

Series: **HANDLE WITH CARE!** April 27, 2008

THIS IS MY BODY!
1 Corinthians 11:17-26

I. INTRO

- A. I had a friend in college named Steve Weir who, for some reason, got into doing stained glass work. And he was **really** good at it. He took on a stained glass lampshade—you know, the kind with pears, apples and grapes in it
-Well, like me, Steve worked security jobs. One evening when he was working at the local newspaper, he took the chandelier along to work on in his spare time. A manager came in, saw it, and said, “Wow! That’s great! Can I look at it?” Well, when he picked it up—it slipped out of his hands onto the cement floor—and **smashed!** Steve was quite shocked by that—but he was even more shocked when the guy burst into tears—realizing what he’d done.
1. We would **prefer** to handle things we really value ourselves. But sometimes we don’t have a choice in the matter. So, when we place something we value in someone else’s hands we say things like, “**Please** be careful with that!” If we have to ship it, we insure the package—and stamp, **Fragile** all over it.
 2. But that’s just stuff, right? Glass chandeliers, cars, and laptops can be repaired. When it comes to **people**—that’s totally different. When a parent takes their child to Daycare—their eyes **plead** with those who will watch over them, **Please...Handle With Care.**
-When a parent walks their daughter down the aisle—and gives her hand to some guy with a smile on his face and gleam in his eye, they silently plead—**Handle With Care.** And if you don’t...**I know where you live, dude!**
- B. The night before His death, Jesus gave his disciples a treasure and pleaded with them to handle it with care. Jesus told them to **remember** Him by gathering regularly—and breaking and eating bread and drinking wine. But it wasn’t intended to be a ritual in his memory. It was intended to be a return trip to the cross—and be reminded of the price tag on sin, the extravagance of God’s love for us.
-By eating bread and drinking wine—we realign ourselves with Jesus and His mission. When we come together at the Lord’s table, we remember that all the hierarchies, all the labels, all the barriers are gone. We are just simply—Christ’s Body. Each of us doing our part.
1. Our constant tendency is to remember the **tradition**—and even enhance it; gold-plate it, surround it with candles and smoke—and forget the core of what the tradition is about. When it comes to faith and a relationship with the God of the universe and Jesus’ mission in the world, I don’t think that’s something we want to do. Right?
 2. So, what I want to do is kind of go back to the basics on Communion, the Lord’s Supper, Eucharist—whatever you want to call it. Communion is intended to take us back—not just to a candlelit upper room on the backstreets of Jerusalem where we re-enact Jesus’ ritual. It’s intended as this ongoing

reminder of what God is like, who we are, and the **best** news to ever come to this old world!

II. AT THE CORE OF OUR FAITH...IS A CROSS

A. The core passage we're studying today was written by Paul—apostle and early church leader—to a group of people who had forgotten what the Lord's Supper was all about. In fact, it was **so** bad that he told them, "Your gatherings are divisive, they **mock** Jesus, and they do more harm than good!" How's **that** for an evaluation! Next week, I'm going to talk about what had gone so wrong with that group.

-But I thought it would be good to just review what the Lord's Supper is **really** all about first. Everyone okay with that? So, let me just say the obvious; at the core of our faith—at the core of everything Jesus is about, everything He came for—is a cross. And the cross represents the only solution to a problem at the core of humanity.

-The problem is something God simply calls **sin**. Sin is rebellion against God, against His leadership and against His ways. Sometimes sin shows itself in being quietly and subtly rebellious. You know—just ignoring God. And sometimes it's blatant out and out **no one is going to tell ME what to do** rebellions. And **everyone** is born with a bent toward in this direction. I was—and **you** were. I can prove it. Anyone here who's ever had to try hard to be selfish? Anyone here who's ever had to **work** at unforgiveness? Anyone here who's ever had to try hard to be jealous or envious or unkind?

1. The Bible is actually pretty blunt about this:

**For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.
(Romans 3:23 NLT)**

And the result of sin is death. Deterioration. It twists and kills relationships. It causes us to be proud and unwilling to cooperate and bend—or even listen to people who love us.

2. We tend to think of specific actions like racism and greed and brutality and rape as sin—and they **are** sin. As awful as these things are, they are **symptoms** of a much deeper problem—the deterioration of the human soul as we give into cravings that destroy us a little bit at a time.

3. All the mess you see in this world is, at the core, a sin problem. It contaminates every single human being—and unless it is stopped, it just keeps wrecking things. See, it's addictive and progressive in nature. Every single relational problem on this planet has been caused by sin—and infected people are usually too proud to admit their part in the problem. Sin escalates those problems into divorce, hatred, murder—and all kinds of unspeakable junk. Under the weight of all this mess, our world **shrieeks** for mercy and grace and peace and hope.

