

Fifth Corinthian Talk 1 Cor 11 17-34 The Lord's Supper p1088

In our fifth snapshot look at 1 Corinthians we come to worship. We see faith, hope and love together with real purpose!

Worship of God. Showing our love for God, our faith in him, our Christian hope. Paul says in v 18 'when you come together as a church.....' I know I keep going on about this point but let's be clear again at the outset. Church is community, body, bride of Christ not an architectural structure. Yesterday's breakfast and work together was **as church**.

Worship in Corinth was, **at its best**, a lively, exciting, spirit led, noisy, charismatic business; the sort of things many western Christians probably including ourselves, sadly avoid if possible!

Read ch 14 later – no time now. It gets excessive and Paul has to draw them in a bit. He wants more **order and dignity** in there to complement the **excitement and the action**.

Maybe we, too often, get just the dignity and the order. Worship should be fun!

At its worst we see how some of the Christians in Corinth once again got it all wrong. Another opportunity to let dividedness largely on income and social status lines get in the way

v18. 'There are divisions among you' says Paul

v20 'so it's not the Lord's supper at all'.

They are abusing the most sacred part of worship, the Lord's Supper, such that it is fatally undermined. (And of course in recent times we had squierarchy in heated pews enjoying better quality wine!)

It is this particular piece of worship that is at the centre of our reading and we do well to examine it and what is really going on. It is that particular aspect of worship which we call the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion or The Eucharist (from efcharisto, thankyou).

There are 3 neat stages to today's reading.

- How not to worship 17-22
- How to do so 23-26
- Being in the right state of heart 27-34

How not to. 17-22

Paul could scarcely have made himself clearer!

They have a 'communion' meal but they bring their own. The rich people feast sumptuously and imbibe liberally and generally have a great blow out under the guise of the Lord's Supper. They simply don't get it!!!

The poor such as the slaves etc have nothing. Sharing seems not to have crossed the minds of the upper classes so others go hungry.

This is the meal Jesus gave us. It is not a place for disrespect, but a time to welcome, to share, to make sure it is accessible **and understandable** to any who come, who want to show their love for the Lord.

So let's look at how to get it right. V23-26

Paul spends just 4 verses saying what HC should be like, based on the Last Supper. **Note the simplicity.** All the detailed paraphernalia that tradition has added later simply isn't there. No altar, no candles, no priest, no altar frontals or linen, no patten, no pall and not a purificator is there in sight.

Authentically it is a simple, symbolic meal built around just 4 actions.

- Jesus took bread
- Blessed it
- Broke it
- Gave it

It is that that we recreate – the Jesus meal.

But crucially note that there is first **a backward look** and then **a forward look**.

We **look back** with great gratitude '*do this in remembrance of me*'. We thank him for the cross, the sacrifice made to **restore** our relationship with God, being forgiven, redeemed, reunited with our maker.

We look back in faith and with love grateful, thankful for his act of love, that '*perfect sacrifice*.' This is contemplative, heart felt gratitude.

But with that massive phrase 'until he comes' we then **turn forward** with **resurrection hope** we '*rejoice in his mighty resurrection*' and we look in excited hope to being welcomed at the '*feast in heaven where all creation worships*'. We note that the Jesus meal is an **interim** arrangement to be repeated in worship only '*until he comes*' v26. Now we are excited, uplifted, anticipating, filled with real, living hope. We rest in that hope.

WSC after Pearl Harbour (and I get this from that marvellous recent TV programme 'Into the Storm') said 'tonight I will sleep the sleep of the saved and of the thankful', knowing that despite further trials and suffering, with US entry into the war, victory was assured.

It is the same for us. We rest in a **sure hope of victory**, of salvation. We look to the great heavenly party, **the new heaven and the new earth**. There is eternal, everlasting life.

We will hear more about this hope next time.

So in the Jesus meal we take part in a drama—we act out the Jesus story, and our response.

Finally preparation v27-34

But taking part in the Eucharistic drama is not something we do lightly. Paul takes more time explaining this than he does the mechanics of the meal itself.

We are to **examine ourselves**, acknowledge our weakness, seek forgiveness, make peace with one another. Again the liturgy, the prayer of humble access, helps us but we must be very careful for it not to become a routine.

The service structure also helps in this preparation. The Word of God is read, then there is a sermon which should be all about understanding and applying the Bible passages read.

As Paul said to the younger Timothy re his ministry in 2 Tim 2 v 15

*¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who **correctly handles the word of truth.***

Too often sermons are trivial 'thought for the day' type utterances which do not properly 'handle the word of truth'. Readings and sermon together should help enable proper preparation and building.

Conclusion

So the Lord's Supper. A vital part of our worship.

If you are a regular worshipper, someone who loves the Lord but maybe not yet comfortable with the idea of taking communion please speak with one of us. Try to edge towards being fully involved in our worship. I am happy to lend this little book, the Meal Jesus Gave Us.

And if there are any issues related to what Christians believe and hope for again speak or ask for a booklet. The Lord's Supper is not the only form of worship and it is great to have you with us whether you take communion or not.

But the Lord's Supper is not the only way to worship God. Paul is clear there are other expressions for us to enjoy. Most of the worship he addresses in 1 Corinthians isn't HC at all. As a parish we are coming to recognise that even with 9 rather than 10 out of 12 services per month being HC, there is imbalance we must explore further.

8 and 9.15 only If all you ever attend is communion do think again. Try a family service, a morning worship, perhaps on an '**in addition to**' not an '**instead of**' basis.

Next week the last of this series of 6 – **Resurrection Hope.**

Material Not Used

There are lots of other ways of getting it wrong!

Let me indulge in an historical digression.

The phrase Jesus used 'this is my body' has generated more contention probably than any other 4 word phrase in history.

After 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council, RCs took it to mean that the bread really becomes Christ's body. And of course the wine his blood. A doctrine known as Transubstantiation. Luther, the reformer, disagreed and went instead for a difficult theology known as consubstantiation that the Body and Blood are "in, with, and under the forms" of bread and wine: Impenetrable stuff.

Incidentally the 4th Lateran Council also came up with celibacy of the clergy and the idea that communion should be taken once a year, at Easter!

The other big hitting European reformer of the time, Zwingli in Switzerland, went for a much more symbolic view – the meal just helps us remember. The two battled it out 480 years ago in a small town in Germany, called Marburg. They had before them **hoc est corpus meum**, this is my body. Luther dipped his finger in his beer (he was German) and underlined the **is, is**. Zwingli said no **is** merely means **represents** not literally is.

In fact Jesus' original words were a translation of the language he spoke, Aramaic, where in fact there is no is! It is 'this – my body'. A deep connection probably is intended but more than that we cannot say.

At Marburg agreement was not secured. Luther went off refusing to shake Zwingli's hand, adding 'I'd sooner drink blood in Rome than wine with the Zwinglians'. At the Colloquy of Marburg an opportunity was missed to bring unity to the reformation in Europe. All over getting the Jesus meal wrong.