

## That's One Super Supper!

Pastor Dave Shackle  
October 5, 2014

On this World Communion Sunday, throughout the entire day, around the entire globe, Christ's followers celebrate Holy Communion. So I think it's a super day to talk about this "The Lord's Supper"! I'll admit that calling Communion a *supper* may seem a bit overstated. All you get is a little piece of bread about the size of a crouton [though it's not even seasoned]. Just one little bite, and a small sip of juice. Yet throughout the centuries, Christians have confidently proclaimed that this is "The *Feast* of Victory for our God!" and "A foretaste of the Heavenly Feast to come!" As you and I share this bread and juice today, we also affirm that it is "The Bread of Life" and "The Cup of Salvation!" And while these may seem like rather outlandish claims to make about a simple supper, here's something even more outlandish.

Throughout the centuries, Christians have had brutal battles over this meal's "true" meaning; and even today many still argue vehemently about who may - or may not - partake. Admittedly, fighting over "The Lord's Supper" is not a particularly good way to honor the "Prince of Peace"! Nonetheless, it is an indication of the tremendous importance that Christians have always placed upon this Holy Sacrament.

In the early days of the Church, Communion was much more than a little bite of bread and sip of juice; it was the culmination of an entire meal. Jesus had started this Communion practice while gathered with his friends at a Passover meal; and his early followers continued the pattern. Whenever they would gather to share a meal or "break bread", they would remember Christ's Presence among them, by celebrating Holy Communion. Back then, much more so than today, breaking bread was a sign of hospitality and community. It was truly a *family* affair; and anyone who joined you at table was - at that moment - 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 delicious BUCC pot-luck dinners. However, some of the people in the Corinthian church wouldn't share their food! [I couldn't imagine that happening with this crowd!] Yet at Corinth, those who couldn't afford to bring anything would 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 scold them: "Do you show contempt for the Church of God? Are you trying to humiliate those who have nothing?" Paul's saying, 'Look. folks, 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 the Family of God!' Then Paul makes a statement about Communion, which is *intended* to foster a spirit of unity: "For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves."

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 it's context, it is clearly about recognizing and respecting the fact that - within the Body of Christ - we are One Family, and we need to treat one another with mutual respect and graciousness. Sadly, however, many Christians have misused and still misuse this very statement, to *excommunicate* people - to exclude them from Communion, because of their potential lack of "theological understanding". They contend, "If you don't properly *discern* how the bread becomes the Body of Christ [ in the same correct way that *we* do], then for your own good, you are forbidden to partake. After all, we wouldn't want you eating and drinking judgement upon yourselves. [We' rather heap it upon you ourselves!"]

Now **that** is really messed-up! That Paul's very words, which were intended to unite and include people, are used to divide and exclude them. Paul's emphasis is that we Christians need to recognize the Body of Christ as 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 fully participating - straight people can't exclude gay, lesbian, or transgender people - the "insiders" cannot exclude the "outsiders". *Exclusion* is not a sacred rite in the Church! [And it's also just not right!] Jesus establishes Holy *Communion* as a sign of our *Common-Union* - our unbreakable connection 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. 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. It teaches us to care for *every* child of God, just like Jesus does. Jesus doesn't just talk about feeding the hungry, he does it! He doesn't preach about universal health care for the poor, he actually practices it! He not only believes in the abundance of Divine Compassion and Grace, Jesus Christ faithfully shares that abundance every day, and in every way.

The Good News of our Faith is, that though our human tendency is to fearfully push-away those who we perceive as being different or deficient; the Divine tendency - to faithfully draw us all back to the Table as One Family - is far more powerful and much more persistent. Each time that you and I celebrate The Lord's Supper, our physical, spiritual, and emotional senses are reawakened to remember Jesus' gracious Life and sacrificial giving. His Body and Blood were - and are - given for us all! And his passionate work for unity and wholeness

continues to inspire you and me today! As we eat and drink together, you and I are empowered to not only remember Jesus, but to also *re-member* the Body of Christ: to graciously welcome all of God's children who have been cut-off and tossed aside, and to lovingly help them re-connect.

So, even though this is a simple Supper that we share, because we do *share* it with all who desire, it truly is a Super Supper!

It links us to that age-old practice of table hospitality.

It connects us to the ancient Hebrew Passover Story, and sets us free from our slavery to fear, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.

It opens our minds and our hearts to a new, world-wide view: the Divine Vision a Promised Land, where all may enter and share together a foretaste of that Heavenly Feast to come.

So...enough of my talking. Let's get ready to eat, and drink, and celebrate the wonderful Life that Jesus Christ freely offers to us all!