

Food for Thought

[Text - I Corinthians 11:20-29]

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In the early days of the Christian Church, the celebration of Holy Communion consisted of more than a little bite of bread and a small sip of juice; it was the culmination of an entire meal. Jesus starts this Communion practice while gathered with his friends at a Passover meal; and his early followers continue the pattern. *Whenever* they gather to share a meal - or to “break bread” - they would honor Christ’s unifying Presence among them, by celebrating Holy Communion. Back then, “breaking bread” was a sign of hospitality and community. It was a *family* affair; and anyone who joined you at table was considered a welcomed part of your family.

Unfortunately, it didn’t take long for this meal of *community*, to become a means of *contention*. In a letter to the Church at Corinth, Saint Paul addresses a problem that has already arisen there, in relation to this sacred supper. Apparently, the Corinthians would have carry-in dinners before their worship - kind of like our BUCC pot-luck dinners. However, some of the people in the Corinthian Church wouldn’t share their food! [Could you imagine that happening here? Inconceivable!] Yet at Corinth, those who couldn’t afford to bring anything would often go hungry, while others who had more than enough to eat would stuff themselves, or even drink to the point of drunkenness, rather than share with those less fortunate.

When Paul learns of this, he immediately writes to reprimand them: “Do you show contempt for the Church of God? Are you trying to humiliate those who have nothing?” Paul is saying, ‘Listen-up people, you’re missing the whole point of this Holy Meal! It is *about* sharing, and caring, and lovingly lifting-up one another as equal members of Christ’s One Family!’ Then Paul makes a statement about Communion, which is *intended* to drive-home the critical importance of this unity: “For all who eat and drink without discerning the *body*, eat and drink judgment against themselves.”

Now please listen carefully: This statement about “discerning the body” has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not a person “discerns” or “understands” *how* the Body of Christ is represented in the bread. In this context, it is clearly about recognizing and respecting the fact that - as the Body of Christ - we are One Family, and that we must treat one another with mutual respect and dignity, kindness and generosity. Sadly, however, many Christians have misused - and still misuse - this very statement as an excuse to *exclude* other people from receiving Holy Communion. They contend, “If you don’t properly *discern* how the Bread *becomes* the Body of Christ [in the same way that we do], then for your own good, we forbid you to partake. After all, we wouldn’t want you eating and drinking judgement upon yourselves. [We’d much rather heap judgement upon you yourselves!]”

Now **that** is really messed-up! That Paul’s own words, which are intended to unite and include people, are used to divide and exclude them. Paul’s point is that we Christians need to recognize that the Body of Christ is One Body - with no exceptions or exclusions! The “haves” cannot exclude the “have-nots” - the rich can’t exclude the poor - men cannot exclude women from leadership positions - straight people can’t exclude gay, lesbian, or transgender people - the “insiders” can never exclude the “outsiders”, because there are no “outsiders”! *Exclusion* is not a sacred *rite* of the Church! [And besides that, it’s just not *right!*]

Jesus establishes Holy *Communion* as a sign of our *Common-Union* - our unbreakable connection with him, with our One Divine Source, and with the entire Human Family. This is why World Communion Sunday was established: to express the unity of Christ’s followers throughout the world, and to celebrate Christ’s extravagant welcome to all people. It’s also why we here at Brecksville United Church of Christ always extend a specific and sincere invitation to *all* who are present, to partake of the Bread and Cup.

We practice a Faith which embraces the interconnectedness of *all* our lives - regardless of one’s faith tradition, personal background, or current status. And more than that, it’s a Faith which shows us, that to

truly “discern the Body of Christ” means not only showing concern for people’s spiritual welfare, but also for their bodies’ physical needs. Jesus doesn’t just talk about feeding hungry people, he does it! He doesn’t preach about universal health care for the poor, he actually provides it! He not only believes in the abundance of Divine Compassion and Grace, Jesus Christ embodies that abundance, and lovingly shares it with each person he encounters!

The *Gospel* - the Good News of our Faith - is this: that while our human tendency is to fearfully push-away those who we perceive as being different or deficient; the Divine desire is to draw us all back to the Table as One loving and caring Family. So, even though the meal we share today is small and simple, the fact that we do *share* it with all who desire makes it tremendously special!

It links us to that age-old practice of table hospitality and community. It connects us to the ancient Hebrew Passover Story, and helps set us free from our own bondage to fear and suspicion, bigotry and narrow-mindedness.

It opens our minds and our hearts to a Christ-like compassion - reminding us that Christ’s call to unity, welcome and inclusion is intended for every person throughout the world!