"Waiting and Remembering"

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 John 13:1-17

This was a special night. Eleven of the twelve there with Jesus knew it was special because this was the Seder meal, the preparation for the celebration of the Passover, a highlight of the religious year. Jesus and Judas knew it would be special for another reason – this would be the night of betrayal. Nothing would be the same for that close-knit group ever again.

Prior to the meal, Jesus must have been thinking about what he would say so his disciples would remember all that they had said and done together in the preceding three years. So, Jesus took this simple meal placed before them and made it so each time they gathered and retold the story they would never forget.

Now, some 2,000 years have passed. *Why* we gather at the table has lost much of its understanding, and often we end up in discussion of *how* or *what* or *how often*. Even as often as we do this, its meaning and purpose are sometimes not as clear as we would hope them to be.

A pastor told of talking with a member of his church about the meaning of communion. The man replied to his pastor, "Oh, I cannot follow all that goes on. I just sit and think quietly about Jesus. I think of that last week with his friends, and the Last Supper, and how he knelt in agony in Gethsemane, how they arrested him, and all night tortured him, and how he died. I get very near to Jesus then, and when I go home, he comes with me."

A pastor was preparing to lead a new confirmation class. The pastor's own daughter was in this particular group and so he was especially excited about what lay ahead.

One evening, as the pastor sat on the front porch reading the evening paper, his daughter came up and sat down beside him.

"Can we talk about this church deal?" the thirteen-old girl asked. Thrilled by the prospect of a great theological discussion with his daughter, the pastor turned and said, "Fire away!"

"I just don't get it!" the girl said.

"Get what?" asked Dad, waiting for an inquiry about the nature of the Trinity or a question about some cloudy detail of the Reformation.

"I just don't get what the big deal is about this communion thing. Why is it so important? What exactly is it that we are supposed to remember? What difference does it make?"

"Oh," came the disappointed reply, who was hoping for a question with a little more meat to it. "Well, let me tell you a story!"

When I was in seminary, we had a course in worship. One day the old professor who taught the class came in carrying a brown paper bag and declared that today we were going to learn the significance of the Lord's Supper. As we began to talk, he reached into the bag and pulled out a handful of buckeyes, and began throwing them, one by one, to each member of the class. Some of the seminarians were from the "Buckeye state".

The professor then reached into his own pocket and removed a small, brown, shriveled up something. Holding it between his two fingers for all to see he said to the class, "See this? This is a buckeye like you have. I have been carrying it around in my pocket since 1942. I had a son who went off to the war that year. When he left, he gave me this buckeye, and told me to put it in my pocket and keep it there until he came home. That way, each time I reached in my pocket. I would always remember him.

Well, I have been carrying that buckeye in my pocket since 1942. And I have been waiting. Waiting for my son to come back, and each time I reach in my pocket I remember my son."

"You see, class," said the old professor, "putting aside all the theological stuff. Putting aside all the mystery. Putting aside all the questions of how, when, and how often. Communion is simply about waiting and remembering. Each time, we, as a community of faith, gather around the table to take the bread and the cup we are remembering, and we are proclaiming that we are waiting for our Lord to return."

The girl was quiet for a while. "That's it, huh? It's just a simple matter of waiting and remembering."

The foot-washing that precedes the Last Supper is the call to serve one another no matter the task. It is our response to Holy Communion with Christ. Christ comes to us in the bread and wine of Holy Communion to forgive our sins and to strengthen us to go out from this place to love and serve one another, to go out from this Divinity Lutheran Church, now empty but alive in spirit in each of our homes to love and serve one another.

Our first Communicants, Alex Crane, Ben DeLaney, Lucy Havel, Logan Kessler, Alexis Vegh, and Brayden Johnson, in their one Saturday class before the virus shut us down, have not only been learning that Christ comes into them when they chew and swallow the bread and drink the wine or grape juice, but also Christ strengthens them in Holy Communion to follow his example to love, serve, and forgive others.

They've also learned there are different names for the meal that describes different aspects of it. The "Lord's Supper" or the "Last Supper" reminds us that this was Jesus' last supper with his closest friends on the Thursday night before his crucifixion.

"Holy Communion" reminds us that Christ comes to us and communes with us in the bread and wine. When we chew the bread and drink the wine, Christ's presence is in us, forgiving our sins and strengthening our faith.

"Eucharist" is the Greek word for "thanksgiving" because we are giving thanks for Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross for our salvation so that His Easter morning resurrection becomes our Easter morning resurrection.

"The sacrament of the altar" describes our gathering around the altar to receive the gift of Christ's strengthening presence as baptized children of God whose sins have been washed away at the baptismal font.

Our first communicants have learned the Lord's Supper is one of two sacraments specifically instituted by Christ that are celebrated by Lutherans. The sacrament of baptism begins our life with Christ. The sacrament of Holy Communion feeds that life.

When our first communicants get back together for another Saturday class and bake the bread for a Saturday night first communion service, they learn that Jesus used unleavened bread and wine. They learn our Divinity home baked bread tastes way better than the cardboard tasting wafers they may receive in another church or during virus times. They learn Holy Communion strengthens our belief that Christ is always with us giving us peace with God, other people, and ourselves.

On a future Saturday night, you'll be seeing us wash our 4th grader's feet and then they'll gather around the altar to eat the bread and drink the wine of Jesus' last supper for the first time. May God bless each of our first communicants, as they await their first communion, and may each of you become a loving servant, following the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May the peace of God . . .

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