

October 4, 2015

“The One Who Offers”

Mark 14:22-26

You have probably heard the saying, “We need to concentrate on what we have in common, instead of the things in which we differ in opinion.” Nowhere in the Church of Jesus Christ, is that so well observed as in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Even in those divisive days of the Reformation when the church was threatened with division that appeared to be more like a shattering than a mere breaking, there was one thing on which the Reformers, and the Old “so called” Catholic Church were actually in agreement. The Lord's Supper, some called it Communion, or the Eucharist, must never be forgotten, in fact must be prized for its simple and marvelous meaning. To be sure there were differences of opinion on how it should be celebrated, and definitely differences over what it meant. But very few were interested in jettisoning this basic sacrament, and those who were, faced major criticism from all sides.

I mention these things because it is the first Sunday in October today. Not lightly, is it called World Wide Communion Sunday. Today, at this hour, and an hour similar to this in differing time zones, Christians of many different denominations and congregations are taking Communion, among other things as a sign of Christian unity, in a world that is increasing hostile, or even worse indifferent to Christians, Christian values, and the Church. Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters are doing what we are doing at this very moment. Our neighbours who call themselves United, Baptist, Anglican and many other affiliations are gathering at the table of the Lord.

We will eat bread in many different forms. We will sip wine and grape juice invented for this purpose, to remember Jesus, his body broken in crucifixion, his life ruptured by death, to redeem,

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to save and to make whole, all would call upon Him and take up the yoke of Christian life and service. I have given my gift to relieve the lot of Syrian refugees, not because I know them, or identify with their suffering, but because I am Christ's man, and He has reminded me even when I would sooner forget, because too often it is simply inconvenient to remember the command... “love your neighbour as you love yourself.” And perhaps even the more moving question, “But who is my neighbour?”

which we tend to ask or at least think, when we see someone in need, and we would rather cross the road and pass by on the other side, abandoning them to cope on their own, to continue in their suffering, to bleed and die, or to drown or to starve.

We are Christians. Followers of Jesus who is the Way. That is why we take communion today. And as we do it we remember we do so with a family of faith that is so much larger than our congregation, our denomination, or the number that is circumscribed by that line which means they agree with us in “all” things. Differences remain. There are reasons I have chosen not to be...you can inject the name of any denomination of the Church that comes to mind...other than Presbyterian Church In Canada. But today, and for these moments of worship focussed on “the Lord's Supper” lines of division either dissolve or are set aside. Here at the Table, we emphasize one thing...we are Christians, and we share a bond with all who profess that they follow Jesus.

In fact that has always been the meaningful nature of the eucharist...a Latin word which the Oxford Dictionary, with no axe to grind except clear communication defines in these words: Christian sacrament (there is that word again...Christian). Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed. The Latin

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word of course has simply passed into English, unaltered, its meaning clear.

In Mark 14: 22-26 we get and even clearer definition of the meaning of communion. “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the disciples saying, “Take it; this is my body.” Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.” Several jewels in those verses that I want you to remember and treasure.

First. The bread and the wine. We use bread and grape juice which is as pure as it could be and alcohol free. As I have mentioned on other occasions, Welch's grape juice was invented for this purpose. It gives us an unfermented alternative to wine. But here is the real point. Jesus and the disciples were having dinner together, celebrating the Passover. The

bread they consumed was common to the meal. The wine washed it down, and was safer to drink than water. Basic, common, every day elements of food and drink. Any Passover Meal, every meal in fact would have included these elements. Nothing special, nothing, marvelous except what faith brings to the moment.

Second. Notice who is in charge at the Table. Some call it an altar, spelled A-L-T-A-R. And some would say there is no difference. Table:Altar. An altar involves sacrifice and God. A table is a common piece of furniture in all our homes. We eat meals at a table. Jesus is in charge at this table. What he says about the bread and the wine, He is talking about a sacrificial offering to God. He transforms the table and its use. But the major point is Jesus is in charge at this table. The words spoken at it mirror His words. The

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prayer is one of thanksgiving and consecration at the same time. The bread is no longer just bread. The wine or juice has a whole new meaning. Jesus offers these things to the disciples of old, and us today in the language of saving grace. He reminds us that God is our Saviour.

Third. At the table. I promise there will be no lecture if you call it an altar. Jesus, not me, not the elders whom you have elected to lead this church, Jesus gives. Jesus offers. He pours in the meaning. Broken body on Calvary's Cross. The blood that stains the wood, and washes us clean of our very real sins. I get to celebrate with you and lead you in this celebration only because you trust me to represent Jesus in your midst. Trust me. I lose sleep over whether or not I do that adequately. Because for all my faith, I am not Jesus, I am not God. I pray that I am led by His Spirit. What happens at the Table is between Jesus and you, between Jesus and me because the truth is, I am one of you.

Fourth. Jesus said He would not drink this stuff until He did it in the Kingdom of God. Without trying to be terribly mystical, this table probably is as close as we ever get to being in that Kingdom, God's Kingdom, while we are living on this earth. The reason I say that is the table is about faith, and forgiveness, the grace of God, and our great need for all three all at once. And every time we take communion, we accept what Jesus gives and what Jesus offers. And we know in our hearts in all honesty there are many moments when we reject what Jesus gives, and we

reject what the King of Heaven offers us.

Finally, fifth. When it was over the disciples and Jesus sang a hymn and went out of that upper room to the Mount of Olives.

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There Jesus would be betrayed. There his disciples and friends would scatter and leave Him alone. We will after communion sing a hymn. We always do. And then we go out from this upper chamber back into the world with all its pressures, its promises and its temptations. We have moments when we win the battle to be faithful. We have moments when we fail. I do not say this to make you feel down about yourself. Remember that it is out in that often violent world Jesus would shoulder the cross and die upon it because of His love for you. What you celebrate here, changes what happens out there. When faith is victorious out there you win. When faith fails out there...you are forgiven. You win!! Because in here Jesus gave to you, and offered you, life eternal. He who offers life honours His word.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, our Saviour and our Friend. Be in our midst we ask as we come to the Table. Feed us the food that fits us for the Kingdom. Remind us when we are weak that you transform weakness into strength. Weakness can become submission and service. Pour the light of heaven into our darkness. Lift us beyond logic, that we might feel the embrace of your everlasting arms. Shepherd us that we might serve others in your precious name. Amen