

Body Broken; Healed

Menno Mennonite Church
February 14, 2021

Purpose: To promote the invitation to the body across many experiences

Message: The table is always meant to strengthen our sense of the body.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 [selections] (I will read); Psalm 23

Synopsis: We are what we eat. As we partake in communion, and come and gather around the table of Christ, we are called to be the people of God that we are. It is around the table that we are called best reflect the body of Christ, and to celebrate the way of God that we live together. In light of this, we must remember that as we gather around table, we are called to remember not just the personal relationship with Christ that it represents, but the larger body that is formed and nourished by the sacrificial love of God in Christ.

¹⁷ Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. 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. ²² What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

In the following areas
I have no praise for you,

for your meetings do more harm than good

¹⁸ In the first place,
I hear that when you come together as a church,
there are divisions among you,
and to some extent I believe it.

¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you
to show which of you have God's approval.

²⁰ When you come together,
it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,
²¹ for as you eat,
each of you goes ahead
without waiting for anybody else.

One remains hungry,
another gets drunk.

²² Don't you have homes
to eat and drink in?

Or do you despise the church of God
and humiliate those who have nothing?

What shall I say to you?
Shall I praise you for this?
Certainly not! Me Geneta!

²³ For I received from the Lord
what I also passed on to you:

The Lord Jesus,
on the night he was betrayed,
took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and said,

"This is my body, which is for you;
do this in remembrance of me."

²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ 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 One ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on themselves.

³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

³² When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

³³ So then, my beloved, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.

³⁴ If anyone is hungry, they should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

And when I come I will give further directions.

How is that for warning you off the notion of taking bread and cup anytime soon. These strong words read a little bit like a disclaimer for pharmaceuticals, detailing the side effects that is always there but nobody hears-- this product is associated with the seeing of pink elephants, an instant change into a hideous, murderous fiend going by the name of Dr. Jekyll, or, worst yet, dry mouth. If you have any of this happen, please consult your doctor. This disclaimer—consumption of communion without giving consideration to the body of Christ—the whole body of Christ—may result in condemnation, discomfort, illness and even death upon consumption. Paul, for all of his faults—run on sentences, grammar to make you wince, and theological metaphors that can be awfully tough to slog your way through—has never in all his writings said something he did not mean, or spare people for the sake of politics. And this is the case here as he is giving instruction for how to do communion. The Church of Corinth had obviously done something to draw his attention, and they succeeded in getting it.

Yet, here we are the body of Christ. Most of the time we skip over this little tirade and keep on going to chapter 12 of First Corinthians, reveling in the luscious metaphor of the body that rises from this issue, skipping the details for another time. Because, really, who doesn't want to do that? It's a far more attractive metaphor and much happier description of the whole concept Christian life—demanding to be sure—but comfortable all the same. Here we are, the body of Christ, each one indispensable, made up of folks from every stripe and background, both here in this particular body and the body more generally all the same. It is a beautiful, rich metaphor with lots going for it along the way. We are the body of Christ; members of each other. We cannot function separately from the body. This is our metaphor and we love it deeply.

That said, I do wonder at how well we live it. I am not speaking about any one particular way of being in our body or all the rest, though we always do well to look within our selves and wonder where the body needs tending. More broadly, I wonder if this is how the church really works, whether it is still a functional metaphor for us. I say this because when I am being really honest, I do not always share the pain of those who I hear of as brothers and sisters who are suffering. When things go poorly in another congregation, I feel a passing regret and sigh deeply, but how well am I moved. As we have worked time and again into church being more a question of style and preference, I wonder if we loose our sense of what it means to be the body together, even when things aren't always to our taste. I have to admit that the work of the body

which I think is still how things SHOULD be, often feels about as remote to me as the church of Corinth does from today.

In many ways, the body makes us uneasy. I have been asked more than once whether the bread the cup really HAS to be a graphic as it is; body broken, blood shed. Left to us, I think we would gravitate to something a good deal more manageable and less physical and personal; community works well. We reach for community as of way of saying “sure, we belong to each other, we interact with one another, but we aren’t going to be tied together too tightly.” It gives a bit more space, and relieves us from the more dire elements of Paul’s indictment here. We honor each other, sure, but we don’t have to go quite so overboard as to say that we are connected at the level that Paul seems to suggest. Community is this magic result of caring for each other enough that common identity and cause just emerges out of a shared experience of purpose and place to make something happen. It is this sort of romantic ideal that we seem to think will be found when we find the right blend of people of think, act, and believe like us. It is the long sought grail of modern life—finding our community in the midst of the myriad options online and elsewhere open to anyone with the proper tech or the right introductions. If we have community, then we are all set and everything is happy.

