

“GETTING READY FOR SUPPER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

May 16, 2021, 9:00 and 10:30 AM

Text for the Sermon: I Corinthians 11:17-34

We have received a very important dinner invitation. Jesus requests the pleasure of our company next Sunday morning.

Let’s talk about table manners. Table manners are among the first cultural habits we learn. You get to move from the high chair to the big table when you can eat without smearing spaghetti in your hair and throwing Jell-O everywhere. And when you get really adept at the finer art of dining you are let out into public and maybe even to a nice restaurant (see Peter Leithart, *Blessed are the Hungry*, p. 117ff.).

Some of you have heard me quote that rather unkind phrase, “no one is useless, they can always serve as a bad example.” Well, the Corinthians are chosen to be that for us. Here is a great example of really bad table manners that is recorded in Scripture to be a warning to us. If we will pay heed to this counsel it will help us get ready for supper.

Paul uses very strong language to admonish the Corinthians. He is especially upset because not only are they abusing and showing contempt for the less fortunate, but in the process, they are desecrating the sacrament of our Lord’s Supper. They are sinning against the body of Christ, the church; and against the body and blood of Christ Himself. They are forgetting their manners and how to act at the family meal.

Do you remember supper time at your house as a child? Remember the days when you were called in from play or work. Mom or dad would call out, “supper time,” and the family came running. For me growing up, suppertime was very faithfully kept. Unfortunately for many of us the experience of suppertime is a fading memory. I want to use the image of suppertime to remind us of what communion is all about and how we should come to it next week.

Suppertime always had rules. Do you remember the rules?

You were not to eat right before supper, especially sweets.

You were to come when called to the family table.

You were to turn off the TV.

You were to wash up, wash your hands and face.

You didn’t start eating until the blessing had been given.

You were to pass everything around and eat what you took.

You weren’t supposed to fight or argue at the table. Suppertime was supposed to be a safe place.

What a heart-warming picture of family life as it used to be, the family table as a picture of peace and provision, of grace and goodness, of love and life. This is an image that helps us come to the Lord's Table. Its suppertime.

Don't ruin your appetite. Come hungry.

A good way to ruin your supper is to fill up on sweets all afternoon so that when it is time for supper you aren't really interested.

It is hard to be hungry for the things of God when we fill up on the junk food and sweets of the world. We fill up on the empty calories of empty entertainment, satisfying our souls with material or temporal things, living for ourselves. We think more stuff, bigger or better stuff will satisfy our longings but they still leave us empty.

I can remember the days when we lived on a sheep ranch in the hills of western Oregon. There were 80 acres of so much to do. Barns with haylofts, tree forts in the apple orchard, a creek that meandered through the property, an old abandoned saw mill in the woods beyond the creek. So many places to explore and play, so many distractions and excuses for skipping supper, so many places to be called from when it was suppertime.

The Corinthians were ruining their appetite for spiritual things by how they were coming to the table. What in your life is curbing or spoiling your appetite for God?

Isaiah 55:2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Malachi 2:2 If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me."

All our earthly pleasures and material blessings will become a curse to us if we don't put Jesus first, if we don't seek Him first and His righteousness. Cultivate a hunger and thirst for righteousness, a longing for God. Blessed are the hungry. Come hungry for God.

Before the Passover feast the Jews cleansed their homes of everything non-kosher. There is wisdom in removing what distracts us from worship. One of the reasons some of us are bored or uninterested with worship is we are too full of the world.

As you come to supper consciously decide to turn off the noise of the world.

Definitely turn off the TV, not just literally, but figuratively.

Saturday evenings we try to limit the TV and video watching. We try to quiet our hearts, slow down, and not stay out late on Saturdays. For over forty five years SNL has been a terrible way

to prepare our hearts for worshiping the holy God. What a terrible thing to fill your mind with as you go to bed.

Sunday mornings I don't read the newspaper, watch TV or check email. Phama plays praise music as one of the ways she prepares her heart. Make the computer off limits before church.

There are so many conflicting and competing voices out there. There is so much static and noise. There are so many voices calling us and tempting us and wooing us. Turn off the world before worship. Turn off the political debates, turn off the sports talk.

Come ready to hear one voice, the voice of our shepherd calling His sheep by name.

Who is invited to the table? It is the family meal.

Growing up normally anyone with the last name of Woodyard was at our table. Mom would holler, "Robbie, Freddie, Andy, Susie, suppertime." It was family.

Who is invited to this table? Anyone with the last name Christian, anyone who has been adopted into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

In other words, this table is for those who recognize Christ, have received Him as their own Savior and Lord and are living in such a way that there is a growing family resemblance.

Romans 10:9-10 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Notice in our text where Paul says, "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

He doesn't say without recognizing the body and the blood of the Lord. The problem at Corinth was not a failure to recognize and understand that the bread and the wine represented the body and blood of Christ. That part is fairly easy to understand. The problem was the way they were treating each other and their failure to discern that the church was the one body of Christ.

In the chapter before this Paul says, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." (I Corinthians 10:17)

We must recognize Christ and recognize the body of Christ present and that we are apart of it. This is a relational sacrament that takes seriously both our relationship with Christ and our relationships with each other. If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and have submitted your life to Him as your Savior and Lord and professed your faith in Him, then you are family, this is the family meal and He calls your name at suppertime.

You should wash up before you come to supper.

There are two ways of doing that. Baptism and repentance. One is a one-time event; the other is on going.

