

The Family Table

May 7, 2023

Matthew 26:20-30

²⁰ When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve disciples,^[a] ²¹ and while they were eating he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²² And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” ²³ He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.” ²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” ²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it^[b] he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the^[c] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Special occasions are often connected to food. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter are the holidays we associate with big meals, but there are also birthdays, graduations, funerals and of course anniversaries are occasions for celebratory meals.

As a child I remember waking up on Thanksgiving or Christmas morning to the wonderful smells of the food my mom was fixing and just by the smells I knew that it was a significant day. But by far the smell that I loved the most was my **Grandma Reed’s homemade yeast rolls.** Like Pavlov’s dog when I smelled those rolls my mouth began to water and my stomach began to growl. I could not wait to hear those 4 important words, “Come and get it!” Even today I associate the smell of fresh baked bread with many fond memories with my family.

I served a church in Kentucky where the bread for Communion was baked in the church that morning and when we came to church we were welcomed by the glorious smell of fresh baked bread. When people walked in the doors and they smelled the bread they knew that it was a significant day because we would be gathering around the Lord’s Table as a family.

This morning as we reflect on the bread and cup we should be prepare ourselves, our hearts and minds to “come to the table.”

I bet when you were a kid and you came to the supper table, before you got a chance to sit down you were reminded to wash your hands. We don't work in the garden or change the oil in the car and then sit down to eat dinner with our family without washing our hands. I remember coming to the dinner table as a kid and having my hands inspected or examined. Many times, I was sent back with the admonition, “Go back and use soap this time.”

In I Corinthians 11:28 Paul says that, **“Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.”** We need to wash up, which means as individuals we need to humbly approach God and confess our sins and ask for forgiveness.

Here at First Congregational Church we offer an open invitation to all those that love God and seek loving relationships with their neighbors to join us as we celebrate communion. In our preparation to receive the bread and the cup we are encouraged to acknowledge that we are not always the most loving person to God or our neighbors. Paul is reminding us that as believers we are to acknowledge our broken relationships and seek reconciliation with God and our neighbor.

In our personal preparations, we must approach the Lord's Table with awe and respect. When I was in college I volunteered as the music director at a small country church, **Poosey Ridge Baptist Church** and when I would go home on weekends I would get up early on Sunday morning, pack my car and drive the 90 miles to get back in time for the 10 AM service. I would put the cruise control on and go. **There were times when I got back to campus** that I didn't remember passing through Frankfort or Lexington. My mind was on cruise control as well and I was oblivious. That can happen to us as we move through our worship services. **We become so familiar** with what we are doing that it loses importance and meaning. It can be easy for us to take our time in worship for granted. We can easily put our minds on cruise control and the next thing we know we are standing for the benediction. The last thing we want to happen is for communion to become so ordinary that it loses significance.

The attitude of our hearts and minds as we approach the Lord's Table has a significant bearing on how we embrace God and how God embraces us. To understand this, we need to take a closer look at the New Testament passage that

was read earlier. The setting for the conversation was of course the Upper Room and took place during the supper that Jesus shared with his disciples to celebrate Passover. While reclining around the table Jesus said, ***“One of you will betray me.”*** Each of the disciples asked Jesus, *“Is it I, Lord?”* When Judas spoke he asked, *“Is it I, Rabbi.”* Did you notice the difference? All the other disciples referred to Jesus as Lord, but Judas called him Rabbi or teacher. **There is a big difference between Lord and teacher.** For the 11 Jesus was much more than a good teacher, he was someone they had dedicated their lives to, Jesus was their Lord.

Who is Jesus to us, just some good teacher that we have heard stories about most of our lives or someone worthy of committing our life to following? Our attitude is very important in how we relate to Christ and how he relates to us.

In many faith traditions as a part of communion the priest or minister consecrates the bread and the cup. They believe that during the consecration the Spirit of God descends upon the bread and cup and in some traditions transforms the bread and juice or wine into the actual body and blood of Christ.

In our tradition, we do not necessarily consecrate the elements but we do ask a blessing over them. **For us, in the blessing of the bread and cup it is the Spirit of God** that lives within our hearts in conjunction with our humble, submissive and thankful attitudes that makes the bread and cup holy and life giving for us. If our attitude isn't where it should be all that has taken place when we partake of the bread and cup is we **have eaten a little bread and drank a bit of juice** instead of having a holy and life-giving experience with God.

In August of 1900 more than 250 hobos, tramps and freeloaders came by train to a little northwest Iowa town for their first annual National Hobo Convention. **They ate free food, drank free beer,** stayed in free accommodations, played games, drew up a political platform and nominated a candidate for the 1900 Presidential election. This is a tradition that is repeated even to this day-the Annual Hobo Days in Britt, Iowa.

The people of Britt have been inviting the hobos, bums, & freeloaders to return each year, not because they deserve it, not because in some way they have earned it. They get this special treatment because they are hobos. Hobos who haven't worked, many who are lazy, crude, dirty, dishonest, who have been arrested for vagrancy; but for one weekend they are loved for who they are and as they are.

Jesus says to us come and eat all is ready, come not because you deserve it, not because you have earned it, come because it is freely given. Like it or not, we come to this table as the hobos come to Britt. We come not deserving but accepting. We are invited by God through Christ to come and eat and drink not because we are great, but because of the great love that God has for us. We come though we have been lazy in our calling to follow Jesus, are dirty with sin, and have been dishonest with God and each other. Yet, we are still invited; we are still accepted at this table as we are.

We come not as perfect people, but as forgiven people. Christ's love, forgiveness and grace are present here at this table. This bread and this juice are symbols, a reminder of God's great love for us. So, Come. Come as people who are celebrating the grace of God. Come to the family table.

Amen.