporary English Version) (Matthew 14.13-21; Mark 6.30-44; Luke 9.10-17)

1 Jesus crossed Lake Galilee, which was also known as Lake Tiberias. **2** A large crowd had seen him work miracles to heal the sick, and those people went with him. **3-4** It was almost time for the Jewish festival of Passover, and Jesus went up on a mountain with his disciples and sat down. **5** When Jesus saw the large crowd coming toward him, he asked Philip, "Where will we get enough food to feed all these people?" **6** He said this to test Philip, since he already knew what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered, "Don't you know that it would take almost a year's wages just to buy only a little bread for each of these people?" **8** Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the disciples. He spoke up and said, **9** "There is a boy here who has five small loaves of barley bread and two fish. But what good is that with all these people?" **10** The ground was covered with grass, and Jesus told his disciples to have everyone sit down. About five thousand men were in the crowd. **11** Jesus took the bread in his hands and gave thanks to God. Then he passed the bread to the people, and he did the same with the fish, until everyone had plenty to eat.

12 The people ate all they wanted, and Jesus told his disciples to gather up the leftovers, so that nothing would be wasted. **13** The disciples gathered them up and filled twelve large baskets with what was left over from the five barley loaves.

14 After the people had seen Jesus work this miracle, they began saying, "This must be the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

John 6:1-14 (The Message)

1-4 After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee (some call it Tiberias). A huge crowd followed him, attracted by the miracles

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they had seen him do among the sick. When he got to the other side, he climbed a hill and sat down, surrounded by his disciples. It was nearly time for the Feast of Passover, kept annually by the Jews.

5-6When Jesus looked out and saw that a large crowd had arrived, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread to feed these people?" He said this to stretch Philip's faith. He already knew what he was going to do.

7Philip answered, "Two hundred silver pieces wouldn't be enough to buy bread for each person to get a piece."

8-9One of the disciples—it was Andrew, brother to Simon Peter—said, "There's a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But that's a drop in the bucket for a crowd like this."

10-11Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was a nice carpet of green grass in this place. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread and, having given thanks, gave it to those who were seated. He did the same with the fish. All ate as much as they wanted.

12-13When the people had eaten their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the leftovers so nothing is wasted." They went to work and filled twelve large baskets with leftovers from the five barley loaves.

14-15The people realized that God was at work among them in what Jesus had just done. They said, "This is the Prophet for sure, God's Prophet right here in Galilee!" Jesus saw that in their enthusiasm, they were about to grab him and make him king, so he slipped off and went back up the mountain to be by himself.

1 Corinthians 11:18-26 (The Message)

17-19Regarding this next item, I'm not at all pleased. I am getting the picture that when you meet together it brings out your worst side instead of your best! First, I get this report on your divisiveness, competing with and criticizing each other. I'm reluctant to believe it, but there it is. The best that can be said for it is that the testing process will bring truth into the open and confirm it.

20-22And then I find that you bring your divisions to worship—you come together, and instead of eating the Lord's Supper, you bring in a lot of food from the outside and make pigs of yourselves. Some are left out, and go home hungry. Others have to be carried out, too drunk to walk. I can't believe it! Don't you have your own homes to eat and drink in? Why would you stoop to desecrating God's church? Why would you actually shame God's poor? I never would have believed you would stoop to this. And I'm not going to stand by and say nothing.

23-26Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you.

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The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me. After supper, he did the same thing with the cup: This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you.

Each time you drink this cup, remember me. 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.

1 Corinthians 11:18-26 (Contemporary English Version)

18I am told that you can't get along with each other when you worship, and I am sure that some of what I have heard is true.

19You are bound to argue with each other, but it is easy to see which of you have God's approval.

20When you meet together, you don't really celebrate the Lord's Supper. **21**You even start eating before everyone gets to the meeting, and some of you go hungry, while others get drunk.

22Don't you have homes where you can eat and drink? Do you hate God's church? Do you want to embarrass people who don't have anything? What can I say to you? I certainly cannot praise you.

23I have already told you what the Lord Jesus did on the night he was betrayed. And it came from the Lord himself.

He took some bread in his hands. **24**Then after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Eat this and remember me."

25After the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine in his hands and said, "This is my blood, and with it God makes his new agreement with you. Drink this and remember me."

26The Lord meant that when you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you tell about his death until he comes.