

1Corinthians 10:16-17

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Willoughby Heights CanRC

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Read: Leviticus 7:11-21

Text: 1Corinthians 10:16-17

Amen-song: Hymn 61:1,2

Dear children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and guests, meals form an important part of daily life. Not just for the food. But also for meeting each other. There's the simple coffee, the business lunch, the wedding banquet, the family barbecue. It's like that in most cultures. And the cultures of Bible times, including that of Israel, are no different. For example, if you were someone special to the king, this would be evident by the fact that you could eat at the king's table. Thus King David honoured his bosom friend Jonathan by having Jonathan's son Mephibosheth at his table. It's interesting that our word "companionship" is from a Latin expression meaning "to share bread". A "companion" is someone you share bread with.

It's this custom of a social meal which the Lord used for the interaction between Himself and His people. We read from Leviticus about the peace offering. Peace – that name puts the focus on the purpose of this sacrifice. It was mostly a voluntary sacrifice, given by the Lord for an Israelite to express his gratitude spontaneously. When there's a birthday, an anniversary, the fulfilment of a special vow. An Israelite might then decide to bring a special sacrifice – not because he had to but simply because he wanted to. This was the kind of sacrifice Elkanah, the father of the prophet Samuel, would bring every year in the tabernacle. Solomon's massive offering at the dedication of the temple was such an offering. The Israelite could choose what he wanted to sacrifice: it might be an animal, it might be different sorts of bread. He'd bring it to the priest, who would burn a part on the altar, and, by a wave motion, give part of it back to you. The best part was sacrificed, it was burned. It was, so to speak, eaten by God. The rest was to be used for a party, a feast, for yourself and all those invited.

The peace offering is also referred to as the fellowship offering. Both terms make clear what this offering is about: it's about the good relationship there is between the person sacrificing and God, and then all those participating in the sacrifice.

The same thought is found in the Lord's Supper. Boys and girls, I'm pretty sure that when you have a meal as family, especially dinner, you sit around the same table. You don't grab your food and go to your bedroom, at least, most times you don't. You eat together. The Lord's Supper is like that too. You eat together, eat the same bread, drink from the same wine. The Lord's Supper is not served at a Drive Thru, the way you might get a coffee or a quick meal. Fellowship is what Paul is pointing to in our text: we all participate in the one cup, partake of the one bread, we all share the one thing. And this participation, this sharing, points us to our peace and fellowship.

First and foremost, there's peace and thus fellowship with God. The Lord's Supper is precisely that: the Supper of the Lord. He is the host.

As Father, He wants to make clear that He cares for us, He strengthens our faith in Him, reassures us that indeed we may belong to Him.

As Son He wants to make clear that our sins have been paid for, that we don't have to be afraid of not being good enough to belong to God, indeed: we're perfect.

As Spirit He wants to make clear to us that He dwells in us, to renew our lives so that we will behave like true children of God.

The Lord's Supper is all about our relationship with the Triune God. It's amazing, when you think about

it. We, with all our failings and shortcomings, may sit at God's table. In much of what we desire, think, and do there's a lack of love and concern. Nevertheless, the ever-loving, always-loyal God welcomes us to participate in His meal.

There's something else. The Lord's Supper also makes clear that we have peace and thus fellowship with each other. We participate in the one bread and drink of the same wine. We belong to each other. In church, we'll refer to each other as brothers and sisters. We're like one big family. A communal fellowship is also part of the Lord's Supper celebration. A fellowship that is also most surprising and awesome. We're so different from each other. Different backgrounds. Different focuses in life. People who think and people who act. Simple people and complicated people. People who tend to be more rational and people who tend to be more emotional. Old people, young people. Married and single. Different cultural backgrounds. Huge differences. While flying to Smithers last Monday I read in a book: among the disciples you have Matthew the tax-collector and Simon the Zealot. It doesn't get more extreme than that the author said: a collaborator and traitor working for the occupying foreign force and then a freedom fighter, a terrorist. Matthew and Simon: in society the two would be considered irreconcilable. Like an ISIS terrorist and an orthodox Jew. But Christ has them sit at the same table. Christ can make them sit at the same table, in peace. Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot became companions: sharers of bread. That's how it is for us too. We can be so different, so opposite to each other. And yet, we all participate in the same supper.

What makes it possible, this fellowship with God, us wretched sinners and the pure and holy God? What makes it possible, this fellowship among people, so different?

It's made possible in Christ. It's a participation, writes Paul, *in* the blood and *in* the body of Christ. It's the connection we have with the blood and body of Christ, that makes for fellowship with God and fellow man.

Our relationship with the pure and holy God is not a direct one. If it were, we would not exist for a moment. But we relate to God through Christ. Christ forms, as it were, a protective layer between us and holy God. And because Christ is perfect, God's *anger* is dissipated by the blood of Christ, while God's *peace* is channeled through to us. Christ shields us with His body and blood from the righteous anger of God and is the conduit of God's love.

Our relationship with each other is not a direct one either. People sometimes think of it that way, and the church becomes an association for those with similar religious convictions or similar religious traditions. Now it is true, we share and profess a common faith. But that's not at bottom what unites us. What unites us is the person of Christ. We are the body of Christ. Christ is the vine, and we are the branches that come out of Christ. It is the blood and Spirit of Christ, that unites people into a single fellowship.

This is an immense and amazing truth. It means that I don't have to be afraid of God, because my faith lacks lustre or because there is a sin in my life which I hate. When we earnestly seek to believe and do what is right, we may be assured that God won't turn us away. It also means that I don't look at the church in a human way: I like those people but those folks rub me the wrong way, I don't want to have anything to do with them. When we look to Christ, we realize we all are the same sinners before God saved by grace in Christ, whether male or female, whether old or young, whether married or single, whether Greek or Jew, whether Canadian or Dutch or Chinese or Syrian or whatever your ethnic origin.

Thus, beloved, when it comes to celebrating the Supper of our Lord together, keep this in mind. Don't forget it. It's not because we get on well with each other that we fellowship together. It's because Christ gets on well with all of us. It's because God has accepted us and receives us into fellowship. And if others are received by God, with all their quirks and faults, they are to be received by me. And I should realize and admit, too have my quirks and faults. Indeed, we should want to be seen with all those who fellowship

with God, for I too, fellowship with God. At the Supper we're all the same: sinners saved by grace in Christ.

So, brothers and sisters, fellow children of God, celebrate the Supper as a sign and seal of your peace with God, and thus of your fellowship with His people. Let the supper encourage you as a foretaste of perfection. For whatever brokenness persists, our weaknesses and sins, as we walk with God and walk with each other, the Lord's Supper assures you it can be, indeed, will be fixed. Christ did it for Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot. Christ is doing it for you and me.

Amen.