

Communion Reflections

September 27, 2015 | Patrick Preheim

A welcome to each who has gathered for worship on this beautiful fall day. Before we enter into our time of worship I draw our attention to a few announcements:

- Offering plates by the doors
- Singing With the Spirit & Sunday Potluck

#36 HWB God of our Strength

“Oh, may our hearts united be in sweet communion, Lord with thee” (v.3 HWB #36). Our worship focus for this day is the ordinance of communion, so I invite us to join together in the reading of an opening prayer. #787 HWB. We will read this prayer in unison.

Friends, our gracious Lord has prepared the meal before us; may the Lord prepare us. The feast is ready. May we be made ready (*Words for Worship*, #261). I offer words from our scriptures which have guided our practice of the Lord’s Supper in our churches from the very beginning.

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians 11:17-26:

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Thus far the reading of scripture.

In early September as I juiced grapes Winona Senner had given me I found myself contemplating the church’s ordinance of communion, which some Christian streams would call the sacrament of communion or its fancy Greek title of Eucharist. I was thinking about the earth and the rhythm of seasons which produced those manifold grapes. I thought about the dry spring and the calm days which fostered an exceedingly

high pollination rate. I was grateful for the fruit of vine and the conditions that had brought on such an enormous harvest. The warm juice tasted amazing as I sampled it. It was a communion moment with Creation itself.

While working it occurred to me that I could, in fact, use some of the juice later in the month for this communion service. This consideration got me thinking about our practice of the Lord's Supper at Nutana Park Mennonite. I find it deeply meaningful the way in which we come together out of respect and love for Jesus. For a moment our disagreements cease. For a moment we subordinate all our political interests, our personal grievances, our idolatries to the one we call Lord. Broken bodies of Nutana Park Mennonite, in all our unworthiness, partaking together at the invitation of Jesus. These were pleasant thoughts for me. It was a type of preparation for communion among us today.

Inspired by these ideas I pulled a Jac Nickel gift off the shelf: a bottle of homemade wine made from berries of the land and much love. I poured a glass of the elixir, filled the juicer with a fresh batch of grapes, and found myself considering matters in a broader scope. Jake wrote that this wine is a blend of chokecherries, Nanking cherries, red currants and rhubarb. Jac Nickel, the maker of this wine, wrote that he "picked and processed this blend to signify ecumenism...We all want to achieve heaven on different paths [and] we all add a different aroma to Christianity." What does communion mean for those Syrian Christians, those Coptic Christians, those Palestinian Christians, those Iraqi Christians—displaced Christians—who have abandoned their vineyards to save their lives? The prophet Micah saw a day when wars would cease and each family would sit under their own vines and fig trees unafraid (4.4). In relative peace we in Canada collect our berries for wine and our grapes for juice. Such is not the case for many of our Christian brothers and sisters across the globe. This reality made me cringe. It was a type of communion with the world which tells me more needs to be done.

That afternoon in September made me wonder how we think about the Eucharist and the implications of the Lord's Supper. September 27, today, seemed the right time to for us to share our thoughts with each other in our community of faith.

Before we launch into sharing within our respective table groups, though, I want to provide a bit of background to the Lord's Supper. I quote extensively now from John D. Rempel who is a learned Mennonite historian, theologian and pastor.

"Throughout Christian history, the church has sought to grasp the paradox that God's transcendent reality can be symbolized by earthbound elements...As Mennonites understand it, the transformation that occurs in communion is that of people and not objects. In the Middle Ages, the elements were held to be so holy that people dreaded to take communion. As a consequence, even though there was a consecration in each mass, people took communion once or twice a year...Some of the Reformers sought to restore frequent communion but were unable to do so consistently because of the persistence of the medieval dread of unworthy communion. In addition, Anabaptists emphasized seeking peace with fellow church members as a precondition for the

breaking of bread.” (John D. Rempel, in *Minister’s Manual*, pp. 60-61) And we all know how tough that can be! As a result, much of our communion experiences in the Mennonite Church has been infrequent and more somber than joy filled. John Rempel continues:

“Rituals condense vast realities into simple gestures. The Lord’s Supper concentrates the saving work of Christ into a moment and an action...Just as he did in his earthly ministry, Jesus comes now and invites us to receive him; the initiative is his, but the response is ours. Thus, the breaking of bread has as much to do with our presence as with his. We prepare ourselves to receive Christ by turning our back on other loyalties and by seeking peace with all (Matt. 5.23-24). This process begins in conversion and baptism but continues throughout our lives: we go our own way and then return. The Lord’s Supper condenses into a gesture this ongoing return to Christ and to our sisters and brothers” (Ibid, 62-63).

