



### **Lent reflection for March 12, 2024**

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#### **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

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 proceeds to eat your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have households 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. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

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### **Today's Reflection is by Mirjam Thulin**

This passage is a difficult one for me for two reasons: firstly, the letter is characterized by Paul's reproving tone towards the congregation in Corinth. Secondly, the subject of the letter is not easy: Paul reminds the readers of the actual reason and emphasizes the significance of the communion.

Paul had visited the Greek port city of Corinth on one of his missionary journeys and was probably also involved in founding the congregation. Now there appears to be considerable tension. I remember other letters and stories by and about Paul regarding divisions in congregations and remember the rebuking letters he sent to the congregations. Paul seems (only to me?) not very charming and sympathetic, and certainly not encouraging. It is only at the end of the letter that his tone softens, and he gives practical advice on how to remedy the described grievance in the matter of the communion.

With his forceful tone, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the intention of the communion. It seems as if the boundaries between a communal meal and communion had become blurred in the congregation. Or a communal meal in the evening turned into communion? And sharing was probably not part of the communal meal either; some members of the congregation came or stayed hungry, and there were many sick and weak people. Perhaps the many "sick and weak" (v. 30) are already an indication from God to the congregation that something was not going right. Paul does not want the Christians in Corinth to be "condemned with the world" (v. 32) because of such grievances.

Paul reminds in detail, even by quoting the words of communion that we all know well, of the meaning of the communion. Jesus introduced this as a commemorative supper at his last evening meal. It is not just any meal where people eat their fill or chat. According to the Paul, anyone who disregards this knowledge must expect to be called to justice by God one day. However, in Paul's time, church services and meals, most likely dinner, were probably more similar than they are today, and perhaps also took place daily. This is why the need to distinguish between supper and communion is so important to him.

But we are probably all familiar with the basic problem he addresses. When we go to church, we all look forward to the company, the conversations and, last but not least, the small snacks or real meals with the congregation, and I am the first to do so. Because for someone like me, who is still new to the city and the congregation, these meetings are essential for settling in and adjusting. However, the admonishing words of the Paul - not least at this special time of the church year - make it clear how inappropriate and unworthy it is to pretend that the celebration of communion is just one of many events in a congregation's weekly program or even a sideshow.

Rather, it is about the center of the Christian faith, namely that Jesus Christ has died on the cross for the guilt of mankind. Communion should be a reminder and sign of this, and it is important to distinguish this from a mere social gathering.

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Mirjam moved to New York from Berlin, Germany, in the beginning of 2023. She lives in Windsor Terrace with her family and enjoys studying and teaching early modern and modern Jewish culture, history and religion.