

1 Corinthians 11:23-26
"Incorporated Faith"
October 2, 2016
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Family dinners – you remember them?

I do.

I recall sitting around the dinner table eating a meal together at least 3 times a week as a kid.

Some of the best meals: Spaghetti & Meatballs / Lasagna / Tater-Tot Casserole / Pizza / Sloppy Joes – we weren't big on Atkins in our family.

Some of the worst meals: Liver and Onions / Anything Vegetable / and did I mention Liver and Onions?

When I was younger it was the food that got me to the table.

As I got older, it was the social milieu of the family meal that beckoned me there.

That table became for me the place I learned that I belonged / that I was somebody and that somebody was part of a family and that family was connected and whenever we got up from that table and went out into the world we represented that family.

Okay, you're all smart people, so by now you know where I'm going with this and on this Sunday we call World Communion Sunday – so, I'll not belabor the introduction any longer and get right to the point....

You are somebody and you belong to a family we call the Christian Family.

When you gather around this table it is about the meal and it is also about the social bond we share within this family and when we get up from this table and go back out into the world we represent the Christian Family by how we interact in the world.

We participate in an "incorporated faith."

To be incorporated is to be knit together into the social body and to have the community's dispositional outlook on the world inscribed within us and to allow our part within the community to influence the community's outlook and interaction in the world.

As part of this community, I am reminded that I need the community and social body to enable me to perceive the world; however, the social body also needs me to represent its vision and practice in the environments around me.¹

We need each other – individually and corporately – to be the church.

We gather in worship – around this table – to grow in faith that we will get up from our seats – and from around this table – and go out into the world to sow faith around us.

We are knit together with each other AND we are knit together with Christ from whom we take our cues.

¹ Smith, James K.A., *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Baker Academics, Grand Rapids, MI, 2013, p. 82.

Christ gives us something to emulate while the Holy Spirit empowers and guides us along the way.

The wonderful thing about this whole scenario is that it often operates “under the radar” – as we participate in the community we are formed into the people God desires us to be.

Like the engine in a Prius, we often forget it is running – because it is so quiet – while it takes us on our daily errands.

If I can take the car illustration a bit further down the road – the vehicle’s longevity can be determined by the contents of what we put into it – the better the gasoline or motor oil – the better the engine will run and the longer it will last.

Every day we are putting fuel into the engine of our lives and it is shaping our outlook and interactions in this world – with what are we fueling our lives?

Enter worship – Enter community – Enter one aspect of our faith which incorporates both (see what I did there?) – Communion.

This meal by its very nature is communal and worship laden.

In our text this morning, verses 23-26, Paul tells in brief summary about Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper. However, if we read the text in isolation from the larger context we might miss something bigger.

To understand the situation, let’s go back to how the Lord’s supper was celebrated in the first-century church. In the early church, the Lord’s supper was part of an actual meal that believers ate together. The community ate to satisfy normal hunger, then at some point in the meal, they shared some bread and wine, probably along with prayer, to make the symbolic connection to Jesus’ last meal. In fact, we can surmise from reading the text that the meal itself was something like a potluck dinner, with each family bringing some food.

There are some churches today, begin their weekly worship with a potluck meal for the community which then goes into worship.

We also learn from the context of the reading that some Christians in Corinth had resources to bring better food to the meal. All however brought what they could. This led to a problem because instead of everybody sharing what they had brought, those who brought better food wanted to eat that food themselves without sharing. Paul points out in verse, 21, “For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.”

In other words, Paul is telling the Corinthian Christians, *you’re missing the point of the Lord’s Supper. It isn’t to promote a ‘look out for yourself’ attitude – it is a unifier to you to become the body of Christ. You have your own homes for your private meals, when you gather together, don’t dive into get the best food for yourself. Instead, share with one another and be a community of Christ.*

Paul summed it up this way, “So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together it will not be to your condemnation.” (vv. 33-34)

Our Christian journey is not meant to be a solitary one. Each person is not commissioned to work on just their own spiritual relationship apart from others. The writer of Hebrews wrote about us not forgetting to “...consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching...” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

There is a prison chapel in Port Arthur, Tasmania, the island off the southeast tip of Australia which is designed in such a way that the sanctuary is comprised of little cubicles in which prisoners were secured singly during worship services. The chaplain while conducting services to a gathered community never saw the whole group together – rather the officiant saw only 50 or more individual faces peering out from their cubicles. The separation prevented inmates from seeing or communicating with one another. While it may have been designed to prevent violent offenders from forming a mob – from a theological standpoint it missed the mark in creating a church for the worship separation in no way created community.

Brian Greet tells of something he saw when traveling in India which has helped him understand the church in a new light. While visiting a Christian community where people suffered from leprosy he recalled a scene as the group headed for the central dining room for lunch. He heard the sound of laughter behind him. Turning around, he saw two people, one riding on the other’s back. They pretended to be horse and rider and were thoroughly enjoying themselves. Then Greet noticed that the man carrying his friend was blind and the man he was carrying had crippled feet.

The one without eyes used his feet while the one without feet used his eyes.
Together they fetched their food and shared in the journey and the meal.

The church is not meant to be solitary Christian confinement. It is a fellowship of faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Dedicated Disciples who form a community and a community which is fed together in a common meal. In this communion meal, the church is reminded of the importance to our own spiritual experience of the community’s experience of faith.

We receive spiritual sustenance and offer spiritual sustenance in the company of others.
We need each other – individually and corporately – to be the church.
We gather in worship – around this table – to grow in faith that we will get up from our seats – and from around this table – and go out into the world to live in faithful ways.

Alleluia and Amen.