

From Bread and Cup to Faith and Giving

2 Thessalonians 2: 1-5, 13-17

Luke 20: 27-38

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As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Luke 20: 27-38

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

Coming to the Communion table has always been a powerful, tender and meaningful experience for me. Whether I have heard--or been the one to say-- the invitation, the prayers, the words of institution, they always resonate deeply with why I am even a part of the Christian church. At the table as we together share in the bread and the cup we not only hear of Jesus' love and sacrifice for us, we see, touch and taste the grace of God as the broken bread and poured wine embody the crucified and risen Christ. We are a gathered faith community, and a global faith community, united across miles and now even pixels.

We step back 2000 years to sit at the table with Jesus and the disciples at the Passover feast when he asked them to remember him in the bread broken and given, in the cup poured out. Seated at the table of the Last Supper we hold in our minds and hearts what is to come after this night—betrayal, desertion, arrest, denial, rejection, lies, pain, crucifixion, death, tomb, quiet, and then finally glorious and triumphant resurrection.

We look ahead to the great heavenly banquet when all of God’s promises are ultimately fulfilled, a time when sharing by all finally will mean scarcity for none, when the lamb will lie safely with the lion, when swords will become plowshares and we will no more know war, and all will be just and peaceful.

This is indeed a joyous act of thanksgiving for all that God has done, is doing, and will do for the redeeming of creation.

Yet for all that Communion has always meant to me as spiritual nourishment, it was not until the day when my cup contained wine, and not grape juice, that Communion took on a richness and a depth that I had never experienced or imagined before. When the sip of wine on my tongue, my tastebuds, was dry and sour, instead of Welch’s sweet, I tasted the meaning of the sacrament brand new. I tasted the sour and bitter experiences of that first Communion, of that dark night and the cruel days ahead. I felt my body and mindset shift from the gathered worshipping community at the joyful feast table to fully onto the presence of Jesus Christ who brought us there. I could taste a body broken, and blood shed, for all, for me. It was a visceral and profound moment that has not only lingered with me, it is in my heart each time we gather to celebrate the sacrament. Communion, the act of sharing in the memorial of the body and blood of Christ, grew in depth and understanding as Eucharist, ‘eucharisteo’ the Greek word that means ‘to give thanks.’ The bread and the cup are not just about receiving, they are also about giving thanks, about coming away from the table in faith and giving gratitude. The words of the Psalmist¹ sing true, “O taste and see that the Lord is good.”

The dry, sour, bitter physical, sensory, experience created a deep, profound spiritual experience as the bread and cup became a way to a deeper, broader faith.

Faith is how we live in the ‘already/not yet,’ the time between Jesus’ earthly life and ascension, and his return; the time between the incarnation of the Living God and that unknown yet expected ‘day of the Lord’ when we will be ‘gathered together to him’ - to use Paul’s words. We follow, we stand firm and hold fast, in the traditions, the words, set for us by ancient teachers of faith and on to those we have known, trusted, loved and learned from in our own lives. Faith holds us on a steady path of truth, pulling us back from false and tempting deceptions, from choices that look good yet are deceiving, from ways that appear wise but are destructive. Faith calls us out from the distraction of our Sadducees moments of thinking we are good and sincere yet are lost in the small hypothetical and hypocritical minutiae that does not belong in the world that God sees for us and calls us to see as well. Faith calls us out from the distraction of our Sadducees moments when we are just as capable of taking Jesus’ two rules for faithful living—love God, love our neighbor—and turning them into more than 600 set requirements and nuances and hurdles so others are not welcomed in for just who they are, or true priorities are lost, are delayed.

The dry, sour, bitter physical, sensory, experience created a deep, profound spiritual experience as the bread and cup became a way to a deeper, broader giving as well as a response of gratitude and thanksgiving. The Welch’s sweet image calls up a gratitude and a giving of welcome, inclusion, and hospitality, but the dry, sour, bitter image also calls forth a gratitude and a giving of work and time and financial support of mission and justice for a world that is broken,

abused, and hurting. The God of the living who gathers us together at the table and sends us out in the knowledge of tradition and the wisdom of the gospel reminds us that God's work is not yet complete. Our faithful work and stewardship in the incomplete of the 'already and not yet' is our participation by time, by talent and by treasure. Our time can immerse us in the tangible work of the gospel. Our talent can plan, organize and enable us and others to be the hands, feet and voice of Christ in the world. Our treasure is the tool that supports the ministries, the actions, the projects, that bring our mission statement to life as we continue to put our faith into action beyond the four walls of the church.

As we reflect today on the bread and the cup that bring us to faith and to giving, we are to see ourselves as 'the Stewardship of All Believers' as Douglas John Hallⁱⁱ says in *The Steward.* 'Stewardship must be understood first as descriptive of being the very life of God's people. Deeds of stewardship arise out of the being of the stewards...the act is an expression and consequence of the life that enacts it.'

This spiritual journey from bread and cup to faith and giving comes full circle as faith and giving bring us back to the bread and the cup, to be spiritually nurtured, to be re-centered, to live into 'eucharisteo' to live into giving thanks. We are fed so that we can go out and feed others.

In your own life, how have the bread and the cup not been just about receiving but also about giving thanks, about coming away from the table of Jesus' pure love in faith and then giving back in gratitude?

Stewardship Sunday is November 20, and as we move toward that day, I invite you to prayerfully and with eucharisteo to consider your pledge for 2023, your financial commitment to the work and the ministries of Smith Church. It truly is about moving from bread and cup to faith and giving. Amen.

ⁱ Psalm 34: 8a

ⁱⁱ Hall, Douglas John. *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990, pp237-242