-And, here's the tragedy. Sin is lethal; fatal. You and I can't do enough good deeds, burn enough candles or go through enough religious rituals to save ourselves. We **are** dying, and we **will** die.

- B. I need to be clear—**that's** why God stepped in. **That's** why God intervened and offered a solution to the sin problem that has nothing to do with our performance—only our faith. This is what Jesus said:

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17 NLT)

1. Jesus' moral teaching is breathtaking—and incredibly wise. But He never tells people to just try to live better lives. His teaching **always** comes back to Himself. He told people, “Come to me—and **I** will give you rest.”

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except *through* me.” (John 14:6 NLT)

-Paul, the early church leader whose writings we've been studying, spells this out very clearly:

We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood...God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. (Romans 3:22-25a, 26b-28 NLT)

2. It is a **huge** misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching to think that He came here to show us a better path to walk; the Golden Rule. **Do for others what you would want them to do for you.** And the theory goes that God then grades on a curve. There is not a **shred** of evidence in the Bible to support that!
-Anyone here who's kept the Golden Rule perfectly up to this point? Of **course** not. We can't. And **that's** why Jesus came.

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:6-8 NLT)

3. There are a number of words in the Bible that describe what took place when Jesus suffered and died and rose from the dead. One is the title of a movie

that's out called, **Atonement**. In casual language, it means to pay for—or make amends for something you've done so that a relationship can be restored.

- What Jesus did takes it a step further. He was our substitute; He was perfect—but He took my place on the cross—and yours—and died in my place.
4. Now, with that background—let me read the specific passage from the book we've been studying—where the author, Paul, is doing serious remedial training on communion.

For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NLT)

- a. If you read through all the narrative accounts of Jesus' last meal with his Disciples, it contains language just like this. The breaking or tearing of the bread—and then these words, **This is my body, which is given for you**. The cup filled with wine was passed around, with these words, **This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood**.
- b. Taking communion is symbolic of understanding—and saying, "I get it. I understand! I realize that on my own—I could never do enough to pay my own debt of sin. So—I'm putting my faith, not in myself—but in Jesus, his death and resurrection—His perfect life substituted for my imperfect life. I receive the forgiveness and life Jesus offers to me!"
5. See, religion **always** gets this backwards. We do, do, do, do—all these good things—to earn our way to God. From the **cross** Jesus said, "It is finished! Paid in full!" Not **do**, but **done**. And we are offered something you can't find anywhere else on this planet. Grace. Life—down inside—**forever** life—spilling out from your heart. And hope for whatever you face.
- How does this happen? Well, see, when we receive Jesus' life in place of ours, His Spirit takes up residence inside. When He comes, He brings life with Him. He brings power to change—power to actually make a difference in the world!

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. (Philippians 2:13 NLT)

- C. Now you and I have a choice to make. Will I choose to receive what Jesus has done for me as a gift—**grace**—and follow His way, accept the atonement already made for my sin. Or...with I just coast, say, "Hmmm—that's nice! That's cool. That's your truth." And pretend Jesus doesn't really matter. Or...will I make my own way...and take my chances.

-By the way, for the record, I don't think you can just ignore Jesus.

1. So—what's it about? Sometimes when people talk about Jesus—it sounds like they're closing their eyes, ignoring the obvious—and making a leap of faith. In think everyone needs to engage their brain—and look at the evidence for Jesus' life and who He was. I believe the historical evidence is convincing.
-But I'll tell you what gets me. It's the absolute transformation of human hearts. It's the changes Jesus has made in my life—and millions upon millions of others; people who have loved in the face of hate; people who have **gladly** given their lives, not for friends, but for enemies. People who have been healed, freed from hatred and addiction—not to just live normal lives, but to make an extraordinary difference in the world.

2. Is there a cost to choosing Jesus? Of course there is. There is a cost to **everything** worthwhile. I married Timothy Seilern and Elizabeth Smyth yesterday—right up here. Marriage is an amazing thing—but there is a **huge** price tag! Marriage is declaring war on self-centeredness and independence and...being right! Is it worth it? Well—only if you pay the price.
-To follow Jesus, you need to count the cost. See, coming to Jesus is not just a matter of grabbing the gift He offers—and then taking off to do your own thing. It's choosing to follow Him. To take self-centeredness—and doing life **your** way to the cross. It's about choosing to be a **follower** of Jesus.
-Is it worth it? There's no comparison. He takes us as we are—and **total** forgiveness. He offers a do-over in life. We will **never** be without Him—and without the power and strength to live the life we long to live and make the difference we want to make. I've never met a person who's truly chosen to follow Jesus and thought they got gyped!
-I'll tell what you do have to give up. Snobbery. The sense that you're better than, more educated than, more refined than, more successful than...others. See—coming to Jesus means giving up that right—and owning the truth that all of the distinctions between us and others—economic, racial, educational, generational—**whatever** they are—are false. Manmade.

