

4-1-21

Maundy Thursday

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Communion

As Often...

Some of you have met two of our oldest and best friends. We met Roy and Becky over forty years ago now when we both lived in Kentucky and were young and just starting out on careers and life. We met at church, and we were drawn together by the fact that we were among a very few couples our age in that congregation who didn't have kids. And you know how people like to talk about their kids! So we formed a bond over being childless. Eventually, of course, we had kids, too, they a son and we our two boys. But for a few years, it was just us. They were involved in one school system by Roy's employment, and we were in the other one there by mine. So Friday nights in the fall, they'd go to a county school game, and we'd be at the city school game, but we started meeting at their place one week and ours the next after the game to watch Dallas. We lived in the Eastern time zone then, so we were usually through in time to catch Dallas at ten o'clock. One week, I don't remember whose week it was to host, somebody fixed a pan of brownies for us to eat while we watched J. R. and Bobby and all the rest of that crew. That started something. It lasted through that football season, and it has lasted more than forty years since then. Whenever we are together, wherever we are together, the first night always includes a pan of brownies. Nothing fancy. Made from a mix. If we're at their house, they fix them. At our house we do. If we meet, as we do more often these days, at a hotel somewhere, we take turns, or, truth be told, we both bring a batch. When we had to make a quick trip to Indianapolis to retrieve Blake when Covid hit last spring, we stopped at Roy and Becky's on the way up to spend

the night. We told them not to worry about feeding us. I think they made spaghetti anyway. But I know for sure there was a pan of brownies before the night was over. Ours is not a low-carb friendship.

They still live in that town where we all started out. We have moved from pillar to post. I can't tell you all the things we've talked about over those brownies. We've found out about babies coming, then learned that those babies had grown up and would be married. We've looked at house plans and considered pastoral calls. We've talked about their involvement in the Church and ours through lots of change over the years. Every time we eat those brownies, we remember and give thanks for a relationship that has lasted all these years and shows no signs of letting up. There have been a few rough spots along the way, but the brownies helped us through those, too. We'll hopefully see them again soon. We'll decide whose turn it is to bring the brownies.

You won't find brownies on the Table tonight. You know what we eat and drink when we gather at this Table. Hopefully someday soon we'll get back to more familiar ways of eating and drinking together. I miss your filing by and getting to talk to you as you do. We talk about important things at this Table, too. Usually, it's the same message to each of you. This is the body of Christ, broken for you. But sometimes, if there is something going on in your life that I know about and that we can talk about before others, we'll say a word about that, too. Prayers for someone who's ill. Remembrance of someone who is no longer with us. Words about a special joy. I miss getting a peck on the cheek from Emily and Joan when they came to the Table. All of those words and actions at the Table are just as binding as those brownies have been down through the years. Every time we come to this Table, we come to remember the events we celebrate tonight and tomorrow—that Jesus shared this meal with his friends just before he died and then tomorrow he will die for your sin and for mine. We are particularly aware of these events during Holy Week, but when we come to Communion in July or

October, you know that you will hear the story of Jesus' sacrifice again.

It's hard for us to imagine much controversy over Communion. Sometimes someone might get bent out of shape if the service runs long on Communion Sundays, but they usually settle down. Many of you will remember when Communion happened less frequently than it does now. Maybe a time or two a year. Then we kind of settled on quarterly. More recently, many of us have agreed on a once-a-month celebration and then at special times of the year like tonight and Christmas Eve. There is a movement in the Church toward more frequent communion. Our friends at First Christian up the street include communion in every service. The Catholics always have. I know a few Presbyterian Churches that have begun every week communion, but you can bet they had lots of worship committee meetings and conversations about it before they did. Every time you get a new preacher, there may be something a little different about how he or she celebrates the Sacrament, but unless it involves something altogether off the wall, most of us don't get too bent out of shape about it.

It was not so easy for the people in Corinth. Paul was writing this letter because their communion practice needed correction. To say they were not doing things in good, Presbyterian, decent and in order ways would be understatement. They weren't serving brownies and milk, but apparently there was more than just bread and wine involved. Their celebration would be closer to a church supper than what we're accustomed to as a sacramental celebration. The trouble was, some were eating before others even got there. Sometimes those early eaters ate everything before others arrived. Sometimes the people who needed that common meal the most were left out. Apparently, the ones who gobbled everything up felt entitled, and didn't see a problem with their behavior.

Paul writes not only to try to correct their behavior, but to remind them of what this celebration was.

You usually don't need such reminders. Whenever you come into this sanctuary and see the table set, you know that in that service you're going to hear about the death of Jesus, whatever season of the year it is. Even when we gather here on Christmas, we'll celebrate the birth, but we'll also talk about who that baby grew up to be and what happened to him. Tonight, of all nights, you come here expecting to hear that story.

That's what Paul means when he says that he reminds them and us that this celebration is not something he came up with on his own. And it is not something we take lightly. He received from the Lord what he is handing on to them. And generations from his time to ours have handed on these same holy things to us.

Most of you have heard me say a form of these words time after time when we gather at the Table. You can probably say them right along with me. On the night he was betrayed and arrested, just before he died for your sin and for mine... Hopefully when you hear those words, you remember Paul's call for us to tell this story over and over until Jesus comes again.

Communion practices vary, of course, from place to place. We try to make it clear that everyone is welcome at the Table here. That is not so in some places. Regardless of how clearly we extend the invitation for all to come, some are not comfortable taking. In another church I served, we had people who carried the bread and the cup to people who were unable or unwilling to come forward. One of those guys was particularly zealous about his job. He wanted everyone to know they were welcome to partake, and when some declined, he would almost force the plate on them. We finally convinced him that it was OK for some not to take.

Being invited to the Table is a special thing. You know what it means to be invited to someone's home to share a meal. Whether it's a special occasion or a simple meal or a pan of brownies, being invited is a treat, not something everyone gets.

To be invited to God's Table is a special invitation, too, one that we believe is extended to all.

Neither Paul or Jesus nor anyone else who talks about this celebration in Scripture spells out exactly how to do it. Or how often. But we all know that we're about something important at this Table, and we want others to know it, too. As often as we do this, we are telling the world about the greatest event in human history, the sacrificial death of Jesus that achieved our salvation, and that story is never, even this week, separated from his glorious resurrection which opened heaven's doors to us and to all. Thanks be to God! Amen.