What constitutes the Lord’s Supper? It is Christ’s invitation AS WELL AS our response. Jesus accepts us we are and calls to us again and again. With joy we acknowledge that Jesus loves us, loves us enough to die for us while still ensnared by sin. Recognition of this amazing grace is not cheap. Our task is sincere preparation for the Lord’s Supper, our reverential participation in the ritual, our express intention to do those things Jesus spoke of and did (Ibid, 65). And this is hard work, and work we will not get done perfectly. Communion does not assume perfection on our part. No, it affirms God’s saving act along with our INTENTION to move ever nearer perfection. Communion celebrated in this mindset, in fact, may bump us further along the road to greater discipleship. From John Rempel’s perspective, this is what communion means in a Mennonite perspective. This, then, invites two questions of reflection for me which we will discuss in our table groups:

1. Why do you, or do you not, participate in communion?
2. How does the service of communion inspire / affect your discipleship?

The questions are on your tables and I invite you to a time of conversation amongst yourselves. Naturally, if a person is uncomfortable responding to a question it is more than acceptable to pass. We will take approximately ten minutes per question.

#457 Be present at our table, Lord

For the remainder of this worship service I will be guided by the Anglican liturgy for Holy Communion which appears in *The Book of Common Prayer*. I invite you to turn in your hymnbooks to #660. This response prayer is the way in which many many Christians begin their liturgy of communion. HWB #660.

HWB #660

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore we praise you, joining our

voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who forever sing [hymns] to proclaim the glory of your name.

God of all power, Ruler of the Universe, you are worthy of glory and praise. At your word all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth. By your will they were created and have their being.

From the primal elements you brought forth the human race and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill. You made us the stewards of creation. But we turned against you, and betrayed your trust; and we turned against one another. Have mercy on us, O Lord.

Again and again, you called us to return. Through prophets and sages you revealed your righteous Instruction. And in the fullness of time you sent your Son, born of a woman, to fulfill your Law, to open for us the way of freedom and peace. By his blood, he reconciled us. By his wounds, we are healed.

And therefore we praise you, joining with the heavenly chorus, with prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and with all those in every generation who have looked to you in hope, to proclaim with them your glory, in their unending hymn: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

And so, Gracious God, we who have been redeemed by him, and made a new people by water and the Spirit, now bring before you these gifts of bread and berry. Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord.

For On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread, and after he had given thanks broke it saying, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". In the same way, after supper, he took the cup and said, "This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink, do so in remembrance of me".

Remembering now his work of redemption, and offering to you this [offering] of thanksgiving, we celebrate his [life], his death, and his resurrection as we await the day of his coming. [As we partake of your communion as our spiritual ancestors have done]: Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the resumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name. Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the Bread.

I invite your table groups to share the bread which is set before you. The bread is gluten free so that we might all partake together without worry of allergic reaction. As you serve the person next to you please offer the plate with the words, "the body of Christ for you". Let your response be "Thanks be to God". If you wish to refrain from

the communion service simply receive the plate and offer the plate with words to the next person in the circle. Once everyone has received the bread we will eat together. The body of Christ for you—Thanks be to God.

The body of Christ that is for us and our world.

In the same way I invite you to pass the trays of juice before you. The inner circle is grape juice and the outer circle is Saskatchewan berry wine. As you serve the person next to you please offer the tray with the words, “the life of Christ for you”. Let your response be “Amen”. If you wish to refrain simply receive the tray and offer the tray with words to the next person in the circle. Once everyone has received the cup we will drink together. The life of Christ for you—Amen.

The life of Christ that is for us and our world.

We join now together with the whole people of God in prayer. (*Take our Moments and our Days* (Ordinary Time), Week 4 Monday evening); adapted). Through the course of the prayer there will be times of silence for our collective and individual prayers. I will conclude those times of silent prayer with the words, “Lord in your mercy”. Your response will be “hear our prayer”.

God who gives meaning to our souls, you offer us the elements of life. In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we have fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, have sent Jesus to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all. So we pray for ourselves and for those dear to us [open prayers.] Lord, in your mercy..... *hear our prayer.*

You surprise us with generosity. You are faithful not only to us, but those whose lives are entwined most intimately with ours. We pray for our church community and for our neighbors. [open prayers.] Lord, in your mercy..... *hear our prayer.*

You are the joy of your people. We pray for Nutana Park Mennonite Church and the church in all places, that we may know the freedom of life in the Spirit. [open prayers.] Lord, in your mercy..... *hear our prayer.*

Your eyes keep watch over the nations. We pray for the world and for all who are ensnared in greed, violence, and oppression. [open prayers.] Lord, in your mercy..... *hear our prayer.*

We offer you other concerns we carry in our hearts. [open prayers.] Lord, in your mercy..... *hear our prayer,*

Wondrous God,
who raised Jesus from death to life,
you heal the wounds that our swords inflict
and deliver us from fear to faith.
Grant us trust in your saving power,

that we might know your restoring touch this day
through Jesus the Savior, we taught us to pray.

Our father, who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

#327 HWB Great in Thy Faithfulness

This service is ended. Go in peace to love and ser the Lord. Amen.