

## **“A Really, Really Big Meal!”**

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)  
*A Reflection for Worldwide Communion*

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:14-22

October 2, 2016

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:14-22  
New Revised Standard Version

What’s the biggest meal you’ve ever gone to? I am not talking about how many trips you made to the buffet. I mean the number of people you were eating with. What’s the biggest?

Community dinner? In 2009, the East of England Agricultural Society put on the largest roast dinner ever: 1,632 people!<sup>1</sup>

Church supper? How about a synagogue? The largest Shabbat meal was shared by 2,322 people in 2015 . . . in Berlin, Germany!<sup>2</sup>

Reunions? In 2008, 16,206 were served at the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority dinner in Washington, D.C.<sup>3</sup>

Weddings? It’s really hard to top this one. A 1995 wedding reception in Madras, India had 150,000 guests.<sup>4</sup>

Today we are going to better them all. We will share a meal with many of the more than two billion people who call themselves Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-simultaneous-roast-dinner](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-simultaneous-roast-dinner)

<sup>2</sup> [www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-shabbat-dinner](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-shabbat-dinner)

<sup>3</sup> [www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-silver-service-dinner](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-silver-service-dinner)

<sup>4</sup> [www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-wedding-banquetreception](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-wedding-banquetreception)

II

Today's reading begins with "*Flee from the worship of idols.*" That's the heart of Paul's message here. But I'm not going to talk about that. My reflection is about Holy Communion. Paul was not writing about that. But he did refer to the Lord's Supper, and that's what I'm going to zoom in on.

Paul's big concern was idolatry. Idols are statues crafted to represent gods and make them present. In the ancient world, that's how you worshipped your gods. The Jewish people stood out as peculiar. They worship God who does not have shape or form, who cannot be represented by created things. Disaster befalls humanity when we worship anything other than the one Creator God.

Paul was worried. Many non-Jews were putting their trust in Jesus and been filled with his Spirit. That was new, and wonderful. But for them, life had always included going to the many temples to many gods that filled their city.<sup>5</sup> Animals were sacrificed, and all the worshippers feasted together. They believed their gods were with them, sharing in the celebration. These sacred dinners were vital parts of their community life.

The new Christians were realizing that these idols, and the gods they represented, were empty, meaningless and false. But their friends and families, business associates and neighbours continued to feast in the temples, sharing in the meals of the gods. What should these Christians do?<sup>6</sup>

III

Part of Paul's answer to them was the Lord's Supper.<sup>7</sup> They knew the Jesus Meal, so Paul reminds them:

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?  
The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?*

Something happens at the Jesus Meal.

It's not that there is anything remarkable about the bread? Nor about the wine (or, in our case, grape juice). They are very ordinary.

What's extraordinary is what God does with them. God uses them to hold us to Jesus. And held to Jesus, we are held to each other.

Jesus binds us to him through his death and resurrection, for our rescue and our rebirth. In Jesus, we die to our old sin-stained selves, and are born into his New Creation.

The Holy Spirit brings this into us. What Jesus has done for the sake of everyone, each of

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 357-63.

<sup>7</sup> Paul's detailed response began at 8:1. Now, many verses later, his is getting to his conclusion.

us can now rejoice: “He has done this for me!” Our baptisms seal this wonderful gift. You and I, we belong to Jesus!

In his Meal, Jesus strengthens this bond. He is here with us. It’s like regularly renewing our marriage vows. He is our Groom. Jesus gives himself to us. What is his is now ours.

(By the way, that’s why this idea of going to those sacred meals with idols makes no sense. Sure, there is nothing to idols. They are just wood and stone, standing for lies and nothingness. But even if you know the relationship will not go anywhere, even if you’re just flirting, even if it is not real . . . it’s cheating. It’s unfaithful. It’s destructive. Paul called it “demonic” . . . and calls on us to be faithful to our true love, Jesus.)

#### IV

Again, here’s what Paul wrote:

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?*

*The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?*

Then he says:

*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

It’s not just that we are joined to Jesus. Yes, by baptism he seals us to himself. He also makes us part of his people. At his Table, he strengthens our bond to him, and each other.

Again, it’s a bit like marriage. If you marry someone, you don’t just get them. You get their family . . . for better, for worse! It’s even more so with Jesus. I can only be a Jesus person as part of Jesus’ People.

World Communion Sunday reminds us that it’s not just about us here . . . or just us United Church folk. We’re eating this Jesus Meal with Presbyterians a couple blocks over, and Anglicans near the library, and Roman Catholics further up Geddes, and Pentecostals on Colborne Street.

ELORA: There is more. This map shows where Christians were living in 1910. The size of the countries is not related to their geography, but their Christian population. The vast majority of Christians lived in Europe, North and South America. Now look at a century later, in 2010. The number in Europe has remained stable, while it’s grown in North and especially South America. Look at Africa! China! The Jesus movement is growing, and becoming much more diverse.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus makes us into one People, his People.

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<sup>8</sup> Conrad Hacket, Brian Grim et al, [Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Research Centre, 2011), 12. The report can be downloaded from [www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/](http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/).

V

Together, we share in Jesus. Together, we share in his mission for the world.

We've been focusing on helping Syrian refugees. We've made a commitment to sponsor Nahed and her two sons, and we're still waiting for them to receive approval to come. Meanwhile, we continue to pray for them and support them as we can.

But of course, it's not just us. Lebanon, beside Syria, has welcomed more than one million refugees. Sixty percent are children. So a Lebanese Presbyterian church is starting schools for them. They use the Syrian curriculum, so when they are able to return home, they will be current in their studies.<sup>9</sup>

Much closer to home, I'm meeting weekly with three other pastors — from Pentecostal, Christian Reformed, and independent Charismatic churches in our community. We'll be praying together, and sharing in a mentoring program together. While our congregations are quite different, we all know that Jesus brings us together, so we can serve our neighbourhoods with him.

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?  
The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because  
there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the  
one bread.*

Big Meal! Lot's of People! With Jesus!

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.theoutreachfoundation.org/updates/2016/9/1/world-communion-sunday-opportunity](http://www.theoutreachfoundation.org/updates/2016/9/1/world-communion-sunday-opportunity)