

“Feeding Your Body”

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 5, 2015

When I was growing up, my grandmother seemed to have a saying for everything – a cliché or quote that she’d heard and thought was appropriate for the moment. For example, she used to say, “advice is free but nobody takes it.” When she saw unruly children she would say, “there’s no accounting for other people’s children.” When she saw her own unruly grandchildren she said, “You’re like a bull in a china shop.” But there was one saying that I seem to remember being used frequently. And not only did my grandmother use it, but my parents said it, my teachers, almost every adult I knew. You’ve probably said it yourself. Heck, I’ve even said it to my own kids. They would say, “you are what you eat.” As a kid I never understood what that was supposed to mean. “You are what you eat.” They usually said that while trying to get me to eat my vegetables. I thought if that’s true, I sure don’t want to turn into broccoli. I wanted to turn into something cool. But they don’t let you eat astronauts.

For the last two thousand years, this idea that you are what you eat has been the basic Christian understanding of the Lord’s Supper. When Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, he took bread and broke it, saying, “this is my body which is for you.” Unfortunately, during those two thousand years different branches of the Church have disagreed over what exactly it means for the bread of communion to be the body of Christ.

In the 13th century, the Roman Catholic Church developed the notion that the bread and wine are themselves transformed into the body and blood of Christ, even though they still look and taste like bread and wine. This became known as transubstantiation. But during the 15th and 16th centuries, the Protestant Reformers began to react against that idea. One of those reformers was Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland. Zwingli taught that because Christ was now in Heaven, there was no way He could be physically present in the elements. For

Zwingli, the Eucharist was merely a memorial meal to remind us of the Last Supper and therefore Christ’s death and resurrection. The bread and wine, then, were just symbols.

Zwingli lived and worked at the same time as Martin Luther and about 525 years ago they met to discuss uniting together as a single Reformed church. They agreed on many points in their work to reform the Church, but they could not agree on communion. At one point, Luther is said to have taken out his knife and carved into the table “This IS my body.” Luther insisted that Christ is truly present in communion and he was not willing to give that up. His view is now known as CONsubstantiation and it’s even more complicated than transubstantiation. Luther said that Christ is present “in, with and under the elements.”

Between these two extremes, John Calvin and others came to understand that while the bread and wine, or juice, remain unchanged, they are more than mere signs. Sacraments include both the sign, in this case the bread and juice, and the thing that is signified by them, which is the promises of God of salvation.

When we come to the Lord’s table and receive the bread and juice we are lifted up into His presence. By the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit we by faith inwardly receive the body and blood of the Lord and nourished spiritually. In I Corinthians 10:16 the Apostle Paul calls this a “participation” in the body and blood of Christ. Through this spiritual eating and drinking the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ, making us “bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.” In other words, we are what we eat. Rather than the bread and juice being changed, *we* are transformed little by little into the body of Christ. Frankly, I think that’s the bigger miracle. It would be no big deal for God to change bread into something else. One of Satan’s temptations of Jesus was to change rocks into bread. But you and I are able to

resist. We can refuse to be changed. So the miracle that takes place in communion is when we submit to Jesus so he can make us into the Body of Christ.

Now we can begin to really understand this morning's passage. In verse 27 the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." This is another instance where they should let southerners translate the Bible because this verse more accurately says, "all y'all together are the body of Christ."

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor in prewar Nazi Germany, wrote about living in Christian community based on his experience leading a small seminary. He explained that we are each united with Christ through His incarnation and resurrection. Because of that, we are united with one another, and not just in this life, but for eternity. Verse 13 tells us that as we become one with the risen Christ and with one another through Him, all the outward things that separate us—Jew or Greek, slave or free, rich or poor, white or black or Hispanic—disappear.

The Scottish commentator William Barclay said, "the supreme glory of the Christian is being part of the body of Christ on earth." Paul uses the metaphor of a human body to help us understand how we become, together, the body of Christ. It's certainly no coincidence that this passage comes right after the discussion of spiritual gifts. Just as the different organs in the body work together for the good of the whole body, when each member of the body of Christ exercises his or her unique spiritual gifts it builds up the Church and benefits all of us and this is God's plan.

Paul goes on to point out that the parts of the body are not jealous of each other. In the same way, we need to understand that there are no unimportant members of the body of Christ. We need each other and there can be no such thing as isolation in the church. Similarly, we are to respect each other because there is no question of relative importance in the body of Christ. Verse 26 says, If one member suffers, all

suffer together and if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

The final thing I want us to understand about being the body of Christ is that it means there are things we must *do*. Bonhoeffer reminds us that "the goal of all Christian community is to meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation." We are called into the Body of Christ in order to be sent out into the world.

As the Body of Christ, we have to be hands to do His work, feet to run His errands, and a voice to speak for Him. When we think of hands, we think of all the things hands do. With our hands we can work to build things, or we can use our hands to feed people. Those in the medical field use their hands to heal bodies. But we can also use our hands and arms to do something as simple as hug. The human touch is one of the most powerful forces in the world. Jesus said, "I did not come to be served but to serve." Christians are called into the Body of Christ to serve. We are to find ways to minister to the needs of those around us, both in the church and in the world. We are to be the gracious presence of Christ to others. Your life may be the only Bible someone reads this week.

As Christ's feet we are called to *go*. It's not enough for us to sit and soak up religion, we are to share the gospel with others. We do this through our missions and ministries in our own city and around the world. I'll never forget what a retiring pastor told me about the Church. He said that he truly believed that when a church became actively involved in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, that God blessed that church with growth at home as well. And he was right. Every growing church I have ever seen has been committed to sending teams to foreign missions in addition to their local community. We are to be the feet of Christ.

We have to remember, though, that as the body we can't survive without the head. Our Presbyterian *Book of Order* begins by confessing Jesus Christ as the head of the church. He is the One who calls the church into being and gives

the church everything necessary for our mission to the world.

In a few moments as we celebrate the Lord's Supper I want you to know that this is not *our* table, it's Christ's table. Therefore, if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are welcome to participate in communion. I want to encourage you to remember that when we eat the bread and drink the juice Jesus is present

with us and by the power of the Holy Spirit we are becoming more like Christ a little bit at a time until that day we get to celebrate with him face to face.

In the meantime, as Bonhoeffer said, we must give up our dream of what the church community is supposed to be in order to allow God's dream to shape the church.

Amen