

## "Do This in Remembrance of Me"

*Luke 22:13-20: So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly 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." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

We all know this story. Out of the Jewish Seder meal that is a part of the Passover celebration, Jesus began and instituted this gracious act of love that virtually every Christian group celebrates in some way.

It had such a simple beginning. Taking the elements of the Seder, Jesus asked us to use the wine to remember that his blood was shed for all and he asked us to use the unleavened bread to remember that his body was broken and sacrificed for all. Such a simple and loving act of grace.

The Passover Seder meal was forever changed for those who follow the Christ - - Oh, we still remember - - - but now we remember the one who gave us life.

Jesus' invitation and direction was so direct and so simple - - "do this in remembrance of me" Nowhere in the gospel are directions given as to who by and how this remembrance happens. We are simply invited to "remember" through the breaking of bread and the drinking of the wine - - the spilled blood and broken body of our Lord.

Wesley always saw this celebration as a means to converting grace. He tried every way he could to get his lay preachers "ordained" so they could serve communion - - even to recruiting a Greek Orthodox Bishop to ordain them. Finally as the Methodists moved to America they did ordain their own bishops and superintendents, who in turn ordained and credentialed the lay preachers who were left behind when the American Revolutionary War broke out and the English born clergy retreated to England.

We celebrate communion in the church today to help us to remember God's amazing grace to us. The church has taken this simple meal of remembrance that Jesus shared with those he loved just before he died and - - have virtually turned in into what I could only term as a - - grace barrier!

Let me explain - -

- Some insist that only fermented wine is proper - - others only unleavened bread.
- Some insist that only their communion is the proper one and all others are an abomination and sacrilegious.
- Some insist that it is only properly served by someone laying something on your tongue and you sipping juice out of a common chalice.
- Some insist that it is only properly served by serving the juice in small communion cups.
- Some insist that it is only proper to take a piece of bread and dip it into a common cup (some insist that this is an abomination).
- Some insist that only baptized members of their church can participate in communion.
- Some insist that it be received only on the first Sunday of each month, others insist it must be received every Sunday, while others only occasionally offer Holy Communion.
- Some insist in believing that we are literally drinking the blood of Christ and eating of his body. (No wonder Caesar's folks thought we were cannibals!)

- Some insist that you have come to an altar to receive the elements, while others insist that you must receive them in the pews.
- Some insist that only those without sin are worthy to participate.
- Some insist that you have to be a professing Christian to come to the table.
- Some insist that only those ordained be allowed to serve the elements.
- Some insist that you wear gloves, and in this day of disease fear that you wash with a disinfectant before touching the elements. The most sanitary insist on using surgical gloves.

Oh, the list could go on, but I believe you get the idea. In the United Methodist Church we have very strict rules on who can consecrate and serve communion. Oh we have found a way for others to serve it - - if it is first prayed over and consecrated by a "properly credentialed person."

We have really jumped through some unusual hoops to get around this grace barrier. I was on a retreat once of all lay folks and we had to have the preacher pray over the elements three days before the event and the refrigerate them because he was going out of town. Many times at lay events we have had to "recruit a properly credentialed preacher" just to have communion.

We have pages and pages of instructions on this Sacrament in our United Methodist Hymnal and Book of Worship. Volumes have been written on this subject. Each school of theology spends a lot of classroom time immersed in the "how to's" of Holy Communion.

Good apostolic succession also helps to validate the credentials of the consecrator. There are some clergy in our midst who insist that lay folks are not worthy to serve the elements - - untrained, and unordained, as we are.

Why not authorize and train dedicated lay persons to consecrate and serve communion in settings where the ordained cannot be and there is not time to wait on "consecrated elements". John Wesley understood this to be a sacrament of converting and prevenient grace.

Our General Board of Discipleship is leading the church on a four-year study of this sacrament as we practice it in the United Methodist Church. I sure hope that the fresh winds of God's Holy Spirit can blow through our cobwebby rituals and free up this grace of God from being the "church's property" and return it to the people as a freely given gift of love - - love from a cross!

Jesus simply said - - "do this in remembrance of me".

Let it be so!

A Jim Lane Commentary  
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