



**LIFE TOGETHER:  
Why We Need the Lord's Supper  
I Cor. 3:1-9, Luke 22:14-27**

I believe one of the most beautiful natural wonders in our nation is that of the magnificent Sequoia trees in California. To visit the National Park where they are located is an awesome experience.

When our Boy Scout troop visited there in the summer of 1966, the guide shared an insight I have never forgotten. He said that you will never find a Sequoia tree in isolation. They only survive by being close to each other. Despite the very large size they grow to - they have very shallow roots. The guide shared how the root system of each tree is so interwoven and connected to each other - that this is where their strength comes from. When fierce winds do come, the trees literally depend on each other to hold them up. There is no rugged individualism here. Interdependence – not independence – is the key to spiritual health.

Here we see the Apostle Paul writing to the church at Corinth sharing in **verse 5**, **“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?”** Paul knew the tendency of people to be selfish and how "disunity" could cripple a church or a nation. Yes, Paul's instruction and the secret of the survival of the Sequoia tree have much to share with our church and culture.

One of the great needs of any local church our size with 2 services, many different Sunday School classes and age groupings is for a greater bonding together and deepening of our Christian fellowship. As the old hymn declares, **"Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love."** There always needs to be constant, intentional effort to strengthen the ties that bind us as a church family. That is why on July 5<sup>th</sup> we are going to the Barnstormers' game together. Be sure to sign up.

I believe one of the greatest threats to the Christian community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is what sociologists call **"fierce individualism."** This mind set prevents any unity of purpose in a community or local church setting. It is more than Jesus and me. We are called to interdependence – not independence.

It seems we are each so very different and unique. We all tend to go our own way. We're so busy with our own agendas, family and work and social gatherings and occasions. The problem is that in our busyness with our individual lives, we become isolated from one another. The Christian faith cannot mature under such conditions.

So many families and individuals have been enslaved to the mindset of the "ME" generation. This has brought much confusion to our nation and neighborhoods which depend on teamwork. So many neighborhoods are only as wide as the computer and television screens. The Internet allows you to communicate with people in China – all the while your older next door neighbors may be dying of thirst or in need of a simple casserole meal.

We learn very quickly in the book of Genesis that its family units are not portrayed as Norman Rockwell families – beaming in gratitude around a Thanksgiving turkey – but as a series of broken relationships in need of redemption. The story of Jacob and Esau – while not a pretty one – is one we face everyday of our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Thankfully, the New Testament does hold out the promise of a new community – the body of Christ – which is to experience life together in a redemptive way.

I recently shared with our Long-term Strategic Planning Committee in our devotional time a thought from Eugene Peterson which stated, “Becoming a truly human community is a long, complex, messy business. Simply growing up as a man or woman demands all the wisdom and patience and courage that we can muster. But growing up with others like parents and siblings and neighbors complicates the process. The people who find themselves called and led and commanded by God find themselves in the company of men and women who sin a lot – quarrel – bicker – grumble – revel – you name it, we do it. We need help in getting along with each other. Wise discipline is required in becoming a people of God.<sup>2</sup> Thankfully the Bible does exactly that. It does not hide the dirty laundry – but always points us to the greater and more excellent way. The church at Corinth was plagued by threats of disunity – which is why the Holy Spirit directed Paul to write the letters he did.

One of the events that can strengthen a church fellowship and reinforce its bond together is for people to eat together. We United Methodists are fairly good at eating together – especially the famous “covered dish dinner.” In our church we call it the “fellowship luncheon” which we will observe today. If you never came to one before – please do not miss another one.

Dr. William H. Willimon, one of our high profile bishops, has written a marvelous book called, **SUNDAY DINNER**. In this book he shares how important it was for him growing up to eat together the family meal, especially Sunday’s dinner which was the best meal of the week. He shares how they would eat together at the table, talking and sharing stories about life. It was a time everybody became acquainted with the joys and concerns of the shared life as a family.

Today, we come together as a ‘church family’ to partake and eat together at the Lord’s Table. Our primary purpose in coming to our Lord’s Table is not to eat food that nourishes us physically – but spiritually.

I want to share three things today for your consideration why in our 'Life Together: The Lord's Supper is important and needed for us to be a redeemed people.

