

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • NOVEMBER 4, 2018

The Psalm Litany

Based on Psalm 146

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live.

*The Lord sets the prisoners free, opens the eyes
of the blind, watches over the strangers,
and upholds the orphan and the widow.*

The Lord will reign forever in all generations!

The Scripture

1 Corinthians 11:23-25

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The Message

A Eucharistic Thanksgiving

A Bigger, Inclusive Table

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Fitting for Broadway's month of Giving Thanks, I am honored to preach a reflection on what gives me the most joy in worship. It's coming to the table for Holy Communion, or the Celebration of the Eucharist – a fancy Greek word that literally means "Thanksgiving." As my faith grows, so does the importance of this special sacrament to me. I rejoice when all God's children come together at one Bigger, Inclusive Table.

This phrase, a bigger inclusive table was penned by my spiritual mentor, Richard Rohr. I am beside myself that I finally got to meet Richard when our Mid-America Men and Friends traveled out to New Mexico for an event called Soularize that he hosted. I talked to him first actually in the buffet line and just

had to almost fall on my knees to thank him for changing my life and honestly, saving my faith. He returned this with his standard graciousness by saying, "Thank you, but it wasn't me; it was all in you."

It is that element contained in each of us, that inner strength, all that we need to have a transformative life and a sincere faith.

When I explained that I am a Disciples minister, he replied, "Oh the Disciples! That's the church that works hard for justice!" I couldn't have been more proud to be understood as a church that follows all the teachings of Jesus Christ. Indeed, our coming together weekly as a family to the Table is an act of complete justice.

Rohr describes Holy Communion as the most radical, counter-cultural, #Resist, subversive act of Christianity today. Bread and wine are not Christian comfort foods. Communion is not and never has been a reward for good Christian worthiness. In its most basic, elemental form, communion is us entering Christ's brokenness. We allow ourselves to be broken with him by shedding our pride and ego, so can we, in turn, can feed the spiritually starving and malnourished from those offering only feel-good religion.

When we remember Christ, as our scriptural words of institution reenact, we stand in Truth that sets us free. The Greek word for Truth, *aletheia* also infers Freedom. Jesus' listeners, by knowing a river with the same name that meant "remember," knew that Truth meant not forgetting – or remembering.

I am right at home in our Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), who are always a People of the Bigger, Inclusive Table. No one is turned away. This is the Truth we shall remember when we remember him. Rohr describes how Jesus consistently ate in new ways and with new people, especially those who were oppressed or excluded from religion. He would always find his place, not at the main table, but at that little, cardboard, folding table we set on the porch for Thanksgiving, where we put the kids and the ornery relatives to eat their meal away from everyone else. That's where Jesus always ate. A great number of Jesus' healings and exorcisms take place while he's entering or leaving a house for a meal. In the process he redefines power and the kingdom of God. Jesus shows us that spiritual power is social action that is primarily exercised outside the structures of the temple. Yes, we are gathered in this "temple" but eat at the Table, but what is more important is what we take with us when we leave to find someone else that needs the Bread of Life. Of course, it is not necessarily easy work.

Notice how Jesus is accused by his contemporaries. By one side, he's criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:10-11); by the other side, he's judged for eating too much (Luke 7:34) or eating with the Pharisees and lawyers, the people on the inside – yes, he ate with them, too (Luke 7, 11, 14). He ate with both sides. He found that wonderful, smooth line between red and blue. That's where he was. He ate with lepers (Mark 14:3), he received a woman with a bad reputation (Luke 7:36-37), and he even invited himself over to a "sinner's" house. "Guess what, Zacchaeus, I'm coming over to your house for dinner." (Luke 19:1-10). He didn't please anybody, it seems; he was always breaking the rules and always making a bigger table.

The power of Holy Communion isn't in the elements themselves, but some are memorable. Working with youth, who I find are addicted to communion. Every time we gather, they want it. However, they often forget to prepare by buying bread and juice. They have to scramble to find the elements. So, I have taken and eaten: goldfish and grapes, graham crackers and hot chocolate, saltines and pink lemonade, chips and salsa, and even Squisher candy that counted for both body and blood. Squisher is a kind of candy that after chewing it for a while, squirts a little liquid. It represented both body and blood. I got their point.

I have also experienced the joy of what was communion for me at a synagogue's Sabbath service when a family baked challah, the sweet, kosher braided bread, all day together and shared it with Jews and Gentiles alike. On this last Sabbath, all Christians were invited to go to synagogue as an expression of solidarity after the tragic murder of 11 faithful Jewish worshippers. I have heard of reports of immense joy when we stand in solidarity with those that have been hurt.

On a world communion Sunday, a Vietnamese refugee, another wounded person, shared her traditional cookies which were sweet, ball-shaped, morsels of every pastel color imaginable. I wished we could have shared that every Sunday.

A dear, dear spiritual brother of mine just shared with me on Friday how he, his wife, and daughters, ages 2 and 4, celebrate communion at home weekly. The girls ask for it often. Even when Mom and Dad are momentarily not exactly on speaking terms, the family grows closer together every single time they share. Can you imagine the healing, the better start if every church meeting, every business meeting, began with serving each other in humility and grace?

This is a Thanksgiving worship or sorts, so I want to share with you communion experiences I have had for which I am very thankful. They have become the three most powerful communion experiences for me were not in churches. The power was not from transubstantiationist words of institution or literally, Hocus Pocus /*Hoc est corpus*/ "This is my body." Each communion had transfigured me because of the unlikely combination of those gathered and the unlikely circumstances.

