

In Remembrance of Me 2022
1 Corinthians 11:17-29

1 Corinthians 11:17-29 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.

Last Sunday after worship something incredible & wonderful happened
when we gathered to enjoy & share in the International Potluck meal.

When I stepped into Watkins Hall,
the food tables were filled with an amazing variety of choices
representing a vast array of flavors from all around the globe,
all being shared freely with our church family.

Looking around, the room was filled with joy and conversation
among people who had connections from all around the world.
It was such a delightfully rich celebration of our diversity,
brought together by the unity of faith we share in Jesus Christ.

It was a picture and experience that pointed toward Communion,
truly a visible foretaste of that coming banquet in heaven,
a meaningful experience and remembrance of Jesus Christ.

During seminary, I had the chance to visit and study in Jerusalem.
Our group was housed at the Roman Catholic Pontifical Institute.
The Jesuit scholars were gracious hosts & amazing instructors.
Our historical & theological discussions were rich & enlightening,
as we experienced the delight and unity of Christian fellowship.

They invited our group to share their vespers one evening,

but when they started going up to receive the Eucharist,
the priest who was sitting beside me whispered,
“Sorry, it’s only for confirmed R. Catholics.”

I had been looking forward to Communion especially in Jerusalem,
and it hurt deeply, and it offended me that I was being excluded,
for clearly we were not really all of the **one body of Christ**,
since our group was not accepted or welcome,
or considered worthy to eat at **their table**.

**I swore that day that I’d never exclude anyone
whom God might have invited to share in Communion.**

But, that is not just a Roman Catholic issue.

The first Sunday that I celebrated Communion here as your new pastor,
one of the retired Presbyterian pastors present in worship that day
came up to me after the service and was very upset with me,
complaining that I had not adequately **fenced the Table**.

Fencing the Table means to declare explicitly who is excluded
from participating and invited to share at the “**Lord’s Table**”,
which is a tragic misunderstanding & misreading of vs. 27-29.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be
answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.

Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and
drink **without discerning the body**, eat and drink judgment against themselves.

Notice first of all, that it is examine yourselves, not other people.
It is not our place to be looking around judging and deciding
if we consider someone else unworthy to receive Communion.

To eat “in an unworthy manner”, is to eat “without discerning the body”,
but what is ‘discerning the body’? - and how do you **discern the body**?

In the Greek, ‘discern’ is a legal term
which means to recognize or acknowledge something as true,
which means to have a proper sense of the body of Christ,
which is to accept & be aware of the **whole** body of Christ.

‘an unworthy manner’ refers not the method of serving Communion.
It’s not whether you stand, sit, kneel or even lie down,
not whether in the pews, up at a rail or around a table.

It’s not the kind of bread, whether it’s wine or grape juice.
It’s not about being good enough or a church member,
and it’s not if you’re hiding some unconfessed sin.

BUT rather, it’s about our unity - our love for one another in Christ.

Partaking unworthily is failing to recognize **all** of Christ’s body.

It's if we reject someone whom we might consider unworthy,
but who are in fact equally loved and cherished by God.

Now not everyone has chosen to accept God's grace yet,
but if God made them, then God does love them,
and God's grace through Christ is theirs to receive.

So, if I am going to come **worthily** to the Lord's Table,
then I've got to give up any notion of judging and control,
and give up any idea of limiting who will be there with me.

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Corinth
because some of them were thinking they were better,
and were looking down and demeaning some of the others,
**which was destroying the gift of shared unity through faith in Christ
which had spread and infected their ways & practices of communion.**

Archeologists and the ancient writings from that period and region,
have provided some helpful insight & detail into what was going on.

The ruins of ancient Corinth indicate that houses of the wealthy
often had a banquet room that would accommodate about 15 people.

The custom of that time, place and culture was to invite a few
of the wealthy and powerful as favored guests, to come early,
to feast & drink wine with the host in the formal banquet room...
... and then others, those less prominent were invited to come later.

They'd wait outside of the dining room, out in the atrium area,
where platters were carried out from the dinner area
after the more honored guests had eaten their fill.
That was the normal custom for entertaining in ancient Corinth.