### **FIRST, WE ARE REMINDED OF OUR COMMON HUNGER.**

Jesus knew that the real human hunger, beneath all our other hungers and desires, is the hunger for God. When we deny that hunger for God, or attempt to satisfy it with false and empty substitutes, we wind up with a deadly self-righteousness, and something beautiful dies inside of us. We have a common spiritual need because there is a hunger for God in our soul that only the bread of heaven can satisfy.

Shortly before his death tennis great, Arthur Ashe, wrote these words to his daughter Camera in his book **DAYS OF GRACE**. In the closing chapter he shares:

**“Camera, have faith in God. Do not be tempted whether by pleasures and material possessions or by the claims of science and smart thinkers, into believing that religion is obsolete, that the worship of God is somehow beneath you. Spiritual nourishment is as important as physical nourishment and intellectual nourishment . . . Do not beg God for favors. Instead, ask God for the wisdom to know what is right, what God wants done, and the will to do it. Know the Bible. Read the Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount and everything else in that timeless book. You will find consolation for your darkest hours. You will find inscribed there the meaning of life and the way you should live. You will grow into a deeper understanding of life’s meanings.”**

Yes, Arthur Ashe was right – spiritual nourishment is as important as physical nourishment. The tennis courts could not match the courts of the Lord and his table. This meal reminds us of that truth – and then provides that nourishment.

Eugene Peterson - from whom I have learned so much about ministry and mission, believes the 'kitchen of the church' – with its vital ministry of hospitality – is as important as the sanctuary in the biblical work of salvation. It is hard to be detached from someone who you are breaking bread together. If this church became as known for its hospitality as we have been known for our support of missions – we could double our membership and attendance in five years. God is pleased when we support and make sacrifices for each other.

### **SECONDLY, WE ARE REMINDED OF OUR COMMON HOPE.**

When we partake from this table – we are reminded that we are a forgiven people. We can walk in the newness of life. God has promised that we will eat and drink here until he comes again. The past is over and forgotten. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sins. This is our hope and joy.

When our Jewish friends eat this meal at Passover – they are to think of their freedom from the bondage of Egypt – and the new opportunities for life again. So we also think of the freedom that Christ gives us from the bondage to sin, guilt, and death. So when we are weary and frustrated, we hear anew the invitation, “**Come unto me and I will give you rest.**”

As we partake in a few moments the emphasis is always one of gratitude for the hope that God gives us in Jesus Christ. Now, let us put our hands to the plow and keep going.

**THIRDLY, WE ARE REMINDED OF OUR COMMON FAITH.**

This supper and cross reminds us all that we belong to him. It reminds us that we are all equal at the cross. The ground is the same level for us all. This table is open to all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We admit our need of a Savior.

As we gather at the Lord’s Supper, it reminds us today that despite the fact we gather as many different people from different ethnic backgrounds and theological convictions, we gather as male and female, young and old, rich and poor, but through the shed blood of Christ and our faith in Him we are united in a common faith. It is so powerful it can transcend any differences here today. If it does not do that – then you are not focused on Jesus!

This was Paul’s plea to the Corinthians, and it is his plea to us today! We reject fierce individualism because we are commanded to weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice, because we are a family in Christ. We are a diverse people, different in tastes, looks, backgrounds, but we have far more that unites us, than what separates us. Like our beautiful stained glass windows our personalities reflect God’s light in many colors and patterns.

Many of you have noticed that Ray and I pray for each others services and the staff and volunteers that make those services come alive. We do so as a reminder that both services are a vital part of a whole and complete body of Christ here at EUM. It is not about us – it is about God.

Christ did not die on a cross so church people could fuss about old hymns or praise choruses in the church or whether we have pews or round tables, 30 minute sermons, or 10 minute homilies. Christ wants us to be a witness to the world – that people who like Mozart, old hymns, and praise choruses could unite under his lordship – and all worship God in spirit and in truth. That is what we are committed to.

Whether it is at 8:30 a.m. or 10:30 a.m., we gather today because we have  
A common hunger  
A common hope  
A common faith.

Let us go to the Holy Table.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz

June 3, 2007

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **LIVING THE MESSAGE**, Harper: San Francisco, 1996, page 127.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **THE MESSAGE: The Old Testament Books of Moses**, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2001, page 214.

NOTE FROM PASTOR ERIC: This sermon was preached at both services on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007.