

June 7, 2015
"The Family Table"
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

As a Protestant denomination, we do not believe that the wine and the bread actually become the body and blood of Christ in the holy sacrament of Communion or the Lord's Supper, rather we believe they are symbols of the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. You may have noticed that the Church of the Nazarene does not use wine in the communion service, but substitutes grape juice. In the old days they would call it the, "pure, unfermented juice of the vine."

I heard a true story of a pastor from a denomination with these beliefs who was married and had a young son. One day the pastor responded to a Red Cross appeal for blood donations. When he didn't come home by the time his young son expected him, the boy asked his mother, "Is Dad going around visiting all the sick people?"

His mother replied, "He's giving blood."

The little boy thought for a moment and said, "But we know it's really grape juice, don't we, Mom?"

Growing up Italian most Sundays meant driving to my grandparents house in Brooklyn. Not just my immediate family but all my aunts, uncles and cousins would come too. Grandma demanded and expected it.

Grandpa sat at the head of the table. I never saw him get drunk, but he always had a glass of wine with his meal. Real wine, not grape juice, not "unfermented juice of the vine" but wine; usually homemade wine other relatives or friends made and gave to him.

Grandma would have been cooking all day, perhaps all week in preparation. The food kept coming. My favorite was my Grandma's manicotti... okay a little Italian lesson: it's mon-a- gota not man-I- cotti and the filling has ri-gota cheese, not ri-cot-ta, and it is topped not with mozza-rella but with mutza-del or mutza-della cheese. My grandmother made her own shells (you know, crepe) and I've never tasted better manicotti then hers.

Although the food was great it was really more about the interaction of the family around the table. The adults sat at the table from the moment we arrived until it was time to leave. The children would take a break to go and play, but eventually we made it back to the table as well. At the table there was laughter, discussion, community, love, memories, advice, giving and receiving; there was food for the stomach and food for the soul and everyone left full on both accounts. There was nothing like getting the family together around the table for a meal.

What we celebrated here today, around the Lord's Table, is the most famous family meal in human history; A meal for the family of Christ. Here we put aside all differences, all worldly concerns, and we focus on Christ the head of the family. Our Scripture today is the earliest description we have of this family meal.

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 Cor 11:23-26**

I want to point out a few things about the Lord's meal with His family.

First of all, this is **A Table of Remembrance**

When my family got together around the family table not only would they reminisce about the past, telling stories we had heard so many times before, yet wanted to hear again; they were also making memories.

At the meal Jesus shared with His followers He said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me... 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."

This is a table of remembrance. Remembering is important.

Some years ago the Los Angeles Daily News carried an editorial about a man named Brian Rooney. Rooney a science teacher, had spent thousands of dollars of his own money, and hundreds of hours of his own time memorializing those who have died on our nation's battlefields, compiling a massive database of memorials from around the USA. Back in 2003 he had catalogued 8,600 memorials in 50 states, perhaps by now he has completed his mission of recording every war memorial in every state.

Rooney's mission began in the Vietnam War with a promise he made to a dying soldier. As a young Army medic Rooney was leaning over a mortally wounded soldier, trying to read the name on his dog tags when the dying soldier whispered two simple words into his ear, "Remember me." Rooney promised that soldier that he would remember him. That promise grew into an obsession. Rooney spent much of his time cataloging memorials for the war dead, making sure they are cared for, and that they are remembered. "It's kind of a way of resurrecting those people," he said of the soldiers he treated in triage at an evacuation hospital.

On communion tables all over the world you will find inscribed in many languages the simple phrase "In remembrance of Me." You can see it on our communion table as well. And that is what the Lord's Supper is all about. "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Remembering is important – remembering those who gave their lives in our behalf, remembering those whose love was so important to us and to who we are. All of this is tied up, of course, in our remembrance of Christ. He died for us, and the reason He

died for us is that He love us more than anyone ever can. We dare not forget that sacrifice, that love. It's a table of remembrance.

This is also **A Table of Reconciliation**

When my family met around the table, differences were talked out, apologies were made, there was reconciliation as we confirmed our love for one another.

