

January 5, 2015

Communion

Psalm 86:4, Luke 22:19-20

A little girl asked her mother, “Mommy, why do you cut the ends off the meat before you cook it?” The girl’s mother told her that she thought it added to the flavor by allowing the meat to better absorb the spices, but perhaps she should ask her grandmother since she always did it that way. So the little girl found her grandmother and asked, “Grandma, why do you and Mommy cut the ends of the meat off before you cook it?”

Her grandmother thought a moment and answered, “I think it allows the meat to stay tender because it soaks up the juices better, but why don’t you ask your Nana? After all, I learned from her, and she always did it that way.”

The little girl was getting a little frustrated, but climbed up in her great-grandmother’s lap and asked, “Nana, why do you cut the ends off the meat before you cook it?”

Nana answered, “I had to; my cooking pot wasn’t big enough.”

We do a lot of things in life, and seldom stop to ask why. We develop habits and traditions, and if we’re not careful, we can forget why we do certain things...

Today I want to discuss what it means to share communion. Here at Brodhead United Methodist Church, we make communion available about 14 times a year... the first Sunday of every month, and also the week before Easter on Thursday night because that’s the night Jesus first introduced his followers to this special meal on the night before his death.

Some churches have communion once a month, others once every three months, and still others every week. Some wish we could have communion every week whereas others think if we have it too often it will lose its meaning.

That statement would have made John Wesley very unhappy. He writes in his sermon *The Duty of Constant Communion*, “I am to show that it is the duty of every Christian to receive the Lord’s Supper as often as he can.”

So . . . why do we celebrate communion? Why do we take itty bitty portions of grape juice and bread together? What’s this practice all about? Good question. So, for the next few moments, before we actually have communion, let me explain.

Don Hawks, a United Methodist pastor posits that communion reminds us of four things. First, the reason we have this symbolic “meal” together is . . .

To Remember

We are asked in this one meal to remember many things. First we are to remember the Jewish and Old Testament holiday of the Passover. Exodus 12 describes the first Passover, which included: a lamb, bitter herbs, wine, and bread. Today, we are to remember Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us.

We are also asked to remember that Jesus instituted something new... communion. The Lord’s Supper is a ceremony that quickly came to be celebrated in the church much more regularly than the annual Passover. We take this time to remember this meal that Jesus shared with his disciples.

**We share in Communion to remember, secondly...
To Rejoice**

In 1st Corinthians it says, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Max Lucado, in his book, *Six Hours One Friday*, tells the story of a missionary in Brazil who discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote part of the jungle. They lived near a large river. The tribe was in need of medical attention. A contagious disease was ravaging the population. People were dying daily.

A hospital was not too terribly far away—across the river, but the Indians would not cross it because they believed it was inhabited by evil spirits. To enter the water would mean certain death. The missionary explained how he had crossed the river and was unharmed. They were not impressed. He then took them to the bank and placed his hand in the water. They still wouldn’t go in. He walked into the water up to his waist and splashed water on his face. It didn’t matter. They were still afraid to enter the river. Finally, he dove into the river, swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side. He had entered the water and escaped. It was then that the Indians broke out into a cheer and followed him across.

That’s exactly what Jesus did! He told the people of His day that they need not fear the river of death, but they wouldn’t believe. He touched a dead boy and called him back to life. They still didn’t believe. He whispered life into the body of a dead girl and got the same result. He let a dead man spend four days in a tomb and then called him out and the people still didn’t believe Him. Finally, He entered the river of death and came out on the other side.

And this is what we celebrate in today’s Communion and every time we come to the Lord’s Supper. We are here to rejoice at both his death and resurrection and to make this proclamation until he returns: “He is risen/He is risen indeed”

**So we remember, we rejoice and next, we have the opportunity...
To Repent**

1st Corinthians says, “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11: 28).

Sharing communion provides opportunity to examine ourselves and, if the Holy Spirit shines his piercing light on anything in our lives that is unworthy of the body and blood of the Lord, we have the opportunity to repent and experience his forgiveness and cleansing anew so that we might celebrate worthily.

We have unceremoniously entered a new season... no I don’t mean summer, which began a few weeks ago... and no I don’t mean the season of Pentecost or the season of “Ordinary Time” that is now upon us. We have begun camping season!

Vacations and camping are prevalent this time of year. With camping comes campfires, getting out into nature, and bugs. It also means dirt, chemicals (like OFF), and charcoal. Camping is a fun but dirty venture. We do a lot of things while we are off camping, and one of the most important things to do is... WASH YOUR HANDS! If we wash our hands, we wash the dirt, grime, chemicals, and

charcoal right off! This means eating less dirt, tracking less grime into the tent, and being cleaner. Washing our hands also means washing off any germs that could make us sick.

Communion is a time to confess our sins, to regularly wash our souls before God. It's essential, the failure to confess our sins will result in spiritual infection that will hinder our ability in the spiritual journey. Today I invite you to repent—to change your mind about the direction of your life. We may not feel worthy or good enough to receive Communion—but thank God it is not about our goodness! It's ultimately about God's goodness. It is God's grace and love given.

We share Communion to remember, rejoice, repent and finally...

To Reconcile

1st Corinthians continues by saying, “For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Corinthians 11:29, NIV).

We are all a part of the one body—the church, brothers and sisters in Christ. If I have resentment toward even one person here I really am judging myself. I'm no better than anyone of you here. At this table we are on equal standing. Therefore, use this time as you take the cup and bread, to be reconciled to God, and also to your brother and sister.

Thus, we share this simple ceremony... male and female, young and old, single and married, black and white and Hispanic and Asian, as Christians have done around the world for twenty centuries... for four reasons . . .

To Remember

To Rejoice

To Repent

To Reconcile

And so, I would encourage you to come to this meal which is the Lord's Supper.

You see, the table of Holy Communion is Christ's table, not the table of The United Methodist Church or of the Brodhead United Methodist Church congregation. It is not a meal in the clubhouse for members only! It is open to all regardless of age or church membership. The table is open to anyone who seeks to respond to Christ's love and seeks to lead a new life of peace and love. Christ invites you to take the bread and the cup that proclaim his loving sacrifice of love for everyone here . . .

I encourage you to calm your spirit, take your time, approach these moments of worship carefully and prayerfully, and come forward whenever you're ready. AND if for any reason you choose not to partake today, that's perfectly okay; please feel free to remain seated, and maybe pray for those who are celebrating today.

As we partake in the Communion meal, remember to... **Remember** the history of this sacred meal in the Last Supper, **Rejoice** in the knowledge that Christ died so that we might live, **Repent** and clean your soul of sins, and **Reconcile** yourself to God and to your brothers and sisters. Remember, Rejoice, Repent, and Reconcile. Amen.