

Last week we were supposed to end our Soul Food Sermon Series and yet, it dawned on me that we didn't talk about the most important soul food we as followers of Jesus can consume together at Christ's table. At Triune, as many of you know, we have the tradition of celebrating communion the first Sunday of the month, so I am preaching about communion this week and we'll celebrate communion next week as we recognize All Saint's Day and remember those who have died in the last year. If baptism is understood to be the starting point for the Christian journey, then we could say that communion is that rite that nourishes disciples along the journey of faith. While baptism initiates one into the covenant community, when the community gathers at the Table the covenant is renewed. **Communion is personal, not private.** The very word "communion" denotes fellowship in community. This holy meal and sacrament is known by many names: Mass, Holy Communion, Eucharist (which means "Thanksgiving") or the Lord's Supper- taken from Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his arrest and death. Like baptism, the Lord's Supper was ordained by Christ for continued use within the Christian community. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians was written about 25 years after Jesus' resurrection, and its eleventh chapter is crucial both for what it contains and for way in which it has been misunderstood but that's another entire sermon series. Today we're only looking at Paul's recollection of Jesus' words at the Last Supper in Chapter 11. The early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper as part of a larger agape feast or potluck dinner. In today's text, Paul is not pleased with what he is seeing among the people of Corinth involving the Lord's Supper. As a matter of fact, the main problem the

Apostle Paul seeks to correct throughout his first letter to the Corinthian congregation is their divisiveness. Three times Paul directly addresses the issue of division and chapter 11 is one of the three. “Ironically, Paul criticizes their coming ‘together as a church’ only to exhibit the divisions present in their gatherings (11:18). But what really irks Paul is that divisions would be present even during Jesus’ mandated celebration of the Lord’s Supper, which was meant to be a unifying commemoration of the body of Christ. Those with means are getting there early or on time and those who have to work, get there later after all the food and drink are gone. As a remedy to their divisions, Paul briefly outlines the tradition of the Lord’s Supper” (Sammy Alfaro, WP). “The overwhelming message that Paul conveys in this letter is the promotion of unity.

Before turning to God’s word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY.**

READ.

Did you know that the herb rosemary means to remember? In ancient times, rosemary was said to strengthen memory. Greek scholars wore rosemary in their hair to help remember their studies, and the association with remembrance has carried through to modern times. In literature and folklore it is an emblem of remembrance. Do you recall Ophelia’s words in Hamlet? *“There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance; pray, love, remember”*(Act IV, scene V). In today’s text, the most crucial word is one that is infuriatingly difficult to put into English. The Greek word (*anamnesis*) is roughly translated “to remember” or “not forgetting.” Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” I have heard and said this phrase more times than I can count. And yet, when do we

ever take the time to stop and ask what these words mean? We use the word 'remember' in the mundane realities of daily life- *remember to take out the trash tonight, remember to take your things with you, remember to set your clocks back one hour next Saturday night.* We also apply it to our most sacred and tender collective commitments- *remember the fallen; remember the poor; remember the saints.* For some of us as we age the loss of memory can be a very painful thing. For most 21st century Christians, "remembering is a solitary experience involving mental recall. But for ancient Jews and early Christians remembrance was a corporate act in which the event remembered was experienced anew through ritual repetition. To remember was to do something, not to think about something. Do this! Do what? Take bread, Give thanks over the loaf for God's graciousness. Break the bread. Give the bread to the people of Christ. Take the cup. Again give thanks to God. Then give the cup to the people of Christ. Paul's intention for them and for us is that we actively participate- and in the participation experience anew for ourselves the presence of the living Christ among us. "While the sacramental significance of this text should be noted, it is also important to pause and consider that here Paul is simply describing a tradition of gathering together for a meal to remember Jesus. Knowing what he is about to face and perhaps reminiscing on his time spent with those who have gathered, Jesus looks around and simply asks them to remember him. Eating together is another intimate act; it is the sharing of space and nourishment; it is also sharing of ourselves with others in the most basic way. The table is a designated zone of exchange where this ritual is being established. This is often a place where we share stories,

passing on what we have been given” (Jennifer T. Kaalund, WP). Take for example the simple yet powerful weekly meals after worship here at Triune. Everyone- no matter those with means or those without- are invited to come and break bread together. “Paul’s counsel to us is not that we should cease receiving communion, but that we should stop disassociating it from the rest of life” (Laurence Stookey, *Eucharist*).

