

"Table Blessings"

Today is the Sunday before the Fourth of July so I wanted to take a moment at the start of this morning's message to do something special. Let's have a show of hands if you have a loved one who is serving or has served in the military. (pause) If you have served in any branch of the U.S. armed forces please stand up and be recognized. (pause) Thank you so much for your service. Let's give them a round of applause. (pause) So many have given their lives in service of something greater than themselves. This applies to those serving in the military and to those who have served in the church militant and have now graduated onto the church triumphant. (pause) For all of our friends and family who are no longer with us let us take comfort together in the grace of God.

Thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the price has been paid for all of our sins, and we have been called to God's table where we break bread with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, all of those who have come before us, and all of those who will come after us.<sup>1</sup> All are welcome at God's table.

"I thank God for my life  
And for the stars and stripes  
May freedom forever fly  
Let it ring  
Salute the ones who died  
The ones that give their lives  
So we don't have to sacrifice  
All the things we love

Like our chicken fried  
And [Sweet Tea] on a Friday night  
A pair of jeans that fit just right  
And the radio up  
I love to see the sun rise  
See the love in my woman's eyes  
Feel the touch of a precious child  
And know a mother's love"

writers: Zac Brown, Wyatt Durrette

album: "The Foundation" (2008)

[] an adjustment by Richard Blount for Sunday morning

Did you know John Wesley struggled with this idea? When John Wesley came to this country he was serving as a pastor and tutoring a young girl named Sophie Hopkie in French on the side. John and Sophie sorta became romantically involved. John believed Sophie had professed her love for him. Then Sophie went and married someone else. So John publicly humiliated Sophie Hopkey by denying her the sacrament of Holy Communion in front of God and the whole colony. Do you know what happened next? They made John pack his bags and put him on the next ship back to England. (pause) They kicked him off the continent. (pause) Call it the work of the Holy Spirit; call it a lesson learned the hard way, but in the Methodist Church we have an open Communion table. We do not deny the sacrament to anyone.

The Lord's Supper is a sign of the love we ought to have for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Holy Communion serves as a means to live into and grow in God's grace. Celebrating Holy Communion is not a way to earn salvation because salvation cannot be earned. Communion is an ordinary means God uses to deliver God's grace through the action of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ invites to God's table all who, "love him, repent of sin, and seek to live as Christian disciples."<sup>2</sup> This simple meal of bread and juice is an ordinary way God shares God's grace, which includes God's grace to build up and God's grace to hold us accountable. As such,

<sup>1</sup> Gayle Carlton Felton. This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion, (Discipleship Resources: Nashville 2005) 18.

<sup>2</sup> Gayle Carlton Felton. This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion, (Discipleship Resources: Nashville 2005) 25.

God's Holy Communion is not something which should be entered into lightly. The Lord's Supper ought to be entered into, "rightly, worthily and with faith."<sup>3,4</sup>

In this morning's passage the two disciples who walked the road to Emmaus after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ were confused. Their teacher and friend had been brutally murdered. The leaders of their people, the Jewish authority, had given Jesus over to the Romans to be beaten, scourged, humiliated and crucified until dead. Women from their group had gone to the tomb of Jesus early that morning only to discover the body of Jesus was gone. The women told a story of angels and even seeing Jesus raised from the dead. To put it plainly – the travelers were stumped. They did not know what to make of it. As they debated the topic a traveler came up behind them and heard their conversation. The traveler asked what are you talking about; and they told the traveler about Jesus of Nazareth and all that had happened. Then the traveler explained;

**“O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”** And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:26-27).

Now, sisters and brothers, here is the good news for this morning's message. The disciples encouraged the traveler to come and stay with them in the inn that night. Then while they were at the supper table, sharing a simple meal of bread and wine. The traveler, “took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight” (vv30-31) One of the reasons I love the Road to Emmaus story is because of the way we walk with the confused disciples through confusion to epiphany in breaking of bread with Jesus. The Communion table provides a powerful opportunity for God's people to encounter the risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples who walked with Jesus exclaim, “Did our hearts not burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them” (v32-33). Then they shared all that they had seen and heard.

The disciples who walked with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus, after having seen Jesus in the Lord's Supper were moved to act. **(pause)** They were moved to act. **(pause)** How might we be moved to act by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in this simple meal of bread and juice? The three rules for John Wesley's class meeting were to do no harm, to do good, and to participate to the means of grace. Before we participate in this means of grace perhaps we should take a moment to consider what harm we have done. Who are those we have wounded with a careless word or a careless action, and who are those we have hurt deliberately? What would it look like to make those wrongs right before we come to God's table? What good might we have done from our last celebration of Holy Communion to this one? What opportunities have we missed? As we come to God's table how will we respond to God's grace? As we approach God's table how will honor those who have come before and what example will we set for those who come behind us? It's something to think about.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House 2016) ¶104, The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church, Article XVIII. P70.