

Series: BREAD, SOUP AND COMMUNION—January 3, 2010

FREE, SAVED, LOVED AND WASHED!

1. You may find this a little strange, but in some of the legalistic traditions that surrounded the denomination I was a part of growing up, one of the issues highlighted as wrong—was what we are doing today. Did you ever suspect that it was wrong to ***eat in the church?*** Ironically, the verses used to defend that are found in the teaching of an early leader, Paul—who made the comment to the church at Corinth:

**What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking?
(1 Corinthians 11:22 NLT)**

-Taking this as a prohibition from eating in a church building, these gatherings would separate the ***Fellowship Hall*** from the ***Church*** with a parking lot. You couldn't eat anywhere near the church ***sanctuary***—but if you walked across the parking lot—well, you could gorge yourself. Later churches would keep the buildings separate—but connect them with an awning so you didn't get wet—as you were going to eat.

-In doing these, believers ***totally*** missed Paul's point. Eating together was a really good thing. It broke down barriers that usually existed with who people would eat with and hang with. In fact, they didn't even have church buildings back then; just homes. What was happening in this ***love feast*** as they were called, was a particularly nasty form of snobbery. The wealthier people—who had more flexible schedules—were invited over early—and ate all the good stuff. Then the poorer people came with Kraft dinner or hot dogs—they had to eat alone.

-Paul was saying, "If you can't wait for ***everyone*** to be there—EAT BEFORE YOU COME!"

2. Eating together is a ***good*** thing! In fact, a lot of things in Jesus' life centered around meals—from his first miracle—120 gallons of wine for a wedding banquet—to feeding the 5000—to meeting with Zacchaeus—to making a breakfast of bread and fish for his disciples.

-Have you ever noticed that when you sit down to a meal with someone, things loosen up? As you share in meeting this basic human need, something really good happens. It's the same as when families get together and share a meal. It's ***more*** than a meal; it's getting into one another's lives and hearts. And ***Communion*** is intended to be this common place where we all understand that we need God—and we need each other; that when Jesus came and gave his life for us—we ***all*** needed Him. And He came to break down every barrier we erect based on gender, work, race, language, position—all these ladders erected in our world get turn down. And we become ***one people***.

-And it was in the joy of being together that early believers remembered a Redeemer who came and gave his life to create one people—to save them, and to engage them in the most important thing going on in our world; God's mission of making ***all*** things right, healing, freeing, forgiving and restoring.

-Some of the leaders I grew up with ***totally missed the point!***

3. Now, some of you come to this table with some baggage, too, I'm guessing. 2000 years of history has a way of doing that. Some of you grew up in traditions where Communion or Eucharist was shrouded in mystery and tradition. There was a special insider who served it—the Priest or Minister. And there was something he did to it that made it effective; that made it holy, powerful—and, in some traditions, the actual body and blood of Christ.

-Did you know that neither Jesus or the early leaders said that someone special--like an ordained minister or priest-- has to serve communion? There's not a shred of biblical evidence that it needs to be served in a special building from a special altar or table!

Did you know that according to what Jesus has done, we are all priests? That any follower of Jesus can serve communion—and that, according to Jesus, where two or three are gathered in his Name—He's there?

Let me read the account of what happened when Jesus first initiated this meal where we remember Him.

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread arrived, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John ahead and said, "Go and prepare the Passover meal, so we can eat it together."

When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table. Jesus said, "I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."

Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come."

He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me."

After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you. (Luke 22:7-8; 15-20 NLT)

- a. The Passover Meal was intended to remember one of the most amazing things that happened in the history of civilization.
- b.

After 400 years of oppression in Egypt, God stepped in and miraculously freed His people--an entire nation of well over 2 million people—from slavery.

-Through Moses, God passed judgment on each of the Egyptian gods—and the Pharaoh cult that promoted them. God's judgment was so severe that this Pharaoh, who definitely had an ego problem—and was himself worshipped as a god—released his entire workforce. Imagine the chaos. All the people building his buildings, serving his food, working in his fields—and building the memorial to his reign—**GONE!**

-This Passover Meal was intended to commemorate that moment of freedom; when the blood of a Passover Lamb spared everyone's lives from that last judgment. Can you see why Jesus was anxious for this moment? That night—all of this history came to live. **He** was the Passover Lamb. **He** was the One who would save them from death. This was **their** moment to be released from slavery. The very One that the Passover looked forward to had come.

-As they ate that Passover Meal together—and as they ate the bread that represented Jesus' body—and drank the wine that represented His shed blood—this was now a **whole new deal**.

- b. Jesus told **all** of his disciples, "When you do this—remember **Me**." Interesting. He didn't tell them how often, or who was the lead things, or to turn the bread and wine to flesh and blood. He didn't restrict it to everyone who had their act together. In fact, one at that table, Judas, was getting ready to betray Him. And before the meal was even over, they all had a big argument over who was the greatest. But Jesus didn't say anything about that; He just made it clear his followers were to gather in His Name—and celebrate this meal together.

