

**THE FELLOWSHIP MEAL****1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

**Intro:** This past week I was driving past the farm located on the northeast corner of the Baney Road and County Road 1600 intersection, and I noticed that there are two pens with quite a number of beautiful turkeys. Now, if you know turkeys, you know they're not really beautiful. As a matter of fact, they would NEVER win a beauty contest. But they're delicious – and since I hadn't had much for breakfast, my mind went to what often comes to my mind, at least too often – food. I thought of a perfectly roasted turkey on the table with all kinds of trimmings. Yes, I thought of Thanksgiving feast. Then with warm anticipation, my mind quickly transitioned to a vision of our family, around the table, celebrating the goodness of God. I've always said when my family is around the table everything is good with the world.

In Luke 22 we read about the last supper, which is where Jesus implemented the first communion. And I realized that Jesus also anticipated having his 12 best friends around the table with him at a Passover meal. And while it was a very special time in the life of any Jewish person, much like how Thanksgiving is a really special time for Americans, this particular meal was special in that it was the final one before Jesus was crucified. He told them, *“I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”* Luke 22:15-16 ESV

What I anticipate at Thanksgiving is warm fellowship with loved ones. What Jesus anticipated with his disciples, among other things, was also warm fellowship with his beloved disciples. It was indeed a fellowship meal.

On this World Communion Sunday, we will celebrate this Fellowship meal as we gather around this table in front of us, and we will partake of the bread that represents the body of Christ broken for us, and drink the cup that represents the blood of Christ shed for us, and we will do it together. And we will do it together knowing that, all around the world, Christ followers are joining us in this fellowship meal as we break the bread and drink the cup. This meal is indeed, as the front of our worship folder reads, *“a relational act”*, where we share with one another and Christ shares with us as we remember his sacrifice, and his victory.

By the time Paul was writing the first letter to the Corinthian Church, about twenty years had passed and they had already botched the meal that Jesus enacted for his followers. It was a love feast where very little love was evident. It was a fellowship meal with no fellowship. It was a communion service where, instead of remembrance of Jesus's sacrifice, drunkenness prevailed for some and hunger for others. Paul knew he needed to have a talk with them, and we have that in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. We will look at this passage by passage as we see how this fellowship meal can be elevated in our minds to the relational act it's supposed to be.

Here's the first section: **(Read 1 Corinthians 11: 17-22)**

So, this might have been a relational act that Jesus inaugurated at the Last Supper, but, to say the least, the Corinthians were not doing very well at it. In Paul's mind The Lord's Supper, as he refers to it, is . . .

**A time for unity**

- But it definitely wasn't. Look at Paul's heart-breaking list
  - There are divisions. A meal should be a time when we put aside our differences and just enjoy God's goodness. As I said earlier – for me to gather around the dinner table is when all is right with the world. But in Corinth they were divided into factions. Were they political? I don't know. Were they families sniping at other families? I don't know. Were they divided families? No idea. Were they struggling with doctrinal or spiritual issues? It doesn't say. But this is what Paul did say, the people of God were separated and it was a travesty. The Lord's Supper is a time when the people of God come together with their attention fully on the one who gave everything for their salvation – and they were failing miserably.
  - Everybody just sits down and eats – completely ignoring the fact that some have not arrived and other sit there with nothing to eat at all.
  - He accuses them of despising the children of God – his “called out ones” we know is the definition of the world church were being humiliated. Paul was ticked! In words dripping with deep disappointment and sorrow Paul tells them, *What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.* 1 Corinthians 11:22a.
- Of all the times when Christ Followers should be united it should be at the Communion table. My prayer is that this particular fellowship meal here at ABC this morning will be the beginning of healing for the Church.

I pray that the unity we have as the Followers of Jesus here at Ashland Brethren in Christ would be instruments of healing for a divided Church as we join other dedicated believers from around the world in the meal implemented by the Prince of Peace. This must be a meal of unity.