It seems that Christians in Corinth were following those same customs
and thereby dividing the church according to social status,
so of course the Apostle Paul angrily complained: vs. 21, 22
*one goes hungry and another becomes drunk ... you show contempt for the church of God, the body of
Christ, and humiliate those who have nothing.*

Ironically, Jesus gave the Lord's Supper to serve
as a perpetual and visible representation of the Gospel.
Communion is supposed to demonstrate the new covenant in Christ
that binds all Christians to one another by grace through Christ,
showing that no one is more loved or more worthy than any other.

But by the Corinthian church's divisive and exclusive treatment,
they were actually abusing the meaning of the Lord's Supper,
and ignoring the very reason for which they came together.

Their divisiveness and social-status-conscious exclusion

was in itself, rejection of the radical love commanded by Jesus,
violating, what they supposedly came together to celebrate.

As Paul pointed out, vs. 18, 20.

For, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you... When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper.

When Christians come together in the name of Christ at Communion,
Paul's teaching is that we are coming together as one body
to form and proclaim our shared relationship with Christ.

BUT the Corinthian's gathering for the Christian fellowship meal
had become an occasion of exclusion & segregation & division,
as the poor among them were mistreated and humiliated,
thereby missing the point of coming together as Church.

As Paul had written earlier in this same letter, 10:16-17

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break,
is it not **a sharing in the body of Christ?** Because there is one bread, **we who are many are one body**,
for we all partake of the one bread.

**In our sharing of the Communion bread and juice,
we are sharing together the one body of Christ,
and we who are many, become the one body of Christ,**
and anything less, shamelessly abuses the sacrament.

How tragic that the very symbol Christ gave to unify his church,
has historically been so tragically and frequently abused,
used to divide Christians into denominations,
and even split churches over how it is administered.

So today, **do we really discern the body** – the whole body of Christ?
That is the point of celebrating World Communion Sunday,
that by grace and faith we are all of the one body of Christ.

On that same trip to the Middle East during seminary,
I saw our unity through grace & faith wonderfully enacted one time.
We were shopping in the Suk, the marketplace of Damascus,
and a Syrian Catholic priest invited us a worship service.

We went & sat in the back, careful not to interfere or offend anyone.
The service was in Arabic – so we didn't understand much of it.
And when the people went forward to receive the bread and wine,
we respectfully stayed back in our seats,
but then the priest vigorously waved us forward, inviting us
to share eating the bread and drinking from the common cup.

And after the priest pronounced the blessing and benediction,
he announced that we were Christians visiting from America,
and the most amazing & wonderful & spontaneous thing happened.

The people got up, they surged and swarmed our group from the pews,
as with smiles, kisses, handshakes and hugs, some even with tears,
they welcomed us, held us and greeted us like long lost family.

It was such a most powerful moment of wonder and delighted joy,
truly a foretaste of the heavenly worship that awaits us,
of praising God in the fellowship of all believers,
as we celebrated our unity as the ONE body of Christ.

**That day, I experienced what it means to be the body of Christ
and for me, since then, Communion has never been the same.**

That day they couldn't speak English, and we couldn't speak Arabic,
yet we communicated God's grace, and we shared our faith
in the holy language of Christian love and fellowship.

That day I saw the precious grace of God – actively proclaimed,
as the Gospel of Jesus Christ was enacted & fulfilled without words.

**I saw the significance of the Lord's Supper with its amazing power
binding the full diversity of Christians into the 1 body of Christ,
where all are loved by God, by letting God love through us.**

Today celebrates and calls us to notice and appreciate
that we are each one wonderfully different and diverse,
that we have been chosen and blessed in unique and wonderful ways,
for by grace alone we are all made one... the one body of Christ.

Today, at the Table, we're called to be vessels of God's mercy & grace
as we acknowledge that all are equally loved and cherished by God.

As we gather for **World Communion in remembrance of Jesus Christ**,
we're also getting an early glimpse at our future hope, life and joy,
a tiny fore-taste of what God's Kingdom fulfilled will be like.