

Brought Together by a Meal

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

What does it say when you have a meal with someone? Maybe your first thought is, “You know, I’ve never really thought that having a meal with someone makes a statement.” But as you think on it a little longer, it becomes more apparent that who you eat with says something. When you eat a meal with a coworker or a business associate, you may only be making the statement that you both need to work, you both need to eat, so this just makes sense. It’s efficient. Or maybe it’s a gesture to have a relationship, a friendship, outside of only working and that’s why you eat together.

Think of the lunchroom politics at school. Part of who you eat with is based on the fact that you all go to the same school together; you don’t get to pick who is going to eat in that lunchroom with you. However, you can probably pick who you sit with, and you make choices of who you want that to be. You pick people who share common interests with you, people you like, people you want to catch up with, people you want to be with, people whose company you enjoy. You may also be making a statement by who you choose not to sit with, that you don’t want to be associated with them, that you are not comfortable eating with them. This, of course, works in reverse. Seeing no available seats by your friends, you may have to sit down at a table where no one else is, and you wonder and hope that someone notices you and decides to sit with you, decides that they want your company. If no one sits with you, you feel isolated, unloved, the odd one out. And, of course, this still happens to us as adults at conferences, the work place, and, yes, even here at church. In fact, if you came tonight to Light of the Valley for the first time, you probably had that thought as you tried to figure out where to sit, hoping not to look like the odd person out.

Eating with someone is a common expression of together-ness, to be further connected. We are social beings. We have a desire to be with others. Yes, I know that many of us are introverts, that we need time to be by ourselves, to reflect and to recharge. But none of us want to be alone. We want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. And when we look to be with other people, we want there to be commonalities, something that brings us together or unifies us. Most of the time we have to figure this out piece by piece, one conversation after another to find something that we click on, something that we share, something that we both enjoy, something that we can bond over so that we can share more than just space. We want to share interests, hobbies, points of view, struggles, triumphs, beliefs. We crave to be brought together with others over something in common, something that unifies us.

Do you feel alone, that you just aren’t fitting in? It may be that you have not found someone who shares your interests, your hobbies, or your pastimes. It may be that it seems that no one else holds your political views. It may be that no one talks about the struggles that you go through, that no one looks as tired and exhausted and as worn out or as in pain as you feel. It may be that your friends, your classmates, your coworkers all talk about a place of worship that they go to together and it’s not your church. You feel like the odd Lutheran out.

Satan wants you to feel alone. He wants you to think that you are the odd one out, that you are different in a bad way, a way that makes you undesirable to other people, that you will not find belonging or unity with anyone else because of the way you think, the way you act, the things you do. He wants you to feel all alone because then he has you right where he wants you. He is a roaring lion looking to devour us. He wants to separate you from others so that you become the easy kill. It makes him grin sinisterly when you feel like you cannot belong with others.

I don’t know if you are wrestling with feelings of loneliness, of isolation, of being the odd one out. But if you are, I am so glad that you are here tonight because God designed the church to bring people together. The word that God uses to describe the church means “the ones called out.” God calls us out of the world and into a belonging with him. The calling out begins with his Word, the first time you heard what God had done to save you, how he came down from heaven to serve you and me, to be the perfection that God requires, to sacrifice himself on the cross to pay for all our sins, all our imperfections, everything we have ever done wrong. God called you out from belonging to this world full of sin and evil to belong to him by the waters of baptism combined with his Word. Baptism washed away all our sins – past, present, and future. With baptism, God clothed us with Jesus’ perfection. And, most importantly, he adopted us into his family, giving us a belonging with God, a unity with him that we never could have gained on our own.

Since that first time, since your baptism, God has continued to call on you, calling you to stay with him. He gave us, his people, physical indication of this belonging, of this unity with him through a meal. Nearly 3500 years ago, God saved his people from death in the land of Egypt. A one-year old blemish free male lamb was sacrificed for each household. The blood of that perfect lamb was painted over the doorframes of their houses, marking them as ones belonging to God. God saw the blood and then had death pass over that house because they belonged to him, to his family. By the blood of the lamb, God saved his people from death. On that same night, he had his people, the people he had called to believe in him, the people who painted the lamb's blood on their doors, to have a meal together. They would eat that lamb remembering that God saved them from death, that they were protected as his people. This was the Passover meal. No one else was allowed to partake in it except those whom God has called to believe in him. The Passover meal was a meal of fellowship, of unity, that was eaten only by those who shared their belief and their deliverance in God.

