

# Lent: A Time For Renewal of Christian Unity

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

April 5, 2012

Maundy Thursday

I read a story about a family who had an unusual custom for New Year's Eve. Every year, the family would sit together around the supper table. They would take the calendar from that year and rip off one page - one month - remember the events of that month - and then throw it in the fire to burn up. First, they would take January. They would remember a birthday, a family party, and so on. They would laugh and talk about them. But all the memories were not happy memories. They also remembered the anger, problems, conflict, pain and sins they had done to each other. They would remember that God had forgiven them and they were able to forgive each other. They would do that eleven more times until the last month's page was in the fire. When all the calendar pages were burned, the family was at peace. They felt happy, closer, and stronger.

The Lord's Supper is like that family's custom. We are a family, not by blood but by faith in Jesus Christ. We gather together, not around a dinner table, but we gather around an altar. We are here to look back, but not one year. We look back to our recent life. We see our failures and mistakes. We have not obeyed God perfectly. We have failed to love and support each other. Then we look farther back - 2,000 years ago - to Jesus. He was sitting around a table with His friends and began a special meal - the Lord's Supper. Tonight is the very night when we remember Jesus starting the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is such a wonderful, exciting gift from Jesus. God comes to rescue us from our sin, mistakes, and failures. He sends His own Son to die on the cross and forgive our sins. But how would He give us that forgiveness? Here in the Lord's Supper Jesus comes here to each of us to give us the forgiveness that He won on the cross for us. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said, "Take and eat; this is My body. Take and drink; this is my blood." Here, on our altar, Jesus' true body is present with the bread. Jesus' true blood is present with the wine. Every week, we come to the altar and relive this wonderful event. I read the words of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper.

We look back and recall Jesus' death to save us and receive the benefits here at the altar. What a joyful and exciting experience!

At least it's *supposed* to be a joyful and exciting experience. Sometimes it's not. Sometimes we process up to the Lord's Supper out of habit. We eat. We drink. Then we go back and sit down. We are not joyful. We are not excited. We are almost bored. Sometimes people say we should not have the Lord's Supper every week because it would mean less and would become not very important to us. I understand those concerns. However, imagine going to your boss and saying, "Please do not pay me every week because money will mean less to me and become not important." Imagine telling your spouse, "Please do not feed me every day because FOOD will mean less to me and become not important." We would never say those things because money is always important to us and food always means much to us.

Long ago, people did not worry about the Lord's Supper meaning little and becoming less important. The Lord's Supper was most important for Christians. Christians established congregations so that they could have the Lord's Supper together. They celebrated the Lord's Supper often - every week and on special days. Why has our attitude changed?

Maybe we don't really understand what happens in the Lord's Supper. In our text, it says that this cup here is a participation in the blood of Christ. This bread is a participation in the body of Christ. We are alienated from God because of our sin and mistakes. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus comes to us and joins Himself to us. When we eat this bread, we are joined to Jesus' body. When we drink this wine, we are joined to Jesus' blood. Everything that Jesus has, we receive. Everything Jesus is, we become. Jesus' death for sins becomes our death for sins. Jesus' resurrection from the dead becomes our resurrection from the dead. We receive forgiveness for our sins and new life because we are joined to Jesus in the Lord's Supper. He is holy and lives forever. God declares us holy and promises us life forever because we are joined to Jesus in the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a very personal experience. Each of us is joined with Christ Jesus and each of us receive great blessings from him. But the Lord's Supper is also something we do together.

The Lord's Supper is an experience for the Christian community. We were alienated from God because of sin and the Lord's Supper unites us with Christ Jesus - His love, mercy, and forgiveness. We are also alienated from one another. We sin against one another and do wrong. Many people feel isolated and alone in our world today. We need to become united with one another.

The Lord's Supper is a unity with one another. The Lord's Supper does not *cause* us to be united. The Lord's Supper declares a unity we already possess. We do not go to the Lord's Supper together to become united with each other. We go to the Lord's Supper because we are already united. We share a faith together. We are sinners - the same. We believe God loves us - the same. We believe Jesus is God's Son and our Savior - the same. We believe that Jesus died on the cross to forgive us - the same. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead to give us everlasting life- the same. We believe that Jesus gives us His body and blood in the Lord's Supper for our forgiveness - the same. We believe that we will live forever in heaven - the same.

Sometimes, our unity is broken. Christians pick on each other, criticize each other, and are angry at each other. Our fellowship is broken. Some Christians begin to teach falsely and believe errors that are not in the Bible. Our unity of faith is broken. Lent is a time for renewal of Christian unity. Is the only way to unification - better communication, new programs at church, improving ourselves, and so on? No. The only way to become unified is through the forgiveness of our sins. We receive God's forgiveness and then we forgive each other.

Then, we can come forward to the Lord's Supper and *celebrate* that unity. We kneel together, acknowledging our sinfulness. We take Jesus' body and blood, acknowledging our need for forgiveness of sins. We trust Jesus' promise, "This is given *for you*...shed *for you*" and receive His full and free forgiveness. We are unified with Christ. Then we can look around and think, "That person is a sinner like me. That person is forgiven just like me. That person and I believe the same." We are unified with each other.

But there's more. Maybe you have seen an old church with an altar and communion rail in a circle in the front. On the outside of the front wall is the church cemetery. Why did they build church

and cemetery like that? This shows that the people who are buried out there are still members of the church. The church is a unique organization. When you die, you do not stop being a member. When you attend the Lord's Supper, you are unified with each other, but you are also unified with the believers in heaven. Maybe you remember in our Sunday Divine Service, I say, "Therefore, with angels, and archangels, and all the company (believers in) of heaven, we praise your name." When you come forward, you are unified with me and I with you, but we are also unified with Evelyn Henselin and Dick Berg and all the other members of our church in heaven. When you come up to the Lord's Supper, you can think of your parents, grandparents, friends, and family who died in the faith. They are not really dead, but they are with the Lord and we are still unified with them at that special time.

Lent is normally a sad time. We remember Jesus' suffering and death. But tonight is a little different. We remember Jesus setting up a special meal for us. It is a joyful celebration. It is a personal celebration -- your Savior comes to you and unites Himself with you. It is a group celebration. We are united together in one faith, one hope, and one God. So, come forward tonight. Jesus has prepared banquet for you, for me, for us. Receive it and rejoice. Amen.