- Next the apostle gives clear instruction for this fellowship meal. It was and always had been . . .

#### **A time to remember**

- Listen (**Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**)
- The tendency for human beings is to get all wrapped up in themselves and so Christ Followers are prone to fall prey to it as well. But communion is a time to remember the ultimate sacrifice – it's a time to get our eyes off of ourselves and onto the saving work of Jesus.
- At my previous church we had a motorcycle gang. It consisted of about ten guys on motorcycles and Big Jim Germack on a big, 600 cc Honda Silver Wing scooter. On Saturday mornings we would take a ride to some breakfast spot within a 50 or 75 miles. One particular day we rode to Cracker Barrel in Hamburg – about 55 miles one way. As we were there, the weather turned and it was obvious we needed to get home before it began to rain – or, as it turned out, snow. In our hurry we bundled into our helmets, motorcycle jackets and gloves. Well, all of us except Blaine, who could not get his leather jacket's zipper to work. So there we were, this gang of BIC bikers, all either trying to zip Blaine's coat or giving advice on how to do it; when into the crowd strode a confident and motherly lady, saying "Do you boys need the expertise of a woman's touch?" And she spun Blaine to face her and zipped up that coat faster than it took for me to say it. The Corinthians knew what communion was supposed to look like, but with the care and even with a little chiding like the lady at Cracker Barrel, Paul takes the Corinthians through a step by step tutorial because they obviously needed a review.
- This passage is the earliest recording of what Jesus implemented on the night he was betrayed. Paul had heard from the other apostles about the Last Supper that enacted the Lord's Supper. How Jesus took bread and gave thanks, and then he broke it and said, "*This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*" 1 Corinthians 11:24. And how after that he took the cup and said, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*" 1 Corinthians 11:25. It is a proclamation of the Lord's death – for us!
- In a way, Paul enacted something that we do in preparation for communion, and that's self-examination. As we approach such a sacred remembrance, it's good for us to make sure that we are right before the Lord and with our brothers and sisters. I mean really think about it, our nation has become so divided over the past 10 to 15 years that families have trouble gathering together because of their inability to agree on politics. The family Thanksgiving meal has become, in too many places, a battleground, instead of a place of unity, and a place of gratitude for the blessings God brought. Paul is grieving the brokenness in the Corinthian community. So he enacts. . .

#### **A time of cleansing**

- Listen (**Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-32**)
- It is obvious that the Corinthians were falling far short in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the consequences were grave. Their fellowship had become sick. Their witness had died away. Some were even physically ill. They were missing the point and they needed to take a good look at themselves. And so do we.
- Let's examine ourselves. As we come to the communion table. We're going to ask you to come forward and take the bread and the cup and partake of them. But before we do that, all of us must first make sure that everything is on an even keel you and the Lord. And also if there is someone that you need to straighten things out with, resolve right now to go and take care of that as soon as possible. I will give us time for this kind of cleansing reflection at the close of this talk and right before we receive Communion.
- And finally, as we do this, we will experience in Communion. . .

#### **A restoration of community**

- Listen (**Read 1 Corinthians 11:33-34**)
- This is one of the key blessings of communion. Community and communion sound alike for a very good reason – they are inextricably linked. As we gather around the table of the Lord we remember and celebrate

what it's about – the death and, ultimately, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's all about him. It's not about any of the other things that seek to distract us and pull us away from our witness of the Good News.

- Jeffrey and Kaitlyn led us in the The Table earlier. Think back to those words: There is a feast at the table of the Lord.

There is peace at the table of the Lord

There is healing at the table of the Lord.

There is community at the table of the Lord, listen:

*Come ALL you weary; come and find*

*His yoke is easy; his burden light*

*He is able; He will restore*

*At the table of the Lord*

*At the table of the Lord*

*I'm invited to the table of the Lord*

*I'm invited to the table of the Lord*

*He says, "Come just as you are"*

*To His table*

Savor the cleansing and healing and community at the table of the Lord. Come to the fellowship meal. Amen