

First Presbyterian Church of Hanford

THE ETERNAL FEAST

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Text: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-17

14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

HISTORY OF THE TABLE

As we prepare to come to the table of Christ, it's worth pausing for a moment—not to complicate the meal, but to be rightly prepared to receive it. The Lord's Supper is simple, and yet the Church has never found it easy to leave holy things alone.

In the earliest days of the Church, the table was just that—a table. A common dining table around which a full meal was shared. Over time, even that simplicity went awry. The Apostle Paul had to correct congregations where the meal became an occasion for indulgence rather than communion—people filling their stomachs while their souls went unfed. From the very beginning, the Church learned that even good gifts can be mishandled.

As centuries passed, the Church responded not by simplifying further, but by elaborating. We are, after all, idol-makers by nature. We have a way of turning humble celebrations into tightly controlled rituals, governed by layers of rules meant to protect holiness but often obscuring grace. Questions multiplied. Why priests, when Christ alone is our great High Priest? Scripture tells us that in Him we are a royal priesthood—a whole people set apart to serve God. Why altars, places of sacrifice, when Christ has already offered Himself once for all, for all sins, for all time? What we gather around is not an altar but

a table—a place of shared grace, even if we sometimes speak poetically of offering a “sacrifice of praise.”

In the medieval Church, the Supper became increasingly elaborate. In the Mass, the priest—often turned away from the congregation—lifted the bread and spoke the words *hoc est corpus meum*, “this is my body,” words that eventually gave rise to our phrase hocus pocus, reflecting how mysterious and even magical the moment had come to seem. The bread was said to become Christ's body and then broken, as though Christ were being offered again and again. The Reformers unanimously rejected this understanding, insisting that Christ's sacrifice was complete and sufficient, never to be repeated.

Even among the Reformers, tensions remained. John Calvin longed for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated weekly in Geneva, but authority over the sacrament rested not with the pastor but with the elders. Calvin, ever the theologian—and perhaps a bit mischievous—responded by preaching from the table instead of the pulpit and shaping the service so that it led unmistakably to the moment when Communion should have been celebrated. Then he would fall silent, letting the absence speak for itself.

Today, Christian practice spans a wide range: intinction with real wine, tiny individual cups

passed along trays, or tables set off to the side for private, self-directed participation. The diversity itself is not the problem. The real loss—the shame, perhaps—is that in all this variation, the deep meaning of the sacrament can quietly slip away. What was meant to be a living encounter with Christ, a shared act of remembrance, grace, and thanksgiving, can become either overburdened with ritual or thinned into mere habit.

So as we come now to the table—not an altar, not a spectacle, not an afterthought—let us come with hearts awake. Christ meets His people here, not because we have perfected the practice, but because He has promised to be present.

SACRAMENT

What is a sacrament? It is not, as some might imagine, a heightened religious performance or a particularly solemn ritual. What makes a sacrament a sacrament is this: God, not we, is the primary actor. A sacrament is not about what we do for God; it is entirely about what God does for us. God is the active agent in every sacrament—not humanity, and not even the Church.

For that reason, it is not quite correct to say that Baptism and the Lord's Supper “belong” to the Church. They do not. They belong to Christ alone. The Church does not own them; we receive them.

We celebrate the sacraments for one reason and one reason only: obedience. We baptize and we come to the Lord's Table because Christ has commanded us to do so. And as we obey, we may trust—without hesitation—that God will do what He has promised to do. The sacraments are God's gracious gift to the Church, given to reassure us that His grace is sufficient and adequate for a life of faith and faithful following.

Our role, then, is participation through obedience. Jesus' words are striking in their simplicity: “Take. Eat.” Do you hear that? It is a

command—plain, direct, and without conditions attached. Jesus does not say, “If your heart is perfectly prepared,” or “If your life has been sufficiently exemplary, then you may come.” He simply says, “Take. Eat.” And we are called to obey.