The first was at the First Stop homeless day center in Huntsville, Alabama. A group of trouble-making clergy had gone out there to give the folks an Easter service. We actually did this on the Saturday before, but it worked. The weather was perfect, so we worshiped outside on lawn chairs. It was a beautiful, incredible experience!

The service was nice, very folksy, and then we had communion. A common loaf and cup were passed for each person to take, break off a piece of bread and dip into the juice.

After the service was over, my Episcopal deacon friend took the leftover bread and juice and handed me a big chunk and one of the cups. "Will you please help me consume all of this?" she asked. In Anglican tradition, there are to be no leftover elements and they certainly are not to be tossed in the trash or thrown on the ground, even for the birds to eat. Gulp! I thought off all the less-than-clean fingers that removed morsels from that bread and perhaps lips with soars that drank what I was about to drink. "This is my body..." Clearly understood!

Last September, I returned to the Turner Bike Hostel in Tebbetts, Missouri. It is a wonderful respite. The last time I was there, my buddy Jack and I decided to spend the night, so we could get an early start to ride on the Katy Trail in Rocheport. We had just finished leading an incredible men's retreat and were still riding on that spiritual high that retreats bring. We were nonstop talk, talk, talk, never-shut-up.

We met three other male cyclists who were riding together for a nice guys' getaway. We didn't want to intrude so Jack and I retreated again to the front porch and broke open some cheap Budweisers and stale popcorn we had on hand. It was all leftover from the ministers' retreat we had attended earlier that week. We wanted to be neighborly of course and invited the men to join us, which they declined.

Jack and I were nonstop talking, each sharing about the experiences we felt on this retreat and our impressions of what the men got out of our presentations. We suddenly felt like we were being listened to. We shared with them our initiation experiences from the Men's Rites of Passage held in Minnesota earlier that summer.

One by one, each of the three men came out to be with us, evidently not frightened by his and my outpouring of male honesty, mutual brokenness, and heart-pounding revelation. The guys entered our conversation and equally opened up how each was riding trying to sort through some problems, make decisions, work off some frustrations and anger, and ultimately find themselves.

One man, a doctor, said point blank, "No one understands how hard it is for me." Yes, we understood. Yes, we did understand. Tears began to well in our five pairs of eyes. The doctor left, I thought we perhaps we had pushed him too hard.

But he returned carrying a bottle of fine McCallum Scotch and exquisite English walnut, roasted almond, pecan trail mix. It was not the cheap stuff we can buy at Sam's Club filled with lots of oatmeal. It was an incredibly high-quality mix. It was if they were rations clearly hidden in his bag, or just waiting for the wait moment to come out of top-secret hiding. He had little medicine cups with him; you know what I'm talking about, slightly bigger than a plastic communion cup.

Cheap beer and popcorn were no longer worthy. He poured each of us a dose of the Scotch and placed in our hands the incredible mixed nuts. We ate together, then drank. No words of institution, no elders' prayers, but the healing through newfound brotherhood was my eucharist thanksgiving. Jack and I were going to leave early the next morning for a good start; the guys begged us to wake them up before we left, and we did. It was all for one last hug of farewell.

Lastly, at the Men's Rites of Passage, we closed an anguishing but renewing spiritual confrontation of our brokenness, our shame, our guilt, and our symbolic death. So, yes, we too could be raised and renewed. Our last moments together were around an incredibly long table full of the powerful symbols that we encountered during our week of retreat.

Some of our elders were Roman Catholic priests and as you may know, inviting non-Catholics to a table they prepared could get them excommunicated.

They weren't concerned in the least. However, Father Kevin found a way around it and began saying that for this Holy Communion, he would be using the liturgy from the Iona tradition - that great ecumenical, international, inter-religious community off the coast of Scotland. Then he shared this invitation from the Iona Abbey worship book.

The table of bread and wine is now to be made ready. It is the table of company of Jesus, and all who love him. It is the table of sharing with the poor of the world, with whom Jesus identified himself. It is the table of communion with the earth, in which Christ became incarnate. So come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more; you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time; you who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed; come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here. [1]

The elements were not passed, nor did we come forward to receive them from a celebrant. We men formed multiple lines on both sides of the table and thus each man stood across from someone on the opposite side of the table. I didn't know who would randomly be opposite of me, but he served me, and I served him. What an incredible intimacy that was created by us.

Hymns and music were being sung and played throughout this. When I took my seat, after I had received my communion elements what would be played next but Ashoken Farewell from Ken Burns' *Civil War* series. That most haunting of melodies that equal good-byes broke me down into a puddle of tears. Best tears ever.

We will come to this bigger, inclusive table of love here shortly. Come with your hopes and dreams. Come with your memories of celebrations of the past, but also leave them behind. Be open to what God will serve you, what Christ will taste like, what he offers to quench that thirst – at this most radical expression of our faith and of our religion.

References:

[1] *Iona Abbey Worship Book* (Wild Goose Publications: 2001), <https://www.ionabooks.com/iona-abbey-worship-book.html>.

Inspired by Richard Rohr's Daily Devotional from the Center of Action and Contemplation of July 23, 2018 which he adapted from Richard Rohr with John Bookser Feister, [*Jesus' Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount*](#) (St. Anthony Messenger Press: 1996), 81, 83.