Here Paul uses the plural form of you: y’all. He could have chosen to address each reader of his letter individually, but he doesn’t. Perhaps because they’ve forgotten the whole “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body” piece? Maybe because they’ve forgotten who the host is when they gather for a meal?! Let’s be honest. Maybe we’ve forgotten as well?! Remember the Ephesians text (Ch. 2:14) about Christ’s flesh making us into one and the very act of Christ breaking down the dividing wall- the hostility- that is between us. Their/our behavior doesn’t always mirror Christ’s, which is why we need to be reminded that we are in desperate need of a Savior. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for gathering merely to eat and get drunk, rather than sharing their time and meal with everyone in the congregation regardless of their social status. “Paul regards such practices- however ‘normal’ in respectable Roman culture- an outrage. Paul insists that the church’s common meal should symbolize the unity of the community through equitable sharing of food at the meal” (*Interpretation Series*, Richard B. Hays). Paul insists that they/we remember and then emulate Jesus’ words and actions together and in the world!

The Lord's Supper is not just another meal. No, for Paul, "participation in the Lord's Supper is the fundamental, even defining, community action of believers. Like no other activity, this sacrament epitomizes believers' relation to Christ and to one another in pristine clarity. Through the power of the Holy Spirit- during communion believers can inescapably see that they stand only in and by God's grace; they look with confidence toward the future when the end of the ages will come; and they see most clearly how they relate to and with each other" (*The New Interpreters Bible*). At Christ's table, we, saints and sinners, remember; we all taste and see that the Lord is good. We remember Christ's atoning death on the cross, proclaim the good news of his saving death, and announce his return when all will be reunited one day.

I'd like to clear up some confusion for a few. During communion we are NOT invited to Christ's table because of how worthy we are. Jesus nor Paul say anything about worthiness. On the contrary, Paul is holding up a mirror for how broken the people are. Nothing saddens my heart more than to hear people say, "I'm not taking communion because I'm not worthy enough." If that were the case, I dare say any of us would be invited to Christ's table. I mean just by definition, grace is only for the unworthy. Or someone might say, "I've not been baptized or I don't know what I believe, so I'm not going to participate in communion." I wonder sometimes if experience and practice precede belief, rather than the other way around?! Take Sara Miles, for example. Raised an atheist, Sara, for no earthly reason wandered into an unfamiliar church in CA one Sunday morning at 46 years old, received

communion for the first time, and found herself transformed—embracing a faith she had once scorned. Like Triune, this church has an open table. Sara had never been baptized, never read much of the Bible, never even prayed the Lord’s prayer. But at this church, the pastor invited her to Christ’s table and something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to her. She felt dizzy, overwhelmed, charged with life, filled. Suddenly, she believed (Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday*). Not only did Sara give her life to Christ, she devoted herself to a religion rooted in the most ordinary yet subversive practice: a dinner table where everyone is welcome, where the despised and outcasts are honored (Held Evans). Imagine if she would’ve walked into a church that wouldn’t allow her to take communion or to assume that she knew how to remember something she didn’t even yet know?!

There’s a lot about faith and life that we come to trust, believe, and understand only after we’ve experienced different things and there are some things in our faith and practices that are a mystery, like communion. In Jesus’ call to remembrance, he is calling us to a practice of remembrance that is more than recollection. As Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor says, “Do this, Jesus said, not ‘believe this, in remembrance of me’” (*An Altar in the World*). *Do this in remembrance of me*. “Why else did Jesus spend his last night on earth teaching his disciples to wash feet and share supper? With all the conceptual truths in the universe at his disposal, he did not give them something to THINK about together, when he was gone. Instead, he gave them/us concrete

things to DO, specific ways of being together in one body” (Taylor). Remember that Jesus also spoke these words to Judas and Peter, the betrayer and the denier. Jesus told them- even them- to remember. He gave them practices to do in remembrance of him...things that would bring them close...around a table...bent over each other’s feet. And he gave those things to us as well because the doing- the re-membering- is what teaches us how to be his body together in this broken, dis-membered world. Because he wasn’t going to be present in the body anymore, he needed to teach us how to be his body- a body that kneels in service, rather than seeking greatness. A body that is broken for others and then brought back to wholeness when we re-member it. *Do this is in remembrance of me.* Thanks be to God! Amen.