***GUESS WHO’S COMING TO DINNER: SOME CORINTHIANS***

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Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

When I was in high school and college I had a much bigger appetite than I do now. As a result, my mom often fed me at home **before** we went to dinner at someone else’s house. This began shortly after we went to the home of a good friend who taught at Slippery Rock University; through the college he got a great deal on lobster tails and invited our family to dinner with his family and some other folks. Unfortunately for my parents but fortunately for me, the adults were all seated in the dining room and I was seated with the younger folks at a table in the living room. Each time the host came in and offered another lobster tail I said, “Sure.” That ended when my mom came in and found the shells of **seven** lobster tails on my plate! In my defense, I didn’t ask for them; he offered and it seemed impolite to turn him down. A growing boy needs to eat!

I don’t know for sure, but my mom’s decision to feed me ahead of time may have been inspired by that portion of the letter to the Corinthians I read moments ago:

*If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together it will not be for your condemnation.*

Paul was writing to a young church that was experiencing conflicts around a meal that was supposed to be unifying for them. They were supposed to come together as a church family to share a meal which included the Lord’s Supper, but the reality was that some came early and ate and drank their fill apart from the others. Instead of gathering to remember the risen Lord in the breaking of bread and sharing of a cup as one community, some came early just to eat, drink and be merry with their wealthy friends. The unifying meaning of the meal was forgotten amid the rollicking feast that some were sharing to the exclusion of others. Instead of being united at one table, they were divided by their practices at that table. As Paul describes it:

*When the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.*

It is worth remembering that these holy meals were celebrated, not in a public building like ours beneath a tall steeple, but in the homes of Christians in the Corinthian community. The breaking of bread and sharing of a cup in remembrance of Jesus was part of that gathering, but the meal in those Corinthian homes also included something akin to our dinner groups or potlucks – a time to eat, drink and share fellowship together. The Lord’s Supper was to be a meal shared by the church as a family, but the unity of that shared meal was being destroyed by divisions along class lines that had the haves eating and drinking together before the have-nots arrived.

The Corinthians were missing the point of the meal, for the Lord’s Supper had lost its holy character and become just another time to eat. At the table they were all to eat from **one** loaf of bread and drink from **one** cup and remember **one** savior as a visible sign of their **one**ness in Christ, a unity that cut across lines of race, ethnicity, vocation and social class. The fellowship, in Greek the *koinonia*, at that table was to be shared by all, not just by some. Those who were too hungry to wait for others to arrive, should eat at home first, suggests Paul. Those who want to eat with only their friends should do so at another time and place. As brothers and sisters in Christ, all were to be welcome to the table to share the Lords’ Supper; none should be excluded so that unity, remembrance of the great sacrifice of the savior, and comprehensive *koinonia* could be lived out together.

We follow Paul’s guidance when we gather here at this table. All are welcome here. Communion is not a private practice to which only some are invited, an individual sacrament to be taken alone. It is a celebration of the community who takes, eats and drinks in remembrance of the risen Lord. At our early service we gather around the table as a sign of our unity. At our later service we receive the elements but wait to eat and drink them at the same time. This is a meal we celebrate together, as one people, one family, remembering one Lord.

One of my high school friends attended a Methodist church in Harrisville, PA; as we do, at communion they received the bread and waited to eat it together. The bread they used for communion was a square of spongy Wonder bread. One Sunday as Bill was holding the bread and waiting for all to be served, he began to roll the soft bread around on his fingertips until it had condensed down to a hard BB. At about that time, the minister announced, “Now in the true spirit of Christian fellowship, everyone pass your bread to the person on your right.” The little old lady to Bill’s right reached out her hand, but he was too embarrassed to hand over his little BB of bread, so he refused her again and again until finally he received a square piece of bread from the person to his left, passed it on to the puzzled woman sitting next to him, and kept the BB for himself.

That true spirit of Christian fellowship, that *koinonia* that shares with one another, permeates our celebration of this meal. It is fellowship with Christ who invites us to his table and promises to be with us in this meal. It is fellowship with one another as equals at this table. None are better than others here; all are sinners in need of the grace and mercy of God. We gather here to remember the grace and mercy poured out for us in the crucified body of Christ. When we hold the broken bread in our hands we remember his broken body. When we place the bread on our tongues we remember his claim to be the “bread of life.” When we taste the juice we remember his blood shed for us. When we celebrate this meal we remember that he first celebrated it with his disciples on the night that he was arrested, betrayed, beaten, and then crucified – for us.

For two thousand years those who call themselves his disciples have gathered at tables around the world to take, eat and drink in remembrance of him. They have done so in times of war and peace, in times of drought and deluge, in times of plague and prosperity, in times of joy and sorrow. The table may be stone or wood or bamboo; the kind of bread varies widely; the cup may be filled with juice or wine; the words may be spoken in Greek or Russian or Arabic or Korean or English. But the same holy words are repeated and the same savior is remembered and the same Lord’s Supper is enacted. This holy meal is never about us. It is about the One who died for us, the One who made this meal holy by his death and resurrection, the One who invites us to do this in remembrance of him.

Paul urges us not to forsake the holiness of this holy meal as the Corinthians had done. He encourages us to pause at this table and examine ourselves, to take a hard look at who we have been and who we have failed to be, to repent of the ways in which we have refused to follow Christ faithfully, to recommit to be more faithful disciples, and to rededicate our lives to the glory of God. We do so not in order to be worthy of the sacrifice Christ made for us – that sacrifice was purely a gift of grace; we do so not in order to be worthy to sit at this table, for that too is a gift of grace. We do so in order to be more like the people we were created to be, more like the disciples we claim to be, more like the community we are called to be, more like the Savior who invites us to be – here, at his table, at the Lord’s Table where we take, eat and drink in remembrance of him. It’s not magic. It is grace – for you, for me, for all of us! Amen