Baptism was and still is the entrance into the covenant community, into the worshipping community of Christians. Some churches still reflect this by placing the baptismal font at the entrance.

Baptism is the outward sign or mark of being washed of our sin and our old nature, cleansed of our unrighteousness, adopted into the family of Christ. This is the first washing, to receive the symbol that we have begun the Christian life.

But after baptism, there is some washing up that we all must do every time we come. Paul calls it self-examination.

I Corinthians 11:27-28 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

It's our practice on the Sunday before Communion Sunday to call us to preparation. It's an invitation to self-examination, an opportunity to clean up before our meal together.

Our own **Heidelberg Catechism** asks the question (81), "Who ought to come to the table of our Lord?" And the answer given is:

"Those who are displeased with themselves for their sins, and who nevertheless trust that these sins have been forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the passion and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and improve their life..."

This call to self-examination is to seek reconciliation with God and with those around us.

I remember years ago being at a pastor's conference. On the last day of our conference we shared communion together. And all of a sudden I realized that I was out of fellowship with one of my brothers. There I was getting ready to participate in a meal that reflects and proclaims our unity in Christ and our unity with one another. But my life was not reflecting the character and nature of my Lord whom I would meet at the table and whom I am called to represent.

I wrestled especially because we were already seated in the room together. If I didn't take communion it would be obvious and if I went to him to talk it would be obvious. I couldn't hide. My first desire was just to leave somehow. But the Lord wouldn't let go of me, so as inconspicuously as I could I made my way to where he was sitting and confessed my sin against him and asked His forgiveness. The whole exchanged probably took 60 to 90 seconds.

The table restored our unity and fellowship. It brought us together as family again. This is not a place for fighting and division, but there our differences are settled. We are family.

In self-examination and in asking for and in giving forgiveness we wash our hands and hearts for supper. When we are washed and forgiven we are ready to eat.

If there is sin in your life that you are hanging on to, not hating, not confessing and repenting of then don't take the Lord's Supper, don't bring judgment on yourself.

The biggest problem in our life is our sin. It's what keeps us from fellowship with God. It's what destroys our relationship with friends, family, and our spouse. It's what robs us of joy and relegates us to misery. It what blinds us to the goodness of God in this life. Be specific, name your sins. Ask for forgiveness from God and from others. Relationships can be restored when sin is acknowledge and dealt with honestly. Be reconciled.

This table is not for those who are without sin, but for those who repent of their sins against God or one another and desire to be reconciled to God and each other.

What about the meal itself? Eating what is in front of us isn't hard, there is so little of it.

My mother was a great cook. I think we liked just about everything she cooked. It wasn't fancy, it wasn't what you might call a big feast, but it was basic good filling nutritional food.

As westerners our idea of a meal is lots of food, lots of variety. Food to us is about filling up, and now days the faster the better. Food for people in the Middle East is about fellowship, friendship, covenant communion.

The simple, small, common things of life are filled with meaning and power.

God chose a loaf of bread and a cup of wine for the feast in which we forever remember His Son.

God shames the wise and strong and takes from the most common of elements, the lowliest of realities to do His great work of salvation. This meal is simple because it isn't about physical needs being met, but about spiritual needs being met. We eat by faith, not by sight.

This food is a feast not because of what food is present, but because of who is present. Notice who is at the table with you when you sit down to supper.

Do we recognize who is at the table with us?

Jesus is present. This is His meal. He said as often as you do this, remember me. He said, "This meal anticipates a meal I will have with you in heaven, and in fact I won't eat of the bread or drink of the cup until I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

Jesus is present when we worship Him, He inhabits the praises of His people. And He is especially present at His table where He invites us to eat and drink with Him.

Just as the sun is physically present in the heavens but its presence is real and felt here on earth, so Christ is bodily present in heaven, but spiritually and divinely present with us here. He is real and He is really, fully, spiritually present.

As real as the bread and the cup are, that is how real His sacrifice on the cross is for us and how real is His forgiveness. As real as the bread and the cup are, that is how real His presence is with us. As real as the bread and the cup are, that is how real is His promise to come again and take us to heaven to eat with Him forever in glory. With this bread and the fruit of the vine He feeds our souls and nourishes us with spiritual food and strength until He comes.

I Corinthians 10:16-17 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

How should we come to this table?

Sad, contrite, down trodden, sorrowing, poor me? Is that how you want your kids to come to your table? No. That is the reason we prepared and washed up. So we can come joyfully, thankfully, expectantly, looking forward to the Father's goodness and provision. This meal is the blessing of God and this cup is the cup of blessing.

In this meal we treasure Christ by remembering Him and His death and resurrection.
In this meal we express the worthiness of Christ by proclaiming what we remember.
In this meal we come to feed our hungry souls with true spiritual food.

In this meal we have a taste of heaven, when we will be called home for supper. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Consume Christ and be united to Him and to each other in love. It is suppertime, you are called, get ready to come. turn off the world, come hungry for spiritual food and drink, wash up, be reconciled, long to be with Jesus and each other. Do this in remembrance of who He is and what He has done for you and why.

Prayer: Holy Father, in the name of Jesus, we humbly bow and ask for your grace to abound to us all as we anticipate and prepare to come to the table of our Lord next week. Prepare us for this taste of heaven, of spiritual food and drink. Cause the significance of this meal to sink in this week as we reflect on the spiritual realities and eternal truths that are ours in this meal. Where there is broken fellowship with you and with each other by the power of your Holy Spirit restore our unity and joy. We ask this for the sake of Jesus and in His name, Amen.