3. At the very core of our faith is a cross. It's where Jesus paid for everyone's sin so that we could be forgiven and go free. And now the question is—what will **you** do with Jesus? Will you receive Him—and the gift of restoration He died to give? Will you walk toward Him, close your eyes—or walk away?

III. THE CALL TO RE-MEMBER

- A. Jesus told us that if we choose to follow Him—we are to remember Him regularly through the simple process of eating bread and drinking wine. **Remember!** Anyone having trouble remembering? I think our minds are like computers—too many files and it takes a **lot** longer to find them!
-When you put a hyphen between **re** and **member**—it changes the emphasis of the word, doesn't it? It's like bringing all the parts of something back together again. I used to build model planes—you know, the kind that fly, in a previous life. Occasionally, something would happen—a wing would get torn off—or other pieces-parts—and I would have to **re-member** the plane.

1. Have you noticed that our world is more splintered than it has **ever** been? We live in a splintered world, don't we? Blown up by disagreements and hostility. Music has splintered into all kinds of special interests—almost 100 different genres, last time I counted. High-schools? They now call all the different groups—from **Goths** to **Heads** to **Emos**—tribes! People get divided by occupations, sports, political candidates, music preferences—and sometimes they hide behind their little wall—and shout insults over the top. Sometimes the divisions putrefy into hatred—and murder.
 -The really tough thing is that the splintering—and sometimes the name-calling—gets into families. And it gets into churches. That's what happened to this church. Paul had taught them, "Jesus tore down **all** the walls!" They spent the next five years rebuilding them—splintering on the basis of gender, race—and at the communion table—social status. Paul says, "The Lord's Supper is a place where Jesus' Body gets **re-membered**—brought back together again!

2. I'll tell you what it means to be **re-membered**. First, it means that we re-join our history. Sometimes as followers of Jesus, we take this really shallow view of who we are—and we go back to how our particular name brand of church came into being. We've got to go back further.
 -Did you realize that as a follower of Jesus—your history and mine extends **all** the way back to the beginning of the Bible. We are a part of all God has been doing for thousands of years to restore and redeem people. The book of Hebrews lists these heroes who lived by faith—people like Noah, Abraham, Joseph and Moses—and says:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. (Hebrews 12:1 NLT)

-You're alone in this race—and you're not the first ones in the race! You're the **people of God** and you're part of a massive plan! Don't run a shabby race. Don't wimp out. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

-We share history--**our** history as God's people—with heroes like Noah who spent 100 years building an ark and Moses who faced down the most powerful leader in the world—and **won!**

-We join hands with Jesus in Gethsemane. When followers of Jesus were dipped in wax and lit like torches to light Nero's garden—**we were there!** We link arms with Wilberforce, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Theresa in the filth and death of Calcutta. Friends—**that's** our history! That's our heritage! And the same God who filled them with courage and power—walks with us!

-See, if we **don't re-member—link arms with, come back together with** our heritage—we'll get sidetracked. Discouraged. We'll give up, wimp out, faint at the thought of trouble—and live for our own program. **We have history**—and it goes back thousands of years. We are people of faith. We are people who love—even when we're mistreated. We are people who look forward to the future with confidence—cause we **know how the story ends!**