In our text Jesus mentions a covenant between God and his people... This speaks of reconciliation. At this table we come as those who have been reconciled to God and with one another.

Max Lucado in his book *Outlive Your Life* tells about his friend Buckner Fanning who was a marine in World War II. Fanning was stationed in Nagasaki three weeks after the dropping of the atomic bomb. It was a scene of total devastation. But then, there in that scene of horror, this young marine found an oasis of grace.

"While patrolling the narrow streets, he came upon a sign that bore an English phrase: Methodist Church. He noted the location and resolved to return the next Sunday morning. When he did, he entered a partially collapsed structure. Windows, shattered. Walls, buckled. The young marine stepped through the rubble, unsure how he would be received.

"Fifteen or so Japanese were setting up chairs and removing debris. When the uniformed American entered their midst, they stopped and turned. He knew only one word in Japanese. He heard it, 'Brother.'

"They welcomed me as a friend," Buckner relates, "the power of the moment still resonating more than sixty years after the events. They offered him a seat. He opened his Bible and, not understanding the sermon, sat and observed. During communion the worshippers brought him the elements. In that quiet moment the enmity of their nations and the hurt of the war was set aside as one Christian served another the body and blood of Christ. Another wall came a-tumblin' down."

There is something about sharing a meal together, it brings people together. It cuts across the divides that normally separate us. We are reconciled to God through the sacrifice of Christ and God chose the meal of the Lord's Supper to symbolize that reconciliation.

This is not only a table for remembering; it is a table for reconciling. Finally, this is **A Table for Receiving**

Jesus said This is my body, which is given for you..."This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood...every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.

At this table you are invited to receive Christ in the breaking of the bread and the taking of the cup.

A few years ago a woman named Sara Miles walked into a church. She says she has never been the same since. She talks about that day in her book which is titled, *Take This Bread*: "One early, cloudy morning when I was forty-six, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, and took a sip of wine. A routine Sunday activity for tens of millions of Americans – except that up until that moment I'd led a thoroughly secular life, at best indifferent to religion, more often appalled by its fundamentalist crusades. This was my first communion. It changed everything... the mysterious sacrament turned out to be not a symbolic wafer at all but actual food- indeed, the bread of life... I took communion, I passed the bread to others, and then I kept going..."

"She surely did [keep going]!" writes Dr. Barbara K. Lundblad. "She kept going at that very church, St. Gregory's in San Francisco- distributing groceries to hungry people. On Sunday people gathered around the altar to pass the bread and share the cup. During the week, Sara and her friends passed out food from the very same altar where she'd first tasted the bread. Within a few years she and the people who had received food started nearly a dozen food pantries in the poorest parts of their city."

This is what has happened to people through the ages. At the table of Christ they have not only seen but they have tasted Christ's love for them. And this has led them to helping other hungry people find the table of Christ as well. This is a table of remembering and reconciling and receiving. This is my body, which is given for you..."This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood.

A pastor once told about visiting a man in his home. The pastor saw an oval picture of an old-fashioned girl on the wall. The host, pointed to the picture, and said, "that is my mother." Then, as tears came to his eyes, he continued, "I never saw her. She died in childbirth when I was born. Someday, when I get to heaven, after seeing my Savior, I want first of all to see the face of my mother."

The pastor later wrote, "I could have exclaimed, 'That is your mother? That is nothing but a piece of paper and cardboard covered with ink!' But I did nothing of the kind, I knew what he meant. 'That picture represents my angel mother. I never saw her, but some day in heaven I shall see her face and love her aboundingly for giving her life for me.'"

The pastor continued, "it is exactly so with our own Lord Jesus. This is His body, and this is His blood, and it pictures our lovely Lord until that precious beautiful day in heaven when we see Him face-to-face and thank Him for giving His life for us."

Remembering, reconciling, receiving. We come as the family of Christ to The Family Table. A spiritual highpoint of the month and we pray a spiritual highpoint in the lives of

the children who received today, as we remember Christ's selfless love for us and for all people.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.