Which makes me wonder whether those who so laud community have actually done real community at all. Because when you get past the “really; Me too!” rejoicing of the thing, the reality is that community—true community (body by a different name)—is just downright hard. I lived in a small group house in my later years of college. It was a great experience, designed both from the college and by us to be community from the ground up. We ate together. We played together. We played together. We even assigned familial roles to each other based on our level of responsibility (I was the family’s over-hyper labradoodle). But we also fought like the cats and dogs we were; over sleep habits, eating habits, cleaning habits, and just about any other thing we could think about. I remember one time when my housemates chose to express their displeasure with my failures to clean the kitchen to their expectation by depositing the leftovers on my pillow. That is community; sleeping with compost on your pillow, and still needing to find a way to be in the same group, the same place, working on the same problems.

Somehow, that gets left out of the glossy idealized brochures. No matter what you call it being body together is just plain hard. To really share life takes work, constantly, something which Valentines Day, as it is, should at it best remind us of—that there is someone with us that

we are willing to keep working with, even in the hard stuff along the way. By all means—go for the flowers and romance and all the rest, if that is your thing. But also take time to congratulate yourselves and the people you love today on the willingness to keep working along the way.

This is the community, the love of body, that Paul is writing to here—a bunch of in-fighting, self-important, power hungry people who were using the occasion of the supper to display their own importance. Its hard; its messy, its work. Not a great valentine, I will admit. But this is what inspires Paul to write this metaphor of the body, and to warn them so drastically against dishonoring it. The work is doing the honoring of each other, he seems to say, even we don't feel like it. We should not be somehow surprised to find that body is hard. We often do not behave like body, as we selectively consider who is in and who is out of the body of Christ. We often do not hurt like body. We often do not move like body as people of all different stripes and persuasions come together as one in the strength and hope of Christ. If there are not people we really don't like in the church, than the church has failed in its job, at least in part, because the job of the body is about welding the desperate elements of the human condition into the only thing that has ever mattered: Christ Jesus who is the head.

If we take the language of body seriously, and we should, we come to be bound together solely by the sacrifice and leadership of Christ Jesus. We are the body together because we are the body who is formed in the coming to the table to find Christ. And when we come to the table, we are the body whether we feel it or not, whether we like it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, both here at Menno, but in the whole wide universe that is the church. We are invited to the table as we are for who we are for the body broken is offered to all who want to follow after it, be formed by it, have life guided by it. When we are baptized, there are some simple questions; do you take Jesus to be your Lord, do you promise to follow the way of Christ the best you can, do you want to be part of the body? That's it. That's the quiz. There is no minimum requirement, no mandatory purchase, no all the rest. There are papers proving citizenship in the kingdom of God, only that we trust God and seek to follow Christ.

As such, the body of Christ in the universal sense is far bigger than what we can imagine. I don't think it is going to take anyone in this room too long to come up with a face or name who we wish were not part of the body. But the thing is, this is not our table, and not our body. It is not up to us, in the grandest sense, to pick and choose. That belongs only and solely to God. As such we gather around the table of our Lord with odd fellowship, and with folks who we may not

be comfortable with, want to eat with talk with or be with. Yet here we are gathered in the name of the living Christ. God insists that every last one of us is worth loving, worth claiming, worth saving, worth dying for, and worth a resurrection beyond that would be our very worst. God is the host who would bring all people to the table and remind us of the need to be body as we were created to be, to be what God wants us to be. As such how can we stay away?

When we come to the table in a little bit, I invite you to imagine the table as it is—this messy, impressive, challenging place of hope, healing, and promise that God meets us even here.

The good news of the table is the good news of the body, and that is that we are a part of it just for wanting to follow Christ. Try as we might the table will never be the clean, organized place we might wish it to be. Isn't that frustrating? And isn't that just about the best thing you have ever heard. The body will never be easy, and in some way it will always will be broken until it is ultimately made one. We can resent it sure, but more of the time, I think it is exactly the right way to think of ourselves as God thinks of us: each beloved, each present, each part, inseparably of the body.

We are a part of the community/the body of the church, whether we want to be or not. We belong to one another -- because we belong to God. We belong to one other. We belong at the table. Period. End of sentence.