

Come to the Table with Joy

Acts 2:42-47 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to **the breaking of bread** and to prayer.

⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all the believers were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,** ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Introduction

Today we celebrate the World Communion Sunday. All around the world, the believers take communion in the name of Jesus our Savior. Once a year, I preach on the meaning of the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of October. Today is that day.

Communion is also called 'the Lord's Supper,' 'the Eucharist,' 'the Mass,' 'the Sacrament of the Altar,' 'the Lord's Table,' or simply 'the Breaking of Bread.' There are many ways and traditions of 'the breaking of bread' (Acts 2:42): from the various forms of Communion elements (wine/juice, regular bread, wafers, gluten free wafers, oyster crackers, and pita bread) to how often we celebrate the Lord's Supper: at every *gathering* (the Early Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Wesley brothers), *weekly* (Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians), *monthly* (Methodists---rooted in the practice of Circuit Riders in the 19th Century), *quarterly* (Baptists), and even *biannual* celebrations (the Amish communities and some Korean churches). Here at our church, we celebrate the Lord's Supper every first Sunday of the month. As far as who can take communion, following our Methodist tradition, we allow anyone including children who believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Whatever tradition we are accustomed to, if we blindly repeat what we have been doing in the past, or if we only focus on non-essential aspects of the Lord's Supper such as elements, we may miss out the true blessings of the Lord's Supper (E.g., Juice or wine. One church couldn't decide, so a half of the tray was filled with real wine, and the other half was juice). In other words, we must understand its underlying nature in order to appreciate and benefit from the Lord's Supper. That is what I am going to talk about this morning.

Content

God's Word points out three aspects of the Lord's Supper for us to remember each time we partake in it.

First, we remember **the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross**, where His body was broken, and His blood was shed for us. It was Christ who first initiated the Lord's Supper with His disciples on the night before He was crucified. He commanded them to observe the Lord's Supper *in remembrance of Him* (Luke 22:19). So, each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember what Christ has done for us.

This is what He has done for us. God the Father sent His only begotten Son Jesus to save us from our sins (John 3:16-17). To bring us to God, Christ suffered once for all sinners like you and me, the righteous for the unrighteous (1 Peter 3:18). Through His own death, He paid the wages of our sin so that our sins may be forgiven (Ephesians 1:7). God's Word declares that *"²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Indeed, Christ set us free from the bondage of sin and death. Therefore, every time you partake in the Lord's Supper, remember that the bread represents His body that was broken, and that the grape juice represents His blood that was shed to redeem us through the sacrifice of His own body.

Next, as we partake in the Lord's Supper, we take in **Christ the Bread of Life and the Living Water**. Christ did a wonderful thing for us on the cross 2000 years ago, but it wasn't a one-time action. He continually blesses us with His presence in us as *'the Bread of Life'* (John 6:35, 48).

Think with me about the meaning of *'the Bread of Life.'* It means that Christ gives life to the world (John 6:33). As bread sustains life in our physical body, so does Christ our spirit and soul. Imagine that everything is taken away from you. The last two things you really need for survival are bread and water. Likewise, our spirit needs Christ the Living Bread and the Living Water (John 4:10). We need Him every day and forever. Listen to Jesus' own words. He said, **"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst"** (John 6:35).

He also said, *"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh"* (John 6:51). What's that mean, *the Living Bread* here? The bread from Heaven. Christ is the bread that gives us life eternal. Christ the Bread of Life is living in us. 24/7. He dwells

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in every believer through His Spirit. He feeds our spirit, strengthens our faith, encourages, and helps us through the times of temptation and challenge. Without Christ, without the Bread of Life, and without this 'Living Water,' our spirit and soul cannot survive even a day---Avalon's song "Oxygen"—"You (Christ) are my oxygen, I breathe you in, I breathe you out."

The question is: Do we live with such an awareness of Christ in us? It's time that we took Christ as *the Living Bread* and *the Living Water* in our lives. Listen to Jesus once again who says: "⁵⁵For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink" (John 6:55). We take 'true food' and we drink 'true drink' each time we partake in communion.

Finally, in the Lord's Supper, we remember that **we the believers are one in Christ**. Despite many differences among us, all believers are one in Christ. (E.g.,¹) "*Dr. Paul Brand was once in Ankara, Turkey to teach a course on leprosy rehabilitation. He didn't speak Turkish and knew nobody and was put up in a little hotel room for the two weeks of the course, which was by translation. The country was strongly Muslim, and he couldn't find an English-speaking Christian church. So, he called the American Embassy, and they told him of an old Catholic church in the Italian Embassy, near his hotel, which hosted a simple Ecumenical Communion service in English and French on Sunday, after their regular Mass. There were not more than fifty of them there, and they were of diverse ethnic backgrounds. He didn't even know from what kind of church the pastor conducting the service came. All he knew was that they broke bread together, on their knees, and the name of Jesus Christ was honored. They hugged each other afterwards and felt at home. The atmosphere of love and fellowship stayed with him all day*" (God's Forever Feast, Paul Brand, pp. 232-233).

(E.g., 2) Not long after the Civil War was over, something unique happened in one church in Alexandria, VA. That Sunday, the worship service was in full swing at Christ Episcopal Church, where General Robert Lee and his family attended, *all white congregation* (mind you). The pastor was about to minister the Communion to the congregants. He invited them to come to the altar. As some people started moving, out of nowhere, a black man a former slave, walked toward the front from the back and knelt at the altar to receive the communion. Remember in those days the Common Cup was a standard practice in the Episcopal Church (the concern of hygiene and spread of germs came later). Everybody including the pastor was shocked. They didn't know what to do. The ushers were ready to remove the man by force. Then, here General Lee started walking toward the altar, knelt right next to the man, and gave a signal to the pastor to serve them both. So did the pastor.

There's no more powerful lesson about being one in Christ than Lee's example. The lesson? In Christ, "¹¹ ... **there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all**" (Colossians 3:11). We are one in Christ.

Conclusion

Let me close my sermon with another story of Dr. Paul Brand. *"There is an Arabic Baptist Church in Israel that has a lovely way to celebrate the breaking of bread. When they come together, each member brings a handful of grains of wheat. It may be from one's own field, or from their personal supplies at home. As they enter the church, they each pour their grains into a common pot. When all have come, and while the worship goes on, the pot is taken to the kitchen and somebody quickly grinds the wheat in a stone mill, mixes in water and salt, and kneads the flour into a loaf. It is put into the already-heated oven and baked. By the time the service is finished, and the church moves into the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the breaking of bread, the loaf is ready. As each member breaks off his own portion, he or she is sharing grains of flour from every member of the church. When asked why they do this, one member replied, "As individual seed we are each alone and separate from each other. Only when we are broken into flour and baked together can we experience full fellowship" (ibid, p. 231).*

Whenever you take the Communion, remember what Christ has done for you. He died for your sins. Remember who Christ is to you. He is the Living Bread and the Living Water in you. Without Him, you cannot survive. He gives you the life eternal. Remember also that we are one in Christ. Come, God's people, to the Lord's Table to receive the bread and wine with gladness and sincerity of heart.

Amen.