

## TABLE TALK

*Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:17-26*

Sunday, February 12, 2012 • The St. John's Pulpit • Dennis W. Foust, PhD, Senior Minister

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**Please Find Your Place at the Table** The church in Corinth was a mess. They really should have called The Center for Congregational Health, in Winston-Salem, to request a consult. But, what they received were letters from Paul. In what we have marked to be the eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul gave this young congregation some spirited words. He confronted their attitudes and their behaviors as they gathered around the table of the Lord.

He challenged the divisions they nurtured among themselves. Rather than observing the supper as a meal of remembrance, some gorged themselves while others went hungry; some were barred from fellowship while others over indulged. They pursued prejudice, greed, control, and pretense while God offered grace and mercy. They built barriers based on differences and positions and labels completely missing God's message. As God, in Jesus, said to each and to all, "Welcome to the table," they scorned God's hospitality as too lenient. They should have been drawn by God's love to erase lines of separation; but they drew lines of legalism. Two thousand years later, we still find pulpits and congregations suggesting they can improve on God's message. Proposing they are protecting God's integrity – as if God's character were in danger - some proclaim, "You are welcome to the Lord's Table if you think like us, are baptized like us and vote like us."

Friends, this is the Lord's Table prepared for you – each of you and all of you. What qualifies you for your seat around this table is not your political positions or your views on ethics, morality or social customs. What qualifies you for your seat around the Lord's Table is your commitment to the God, who is revealed in Jesus; this God who is willing to identify with you in suffering and in dying to make sure you can grasp this limitless divine love and be inspired to invest your life completely to loving one another and serving others.

Three years ago, I stood in the sacred site of the Upper Room in Jerusalem. This room commemorates where Jesus gave this meal to us. We prayed with Russian Orthodox pilgrims in that space. I was reminded of the diversity and the universality of Christ's Church and how this is a meal for the family of God. This table offers a meal to every person who chooses to be a child of the living God. Please, find your place at the table.

## **Would You Like More Bread?**

Bread; Bread is the most basic of all foods. Bread is the oldest of all foods consumed by humanity. Bread is the one food that is common to all cultures and races and classes of people. Bread. How appropriate that Jesus chose bread to describe himself.

In the sixth chapter of John's gospel, there is a story of Jesus feeding a multitude of people with five loaves and two small fish. In this story, the miracle causes the people to get excited and move toward Jesus in an effort of making him king. So Jesus withdrew into the mountains to be by himself. The next day, the people were searching for Jesus and when they found him, Jesus was not at all pleased. Jesus had no desire to become popular. Jesus had no desire to be followed by the paparazzi.

Jesus realized these people were following him because he filled their bellies. Jesus realized these people desired to be with him because he made them feel good, he gave them an experience they could not explain. These people wanted to be with Jesus so Jesus could meet their needs *as they defined* their needs.

But, you can find bread like that in a circus ticket or a concert ticket or a big game ticket. This is not the bread offered by Jesus. Jesus does not desire codependent disciples; he requires interdependent disciples. Jesus wants you to be his follower because you want a relationship with him. And Jesus wants this relationship to be based on who he is to you, not on what he does for you.

Jesus is the bread of life who offers real sustenance to the core of your being. The kind of life Jesus gives is not based on miracles, getting your appetite satisfied, or following Jesus like you do a celebrity. Real life, as a disciple of Jesus, is to be in a relationship with God that is as basic – as common – as bread. This relationship calls you to be honest, humble, vulnerable, authentic and committed toward God and compassionate toward others.

Jesus, the bread of life, was sent from God for you. Jesus, the bread of life, was broken for you. Jesus, the bread of life, invites you to feed on him for nourishment today and everyday. Would you like more bread?

## **May I Refill Your Cup?**

When is a cup not merely a cup? A cup is not merely a cup when it is filled with more than liquid. A cup is more than a cup when it is filled with sacrificial love. A cup is more than a cup when it is filled with complete commitment to the will of God. A cup is more than a cup when it represents a covenant between God and humanity.

Jesus took a cup and asked the disciples to divide it among themselves. Jesus knelt in a garden called Gethsemane to pray. Jesus prayed to God that this cup be taken from him if it were possible. Then Jesus prayed, *“not as I will, but as you will.”* Prior to Jesus’ body being broken, he allowed his will to be offered as a sacrifice. Prior to his blood being spilt by thorns, spikes and spear, Jesus committed his will to follow the will of God.

In the life of discipleship and obedience and trust, sometimes you find that your cup has become empty. Possibly you have given yourself in service until you are hollow. Possibly the jostle and challenges of life have bumped you so often that your cup is spilled out. Listen in your spirit for God’s voice, the Holy Spirit comes to you in the person of Jesus to ask, “May I refill your cup?”