Almost 1500 years later, Jesus, God himself, was partaking in this Passover feast. He was in an upper room surrounded with his twelve disciples, those who had walked with him, learned from him, who took his Word out to others. After the Passover meal was over, Jesus took some bread and gave thanks. He broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take it; this is my body." (Mark 14:22) Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." (Mark 14:24) This meal was more than just bread and wine. Things were being brought together, impossible things, miraculous things. Jesus wasn't giving a cryptic word picture. He said, "This is my body; this is my blood," but at the same time it was still clearly bread and wine. As Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians, "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (verse 16)

This wine used in what we know as the Lord's Supper participated in the blood of Christ. This bread participated in the body of Christ. That word "participate" literally means, "has union with" or, as we say, it was a communion, a bringing together. Jesus' body was brought together with the bread. They shared a unity. In the Lord's Supper, you can't have one without the other, even though you can only see one but not the other. The same is true with Jesus' blood and the wine. These two elements were now unified, that as we drink the wine we are receiving Jesus' blood with the wine, even though we can only taste the one and not the other. Jesus' Supper, the Lord's Supper, brought the bread and Jesus' body together as well as the wine and Jesus' blood. God brought these things together as yet another way to bring his people together with him, to bring his disciples together with him knowing that he would soon give his life on the cross, to bring us together with him by forgiving our wickedness and remembering our sins no more, the covenant that was given in His Supper.

God has brought us together this evening in this building. He called you with his Word, with the message of what he has done to bring you to him, how he sacrificed himself as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world, to save you from death just like the body and blood of the Passover lamb did for the Israelites of old. Jesus gave up his body and his blood to pay for our debt of sin, a debt that alienated us from God, a debt we cannot ever repay, no matter how much time we put in, no matter how many things we give to him. But Jesus Christ, being true God and true Man at the same time (another unity), he wiped out our debt with his body and with his blood sacrificed for us. His blood was painted over the doorposts of our hearts and he saved us from death, eternal death.

As we have come to know God and have been called by him out of our debt of sin and out of belonging to this world of sin, God continues to call us to be united with him through a meal. Jesus gave us this special meal, His Supper, to keep us together with him. This is no mere eating and drinking for the sake of nourishing our physical bodies. In his Supper, Jesus nourishes our spiritual life, forgiving our sins, removing our guilt, cleansing our conscience. God keeps us together through a meal, a holy communion.

"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf." (Verse 17) It doesn't matter what you did. It doesn't matter where you come from, who your friends are, where you went to school, your position on the totem pole at work. It doesn't matter if you have a reserved seat with friends at the lunch table. God called you to belong to him. He brought you to him through his Word, through his promises, through baptism. He keeps you together with him through his Word, through his Holy Supper, through Holy Communion.

We come here because we have been brought together by the same God, the same Lord, the same Jesus Christ. We enjoy the same forgiveness, the same sacrifice. We enjoy the same belonging as expressed when we join together partaking in the Lord's Supper. We are all part of this one body, this body that we call the church, the ones called out of belonging to anything else but to God alone.

If this is your first time here, then I am so glad that you are here. This God who brings us together is the God I want you to know, the God I want to share with you. This is the God I want you to be connected to. I want you to have unity with this group of believers by learning about God and all that he has done for you. Although you may not be able to say today that you believe everything we teach and preach here, my hope and prayer is to share all that God has done for you so that he gives you a belonging, particularly here.

So, if you are feeling alone, that you are the odd one out, taste and see the belonging that God has given you – first through his Word, through baptism, then through his Supper as you learn more about him, unity through Holy Communion. As you have been drawn here to belong to his family of believers, of God’s people, express that unity that we share in the Lord’s Supper, united in forgiveness, united in what we believe, a people called by God, a people belonging to God, kept together by his meal. Amen.

March 29, 2018

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