There was a time in some traditions when elders were sent from house to house to examine families before Communion, to determine whether they were “worthy” to approach the Table. That practice rests on a profound theological error. No one is worthy of either sacrament. In fact, it is precisely the honest awareness of our unworthiness that prepares us to receive them rightly.

What is required is not moral achievement but spiritual recognition: that we discern the sacrament as a true act of God, that we discern the body of Christ, and that we come in humility. And humility, in the biblical sense, means coming empty, hungry, and eager to be filled.

THE TIMELESS TABLE

This table is not a Presbyterian table. It is not Catholic, Orthodox, Methodist, Baptist, Independent, or anything else we might label it. It is simply Christ's table.

And it is a timeless table. In God's economy, all time is gathered into one. When we come here, we eat from a table that participates in eternity itself.

One of the most important words in Scripture is *remember*. In the Old Testament, Israel's faithfulness is measured by whether the people remember or forget the Lord. God remembers His covenant—and because God remembers, He is always faithful. The people, however, forget. And forgetting God is the most basic expression of failed faith.

In the New Testament, Jesus takes up that same word and gives it new depth when He says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” We are still called

to remember—but not in the thin sense of mental recall. The Greek word Jesus uses is *anamnesis*, which means more than recollection. It means a making-present, a re-enactment. Even our English word *remember* hints at this: to re-member is to bring back together what has been scattered, to be made one again—one body in Christ.

That is why our regular celebration of the Lord's Supper is not merely a memorial. It is an ongoing dress rehearsal for a very real meal that is yet to come. Jesus tells us that He will not drink of the cup again until the kingdom of God comes. And here is the strange and beautiful thing: because God is not bound by time as we are, our remembering moves in two directions at once. We remember the past—the night Jesus shared the meal with His disciples—and we remember the future—the completed feast in the fullness of the Kingdom. Past and future meet at this table.

So as we remember Christ's meal with His disciples, we also anticipate its fulfillment. There is a real meal coming. Christ will gather His disciples from every time and every corner of the world. We will gather at a real table. And though there may be billions present, we will each be equally close to Him. There will be real bread and real wine—fully physical, even more solid and substantial than what we now call “real.” And Jesus will lift the bread and break it.

And I suspect there will not be a dry eye in heaven, because in that moment we will finally understand: all those small, ordinary celebrations of Communion throughout our lives were preparing us for this. We will know the words. We will know the gestures. We will know our part. And at last, we will fully understand why it mattered so much all along.

RESET, REBOOT, REFRESH

Finally, we do well to remember that every celebration of the Lord's Supper is an utter and complete *reset*. We get a divine *do-over* through God's grace. We forgive, and we forget. We

refresh, reset, reboot—every time. We should be mindful and grateful for this.

The invitation to the table is always a system upgrade, and the old systems are now fit only for the junkyards and trash heaps.

What a beautiful thing it is that God offers us such renewal! Again, it is His work that makes the sacrament a sacrament, not ours.

THE INVISIBLE TABLE

There is a table within the table here—an *invisible* table that is present in and around this particular table, just as the presence of Christ is present in and around the communion elements.

That invisible table-within-the table neither begins nor ends here. Think of the top of this table spreading out, stretching east and west, passing through the walls of this church, reconnecting with the table tops of the local Methodist, Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, and Independent churches. That table top stretches around the country and globe, connecting all the earthly tables into the one table of Christ.

That table—no other—is the one we are blessed to be welcome to, and it is completely real.

Let us be ready. Come to the table, not because you are strong but because you are weak. Come to the table, not because you are good and righteous, but because you are so hungry to be filled with righteousness that you see little to none within yourself. Come not because you feel worthy, because we are not, and the Table is for *sinner*s, not the righteous. Come, bring your sins as an offering, declare Christ Lord of all, put your total trust in Him, and receive, receive, receive.

In His words, “Take. Eat.” †