3. **Re-remembering** also means, to put it bluntly, me getting off my pedestal—and you getting off yours. See, the cross is where Jesus reached his **deepest** point of humility. The cross is where, to be quite frank, Jesus looked the **least** like God. When he was dead—he **looked** dead. They pried him off the cross and dumped him in the dirt—and it **looked** like the world system had won. Of course we **know** what happened!
 -Jesus came and identified with our weakness. He wasn't ashamed to be seen as our brother, the Bible says. And it offends him greatly when we, for some reason, see ourselves as more worthy, more deserving of God's love than those in prison, those sleeping off a hangover downtown—or those who can't read and smell like sweat and have teeth rotted and missing. The Lord's supper is the place to not just grieve over our pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency as we remember the very one who **died** for all the junk. When we take communion—we **re-member** who we are, who others are—and who God is.
4. **Re-remembering** means something else. It means reconciling—rejoining ourselves with those we're alienated from. This may be the hardest—because it means humbling our pride and, to some extent, making ourselves vulnerable. Anyone enjoy that? .
 -After Jesus washed his disciple's feet—and then gave them the broken bread and wine to remember Him by, He talked about—and prayed for the future. He prayed for us. And his prayer was,
“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.
(John 17:20-21 NLT)
 -You can't remember Jesus—and absolutely and stubbornly refuse to **re-member**—reconcile, come together with, stop hating and backbiting and gossiping about his other children. See, we belong to the One who **died**—arms nailed open; that's how we were forgiven. How could we refuse to forgive and offer grace when we have the power of the cross in us?
 -So. Don't remember your grudges; **re-member** yourself with those who've hurt you.
5. And at the foot of the cross—at this table—we need to **re-member**—link arms with the world. We need to take off our blinders. It is **so** easy to take communion wrapped in insulation; to only think about Jesus' sacrifice in terms of ourselves, our needs, our pain, our family. Does Jesus care about that? Of **course** He does! And He wants us to be wrapped in peace and life and grace.
 -But then He calls us to do what someone else did for us; pass His generosity and grace and kindness on to others—cause, see, He loves them. His sacrifice was Good News for the entire, splintered, sad, sick world we live in.
 -Not so we could just whisper a pray for it as we grab our bread and juice—but so we could be an active part of the restoration Jesus longs to bring. Not just overseas in tin shack villages—but in **our** world. Where, in some way like

Jesus—God **lives and loves and cares** through us; we live out His values in our home, with our neighbors—wherever we are.

-See, when we take Jesus' body—the bread, and the cup—his shed blood—we are stating together, “We **are** the Body of Christ in this world—here to do **His** will—be **His** representatives. There's this solidarity. When we take communion—it's like we're joining hands with people all over the world—people who down through all generations have trusted in God! And when we do—in some small measure, the splintering and hatred and squalor and disease and sadness is healed by Jesus. And **that's** Good News!

- B. I could go on, but I'm not going to. There's another part to this story that we have to **re-member**; join. Hold onto. It's the promise that comes with this:

Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.” For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again. (1 Corinthians 11:26 NLT)

1. There's an end point. There's a point when the Lord's Supper, Eucharist, Communion—will no longer be necessary. Jesus—our Master; our Leader—the One we follow, will one day return. In fact, Jesus told his followers right at that meal, “I won't eat this meal again with you—until the day I return.” At some points in history, this was **all** people had to look forward to.
2. I have no idea what your life looks like this morning. It may be fine. It may be **almost** fine—just needs some minor adjustments. It may be **very** un-fine—and unfair. Or...it may be devastatingly hard. The place to bring your heart—is to the very core of your faith. To the cross. To the Savior—Jesus—who gave his life and was broken for **us**. Who, in the blood and mess and confusion and agony of His death—brought about the reconciliation and restoration of the world. You're familiar with the word **redeem? Redemption?** It means to buy back; to thoroughly change a situation—from what it is—to what it could be. Jesus is **Savior** and **Redeemer**.
 -Whatever your present is right now—you can look forward to the future. Not in the sense that, like Scottie from Star Trek, Jesus is going to beam you up out of every mess. It's just that He **knows** the root of your suffering, whether it's pain or betrayal or deep disappointment or alienation. He knows. So don't lose hope! Make sure you don't forget to **look forward!**
 -See, things won't be splintered and broken forever. He is at work—making all things new, reconciling the world to Himself. Bringing peace where there's no peace; bringing hope where there's no hope; bringing life where there's no life.
 -And He's told us that whenever we gather in His Name—He **would** show up. And He's here.

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. When I come to the Lord's Supper, I usually have a mixture of feelings—gladness, gratitude—I'm always moved the Jesus' selflessness and humility. But I also feel guilt and sadness over stupid choices I've made. At the cross—I see my flaws and selfishness and pride. I can identify with the distance between what I want to be—and should be—and what I am.

-And then I realize—Jesus doesn't ask me to be perfect—or figure everything out before I take the bread and wine—and remember Him. He asks me to come—just like the old song says—***Just As I Am.***

- B. Through his death—Jesus said we could have a fresh start; a new birth. Life is a ***gift.*** Today, for some of you, it's ***your*** birthday—you just need to come and receive your gift!

-You could do that, you know. You don't have to carry your own guilt or try to make your own way. You could come here, in faith, and as you receive the bread and wine—you could confess Jesus as Lord, become God's child—and find the life Jesus died to give! When you dig down to the very core of our faith—there's a cross. And where there's a cross—there's grace and hope.