

Do This in Remembrance of Me
Sermon preached on I Corinthians 11:23-26
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If I catch a whiff of petunias in the summer, I am immediately transported to 210 Jackson Blvd in Wilmington, Delaware where I visited my grandparents each summer. Petunias and the scent of Grandmother's Revlon lipstick place me right in their backyard and the joy of being with them.

I'm guessing you have your own transporting smells – steaks on the grill, fragrant roses, Chanel Number 5 – and suddenly it's summer on the lake or dinner at a long ago family table. Sounds carry us too. A big band song, the Beatles, or Goo Goo Dolls on the radio in a flash we are young again, and we know exactly where we were and who we were with. So too with the taste of butterscotch candy or the sight of a firefly on a summer's eve. Off we go, back to a moment in time, fully present to what was then.

Senses activate memory. It is one of the graces of living in a body. And one of the hazards too – we've learned how veterans suffering from PTSD are triggered by sounds and sights – a reminder of how powerful our senses are. I like to think they may be activated for good in our worship experience.

As Greg reminded some weeks ago, we are embodied. Our worship is incarnate. We sit, stand, touch; we practice stillness. Today as we continue our series on the elements of worship, we will consider Communion, another incarnate expression of worship. Engaging our senses of taste, smell, touch, sound and sight can help us connect with the many layers of meaning surrounding communion and ultimately, mysteriously with our God.

As you recall the purpose of this summer series is to explore the nature and elements of worship after a year of Covid and all the adaptations that had to be made. Later this summer, the worship committee will consider ways to make our worship experience more meaningful, including the sacrament of Communion.

What is the difference when we have the elements brought to us in the pew or when we come forward to the table? Do we take the elements from the tray or receive them with open hands? As you reflect, Greg invites you to share your thoughts with him.

This morning we consider Jesus' first recorded words, as given to us by Paul. Do this in remembrance of me, he said. As every confirmand can tell you, communion is one of only two sacraments we celebrate. Baptism is the other. Each is a physical, tangible sign of invisible gifts and grace.

God knows that in our creatureliness, we need concrete things to point us to the extraordinary. In communion, we ingest real food - the bread and juice - to taste and see that the Lord is good.

It's a simple meal rich with meaning and mystery. That's why there are different names for it. It is sometimes called Eucharist, telling us it is a meal of thanksgiving; it is also called the Lord's supper because it is his table and we are his guests. It is known as communion as we experience union with God and one another; Sometimes it is known as the breaking of bread by which Christ makes himself known as he did to disciples after his death. It is a foretaste of heaven and his pledge for the great feast.

In sum, it is bread for the journey as we slog through the wilderness. It is given freely to each of us whether we are steadfast or faltering in our belief.

It is perfectly ordinary, like any supper and then it's not, because it's also a ritual – one that can transport us into a deeper experience and understanding of God's abundant love and extravagant mercy.

Here at Clarence, there are two ways we participate in this ritual – seated in our pews or up front by intinction.

During a typical program year, silver trays of bread and juice are stacked on the table until our elders carry them row by row into the sanctuary. In this way we serve one another as Jesus served us. As in fine dining, there are two courses with a pause in between – first the bread and then the cup. And practicing hospitality, we wait until everyone is served before we take a bite and then a sip.

During the stillness, the waiting, we contemplate Christ's life and love and ministry; his death and resurrection until he comes. In the silence we commune with God and one another. One of the graces of receiving communion this way is that we need not, indeed we cannot, earn this meal. It is freely and lovingly given to us by God.

And while the saying goes that it's better to give than receive, some among us do a lot of giving and serving. How blessed it is to sit and be served, to receive.

The second way we celebrate communion, at the 8:30 service and in the summer, is by intinction. Lucille Weaver introduced it to the congregation more than 20 years ago. Intinction is a term to describe dipping the bread into the cup to receive the elements together, more like going to a buffet than fine dining.

When we receive communion by intinction, it asks something of us. It asks us to respond to God's invitation to a feast – to get up and find our way to the front. I believe there is grace in this method of communion too.

I am reminded of the story of Elijah from I Kings. He's fleeing for his life and has had it. He tells God he has nothing left and is ready to die. But twice he was wakened to find

bread and water. The second time he is wakened, the angel tells him that he must get up and eat – otherwise the journey will be too much for him. And so he got up and ate. On the strength of that food, we learn, he went on for another 40 days and 40 nights.

That is what is asked of us in intinction– to get up and eat – that we too might journey on. We come forward as a community in a kind of “come as you are party” – the young and the old, the fit and the impaired, the wise and the innocent, in our faith and our doubt, each of us welcome just as we are. What a grace this is.

This morning as you have throughout Covid, we don’t take the bread from the plate. Rather we open our hands to receive the bread. This seems a perfect metaphor to me – receiving with open hands what Christ would give us. I invite you to notice your own experience of receiving the bread today.

However you decide to shape your worship for the next few years, this is a meal where Christ is host and present in a real way. It is a supper of true communion – one with God and each another. It is a meal of remembrance, comfort and hope.

I want to share a story told by Charles L. Allen, born 1913 and who lived until 2005. He was a United Methodist minister who served largely in Atlanta, Georgia. He is author of God’s Psychiatry, an extraordinary book using some of the best-known passages of the Bible as “prescriptions” to cure discouragement and doubt.

Elsewhere, he wrote about the thousands of children orphaned and left to starve after the bombing raids of World War II. Allied armies took the fortunate among those hungry and homeless children to large camps where they were fed and cared for.

Even though they were once again safe and well cared for, they were traumatized by the terror of bombings and abandonment. They were restless and fearful at night and slept poorly. They were afraid they would wake up to find themselves homeless and hungry again. No amount of reassurance seemed to help until a psychiatrist tried something new at bedtime. He sent one of the children to bed with a loaf of bread to hold. The child slept. It worked!

Thereafter, each child received a slice of bread at bedtime. Sleeping with bread, the children were able to fall asleep, and if they awoke frightened in the night, the bread reminded them, “I ate today, and I will eat again tomorrow.” Just one piece of bread. What they needed had already been provided, like manna in the wilderness. God’s providing is for us too.

Do this, he said, in remembrance of me. This is the Lord’s table. He has invited us before. He invites us today. He will invite us again and again until we join the saints with him at the heavenly banquet.

Today, I invite you to engage your senses when you come forward. Touch, smell, taste. Allow yourself to be transported. Take in Christ’s presence as you remember all that

Christ has done for us. Remember his teachings and parables and acts of justice, his healing of demoniacs, men and women, the blind, lame and brokenhearted. Remember his miracles and forgiveness, celebrating at a wedding and weeping over Lazarus. Remember that he was betrayed, executed on a cross and then resurrected.

Let's remember the many meals Jesus shared with saints and sinners and the very last supper he had when he took bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples, those He most loved. He asked them to eat and drink to remember. He knew how they would need Him after he was gone.

By his grace, we are beloved disciples too. And he knows how in our crazy, cold and too often cruel world, we need him too. So take in, taste and see and know that the Lord is good. Let our spiritual hunger and thirst be fed by a piece of bread and sip of juice.

And, like children sleeping with bread, let us hold onto him and carry him as we go forth in a world that sorely needs him now.

May it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.