

**1Cor. 11:17** Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. **18** For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. **19** Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. **20** When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. **21** For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. **22** What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

**26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. **28** Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves... So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. **34** If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation.

First of all this morning, I confess that I made a slight mistake. We usually have Communion at the beginning of June, not May. We did have it on April 1, but that was not a very large group of people. So, this is off a bit; but since a vast number of Christians have Communion every Sunday, I think we'll be okay.

We have talked about so many different things in the last year, in this strange year of separation. Especially because of the forced separation, I think that you'll appreciate where I am taking us this morning. So here we go...

As Christians, and as Protestants in particular, we have two special things that we call SACRAMENTS. These are special symbolic acts that we do that represent something wonderful. These things are what we would call "an outward sign of an inward and invisible grace." We have two of these. One is

usually only done once in our entire lives. This is BAPTISM which actually is the thing that marks us as a part of Christianity. Some American Protestants have tried to change this in the last 200 years, but that is another story for another day. So, we have BAPTISM. But we have another Sacrament, which we can do as many times as we desire, and this is technically called the EUCHARIST or HOLY COMMUNION. BTW the word Eucharist, which is Greek, basically means to say thank you or better *to bless*, or *to say the blessing*. We thank God for it when we do it. And that is always a good thing to do.

But we know from a few weeks ago, when I talked about Judas and Peter, we know that Jesus revealed at the Last Supper that he would be betrayed! So even from the very first time they in a sense had *Communion*, there was a storm cloud on the horizon. Things have not always been smooth when it comes to this sacred meal together.

Especially in America, our churches have objected that other churches do not do Communion correctly! Some people say it must be actual wine and unleavened bread! Some say it must be Welches Grape Juice and Wonder Bread! Some say it must be done every Sunday! Some ( like the Amish and Mennonites ) only do it one time per year! Some say it is the actual Body and Blood of Jesus himself! Others say that it is only a symbol. So we have those problems to overcome.

I have shared the story of my very beginning as a student-pastor in West Ohio Conference, back 40 years ago when Jill and I were married. I served a 2-point charge, with two rural

but very different congregations. I was licensed to serve Holy Communion, and so I did, although there had to be a full elder present with me. In fact a special man named Rev. George Oerke was the elder who would come to help me serve Communion. We became good friends with him and his wife. We found a strange problem though: when we had Communion, half of the people would be gone, and these were your every-Sunday faithful! Half of them would miss that day.

I was curious as to why this was this way. And I was shocked to find two sad things: first, for some of the people, they felt that they were not worthy to have Communion, so they stayed away. But for others, they stayed away because they saw it as charity, which they refused! They didn't need any help from God, or anyone else! That was sadder than the first group! At least they were humble about it. So we have all kinds of complications that rise up when we try to remember Jesus dying for our sins on the Cross.

For the record, we can see in 1st Corinthians that Paul was dealing with troubles with some of his people as well. And the church in Corinth had all kinds of problems. But it seems that they had one big one: when they had Communion, it would be as part of a meal together. So people sat down to eat. So, what could possibly go wrong? Well, let's see. It seems that some of the people would arrive before the others. And what would they do? Well, they would eat all the food and drink all the wine! Why not? They were there. Others, usually workers who were coming in later, would get there, tired and hungry, only to see

that there were only crumbs left, and nothing to drink. And others would sit there, all fed and red-faced, enjoying their wine! Could this be a problem?

Paul is furious with this. And so he tells them that there is something that they must do when they have this holy meal together: ultimately, they need to realize that they are ***together, as one body, one group***. They are not whole unless they are together, and they celebrate that togetherness. Paul says that they must “discern the Body.” He asks them to wait for each other. I love that! Of course they should wait for each other. But more than that they need to recognize that ***the church is not ME, it is US***.

This is a problem in our culture, since around 1800. Christianity since 1800, for many Protestants, has been all about ME. It is in our hymns! Some time borrow a hymnal and check out the hymns. Look at the dates for when the words were written. If they were written between 1830 and 1950, the focus is probably on ME. American culture is often focussed on the individual. So when our churches act this way, it makes sense, because it blends in with America. But is it what Paul would want us to do? We had people in his day who were taking care of themselves, and not worrying about what would happen to others. Did they not get any bread? Did they not get any wine? Oh well. I got mine. Paul has news for them. They are eating and drinking in a manner that is not worthy of Jesus. If they do not discern the Body, that they are a group of people, called to be the Body of Christ, if they do not discern the Body they are

doing it wrong. He even says to them to wait for one another, to be together. He says if they are so hungry, they should eat and drink at home, rather than have the Eucharist become something that would condemn them instead of being a blessing to them.

Folks, we always have different ideas about many things. But I think the story here is simple to understand: Paul wanted the people to discern the Body, to acknowledge the group as all together, called by God, a holy people. This was actually a great innovation on the part of European Protestants, especially Calvinists who would pass Communion to each other, and serve each other, and wait for each other. We say “the Body of Christ,” and we eat together. “The Blood of Christ,” and we drink it together. It’s what we do.

We have been separated for a long time, but that separation is hopefully winding down. And we will need to be the Body again. And we will need to discern the Body. We can do this. Okay? May God bless and guide us as we discern the Body today. Let’s pray...