-Over the next days, these followers of Jesus went to hell and back. They experienced the worst devastation you can experience—when you not only lose your best friend—but all your dreams and hopes turn to disillusionment. And **then** the unbelievable realization that the One you followed did what **no one** has ever done. He came back from the dead—and proved that everything He'd said about Himself was true!

- c. Now. How many of you think that when Jesus' followers got together over the next weeks, months and years to observe this meal—that it was a solemn, quiet occasion. You know, when they all got together, wore black, and felt sorry for Jesus and what had happened to him on the cross? I'm guessing that it was a transcendent moment—as they thought back and remembered what it was like to have Jesus in the room. I'm guessing that, after some spectacular failures on their part where they **totally** fumbled the ball—there were some tears. Some times when they prayed, "Oh **God! How could I possibly have strayed so far?**" Or thought, "Jesus, I miss the sound of your voice; I miss being able to look into your eyes!"

-But I'm guessing that there was laughter around the meal. That there was unbelievable joy—as they saw people who were once far away--join them. Maybe a little dancing—a few cheers. But **always** a sense of love. Community. Of being a part of something that was **way** bigger than they'd ever dreamed!

-They had this love feast—and shared communion together when the Good News moved to the Gentiles. They had communion—and shared this meal—when they knew that the next day some among them would die horrible deaths. They shared this meal after weddings, after births, after healings, after deaths. It was the **coming together** of the people of Jesus—to remember who they were, who their leader was, and that He, through them, was fulfilling the dream

of all the prophets; God bringing **His Shalom** to the world. Even when **nothing** seemed to be going right! It was a **feast**. It was a **LOVE feast!**

4. Our reason for wanting to do communion like we're doing it this morning is to somehow get a little closer to our beginnings—where Communion, the Lord's Supper, Eucharist—which, by the way, means, simply, **Thanks!**—is celebrated in the context of a love feast. Of people looking each other in the eye. Of people knowing and being known, loving and being loved, serving and being served.

-Whoever you choose to do so will break the bread and pass it around—and pour the wine. See, we want this celebration to eventually extend way beyond gatherings like these. Something **this** good and **this** powerful was never intended to be contained with walls—whether they're the walls of a cathedral or a converted strip club. Wouldn't it be great if the love feast and the giving of thanks to Jesus would invade every small group; banquets; family gatherings—even office parties—so that the Good News of what Jesus has done—and the Glory of the God who chose to **know us**—fills the earth!

If you are a follower of Jesus—I officially give you permission (as if you needed it) to celebrate Jesus whenever 2 or 3 of you are gathered in his Name. Let me remind you of a few things:

- a. The ground, folks, is **totally** level at this love feast—as it is at the foot of the cross. No one is loved more by God—because of their stellar performance in this past week—or loved less because they fell on their face. All the successes and wins and accolades of a world system that judges **much, MUCH** differently than God—we leave behind. All of the junk that surrounds differences in education, lifestyles, finances, age, generation—all that junk gets left behind. This is **not** the place to be cool—or wise.
- b. As we eat with one another—this symbolizes a **lot** of one another's the Bible talks about: the **one anothers**. **Encourage** one another. **Help** one another. **Serve** one another. **Confess your sins** to one another. **Forgive** one another. **Love** one another. **Share** with one another. That's what love is, see. It's not a sentiment you feel when you gather with others and feel a lump in your throat and a tear in your eye. It's the real practical stuff of loving each other.
- c. Just like the Israelites must've celebrated freedom from slavery—we also celebrated our freedom from slavery. Whether it's to ourselves, to some addiction, to lust, to greed—we have been freed to actually **be** free—not just pretend! The sacrifice of Jesus is that powerful—to set us totally free!
- d. We come to this meal—and we bring our sorrows. Our struggles. Our highs—our lows. Our wins, our losses. And we covenant to **one another**, "You are **not** in this alone. I'm here. Maybe I can't heal you or meet your needs—or even be of much help to you. But I'm here—and I'll pray—and I'll do what I can. We're in this together—and we have **all** been saved from death!

5. Jesus said that this meal was the foreshadowing of a much more profound meal we will share together when what God is up to here on this planet—and in us—is complete.

-Today, we struggle—not just with our own junk—but with our world. We struggle with Afghanistan, with people trying to blow up planes, with predators lurking in alleys...or cyberspace--who think **nothing** of taking using and discarding whoever they can get their hands on. Today we struggle with massive pieces of steel--whether cruising the oceans or hidden in missile silos, bristling with destructive power that makes any thinking person shudder.

-Today we struggle with the sadness of a world where people still die of hunger and from preventable diseases—from the lack of love. And we say, “God use us to give others their daily bread...!”

-Today we struggle with depression and fear and loss and anxiety—even self-loathing. And we look forward to a meal when all the weapons have been melted down into John Deere tractors; to a time when children can be trusted to go anywhere; to a time when all tears are wiped away—and when everyone truly feels loved, treasured, blessed—and at complete peace—with no fear of what tomorrow holds.

-But until then, we huddle together, love, eat, celebrate, hug—and honor the One who has called us as **His** servants to make this happen! We have a **lot** to celebrate! So—laugh, tell stories, listen, cry—and pass the bread, the soup and the wine!