

**WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?  
A LIFE OF BELONGING  
LUKE 22:14-29  
MARCH 28, 2013  
HOLY THURSDAY**

What are some of your best family memories?

I'll bet those memories include some shared meals.

Those times when it's not

picking up something at the drive-through and eating on the way to the next whatever,  
when it's not pop something in the microwave  
and swallow it whole as you run out the door.

Times when you actually sat down with family and shared a real meal.

I think of Thanksgiving dinners or Christmas dinners shared at my grandparents' homes.

I remember times when I was growing up when my dad got home from work,  
and we'd sit down to some of my favorite meals,

fried catfish, fried chicken, fried venison steak, fried okra,  
(Do you notice a theme developing?),  
and we'd talk about what went on during the day.

I recall meals like that with my own children.

I remember one nice dinner with them.

We sat down to eat, and the doorbell rang.

It was a good friend from the church,  
so everyone left the table to go talk in the front hall.

When we came back to the table,  
our Labrador Retriever puppy was standing on the table eating Jill's dinner,  
her tail going like a helicopter blade.

You've probably got a few meals stories in your memory banks.

A wedding rehearsal or reception.

A birthday party.

Whatever.

Rich things can happen at meals.

Tonight we remember and participate in the most significant meal that has ever been.

**LUKE 22:14-29**

"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover *with you* before I suffer."

It's not just the Passover meal he longed for, but also the *with you* aspect of it.

The Jewish Passover was not a religious ritual in the synagogue or temple.

It was a meal of remembrance shared by families in their homes.

This little band of friends was, in essence, Jesus' family.

And a big part of this meal's significance for Jesus was being "with you."

A meal of remembrance.

They remembered what God had done for the Hebrew people,  
setting them free from slavery in Egypt,  
and making them his own chosen people.

When they shared this meal every year thereafter,

it was a time to remember the events of the past,  
the bitterness of slavery,  
and the mighty acts of God on their behalf.

It was in that great event known as the exodus that God made them his people.  
 He became their Father,  
 and the nation of Israel his son.  
 It was a meal of belonging,  
 where families remembered they belonged to God and to one another.

When Jesus shared this meal with his friends,  
 they remembered all of that.  
 And they got a hint at what God was about to do to set his people free from slavery to sin and death.  
 They didn't understand it then, but they soon would.  
 Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them saying,  
 "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."  
 Your body?  
 What?  
 Remembrance?  
 Are you going somewhere?  
 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying,  
 "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."  
 The new covenant, we know.  
 It's promised by the prophets.  
 But your blood poured out?  
 What?

Today we call this meal the Last Supper, the Lord's Supper, or "communion."  
 That word "communion" is significant.  
 What words is it related to?  
 Communion, communicate, community, common,  
 commune as a verb,  
 like when you commune with nature,  
 commune as a noun,  
 where people live together,  
 and, yes, even communism.  
 Not communism as it worked out in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,  
 but in the sense of a community of like-minded people  
 willingly and freely sharing all things in common,  
 like the first generation of the church in Jerusalem.  
 All these words derive from the Old Latin "comoine," which means "shared."  
 Shared stuff, shared convictions, shared life.

Listen to how Luke describes that community in Acts 2:

**ACTS 2:42-47**

They devoted themselves to the fellowship and to the breaking of bread.  
 They were together and had everything in common.  
 They shared their possessions and wealth with each other as needed.  
 They met together.  
 They worshipped together.  
 They ate together.  
 It was all about being together, belonging.  
 And that's what this meal, communion, is about.  
 Being together, belonging to one another and to God.  
 When someone asks you what difference it makes to be a Christian,  
 tell them you have a community, a place where you belong.

That is something people are hungry for.

That's why old TV shows like Friends and Seinfeld were so popular,  
and shows like How I Met Your Mother and Community are popular today.  
Because the characters are always just hanging out with their friends.

Have you noticed

most of them seem to not have a job that keeps them away for 8-10 hours a day?  
No one has to go grocery shopping or repair things around the house.  
Nobody spends hours driving kids to  
soccer practice, voice lessons, dance lessons, or other activities.  
They just hang out with each other.

And people watch because they are hungry for community.

Not a virtual community like on Facebook.

Real, face-to-face relationships.

A network of significant relationships,  
the church, the family of God,  
with God as your Father and us as your brothers and sisters.

Ah, there's the rub.

The brothers and sisters.

Where two or more are gathered in his name,

someone is going to mess up, someone is going to fall short,  
someone is going to hurt your feelings, someone is going to offend you,  
someone is going to get in your way.

Yes, the church is just like a regular blood-related family.

Which means sometimes we get crossways with each other.

The sad thing is, too often we don't do anything about it.

A harsh word is spoken, an unfair accusation is made,  
a rumor passed, someone is left out or snubbed.  
There are hurt feelings.

But we avoid a possible confrontation and just hope it will blow over.

Ignore it, and maybe it'll go away... like a bad cold.

That's not exactly following Jesus' instructions.

Jesus said move into the conflict and work things out.

Work for reconciliation.

He said, "Anyone who is bitterly angry with their brother or sister is liable to the judgment.

If you're offering your gift at the altar  
and remember that your brother or sister has something against you,  
leave your gift there at the altar.

First go and be reconciled to them;

then come and offer your gift." (Mt.5:22, 23-24)

He taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Mt.6:12)

Just a couple of verses later he said,

"If you forgive people when they sin against you,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

If you do not forgive people their sins,  
your Father will not forgive your sins." (Mt.6:14-15)

And then he talked with Peter and the rest about forgiving those who do us wrong,

not once,

not three times as the rabbis taught,

not seven times as Peter was willing to stretch to,

but 77 times!

As in, you just keep on forgiving and forgiving and forgiving.

And, he said, you'd better learn how to do that,

because those who will not forgive others,

will not find themselves forgiven by God. (Mt.18:21-35)

Because being a Christian means living in community with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

The church is all about belonging, living in a web of rich relationships.

And that's going to require working through some tough stuff,

smoothing out bumps in the relational road,

seeking forgiveness and giving forgiveness.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in the city of Corinth about the importance of

living in genuine community with one another

if we would participate in communion.

The Lord's Supper then was part of a larger communal meal.

Well, apparently, there were some white collar church folk

who didn't have to worry about punching a time clock.

They would gather early,

dive into their shared meal,

and be full by the time the blue-collar folk could get there.

Even a bit tipsy from seconds and thirds from the wine.

Paul said there should be no divisions among brothers and sisters in Christ.

The family should sit down to the meal together.

So the white collar folks should wait for the blue collar folks to arrive,

and then they would all eat together.

Or, if they're really that hungry,

the white collar folks should have a bite to eat at home,

before they go to the church gathering.

But it was wrong to just dive in before everyone could get there.

Recognize the body of Christ, the church, and uphold its unity in community.

And, Paul said, you should come to the meal in a worthy manner.

Not only do we need to do what we can to

set right our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ,

but we also need to do what we can to

set right our relationship with our heavenly Father.

You ought to examine yourself before you share in this meal. (1Cor.11:17-33)

"Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in holy awe." (v.28 MSG)

This is about confessing our sins,

coming clean before God.

Take out the nail you were given when you came in tonight.

Take a look at the scripture verse printed there.

"Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in holy awe." (v.28 MSG)

Confessing our sins is an important part of living in real community with others.

It's important in a marriage.

I've talked before about those three sentences of three words each

that are so important to making a marriage work.

Repeat them after me:

I am sorry.

I was wrong.

Please forgive me.

Confessing our sins is also an important part of preparation for communion.

It's part of rebuilding our relationship with God,  
 which is the foundation of our life together in community with one another.  
 And I'd suggest we add a fourth sentence to this:

Again, repeat them after me:

I am sorry.  
 I was wrong.  
 Please forgive me.  
 Help me change.

Tonight the card and the nail are to prompt you to  
 pray your own prayers of confession and repentance as we approach the table of Christ.

Take the card and nail home with you,  
 and bring it back tomorrow night.

We'll have something more to do with it then.

We come to the table as a family, ready to sit down to a significant family meal.

But to truly be in community with each other as we take communion,  
 we need to do what we can to truly commune with God.

That means confession and repentance.

But if we take that seriously, it can be terribly difficult.

Even scary.

It makes us completely vulnerable,

and there may be some fear that we could be hurt by being vulnerable.

But in truth, it's the only way for relationships to be made whole.

Sometimes you have to intentionally go into that which scares you the most.

Do you remember the old TV show "The Wide World of Sports"?

It opened with words about "the thrill of victory and"... right, "the agony of defeat."

To illustrate the agony of defeat there was that painful ending to an attempted ski jump.

The skier appeared in good form as he headed down the jump,

but then, for no apparent reason,

he tumbled head over heels off the side of the jump,

ripping through flags and barriers,

bouncing off the supporting structure,

and falling to the snow below.

What we didn't know was that he chose to fall rather than finish the jump.

Why?

As he explained later, the jump surface had become too fast,

and midway down the ramp he realized if he completed the jump,

he would land on the level ground,

beyond the safe landing area,

which could have been fatal.

Surprisingly, the skier suffered no more than a headache from the tumble.

To change your course in life can be a scary and sometimes painful undertaking,

but it's better than not changing course.

Confession, repentance, reconciliation.

It's all about repairing and rebuilding community.

And that's important, because one of the big differences it makes to be a Christian is,  
 we have a place of belonging... with Jesus and each other.

