

Today is World Communion Sunday when Christians all over the world gather to share in the Lord's Supper. We gather in response to Jesus' words as recorded by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

Thus, whenever we gather to break the bread and share the cup, we are proclaiming what Jesus Christ has done and will do for all who believe in Him. This morning, I want to build upon this passage by discussing what Paul said in the previous tenth chapter of First Corinthians, verse 16 and 17. Let's see what the Apostle Paul has to tell the church at Corinth and us today.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Listen to verse 17 again: "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we partake of the one loaf." Did you notice how many times the Apostle Paul used the word "one" in this single verse? Three times. I believe that he was trying to make a definite point here that we as Christians unfortunately often forget. We are one, one in Jesus Christ. The *Message* paraphrases this verse this way: "Because there is one loaf, our many-ness becomes one-ness – Christ doesn't become fragmented in us. Rather, we become unified in Him. We don't reduce Christ to what we are; He raises us to what He is." Now that's a powerful interpretation of this passage!

In this passage, Paul said that because there is one loaf, one bread, we are one. Now when I say bread what is the first visual image that comes to your mind? What type of bread do you see? For me, when I say bread, I'm talking about simple, unhealthy white loaf bread, but you may be thinking about something different such as sourdough bread, cornbread, pita bread, tortillas, or banana bread. Have you ever noticed how many different types of bread there are in the grocery store; it makes it difficult to choose the one you want. Like all these breads, we are all different; some of us are just plain old white bread, some hotdog buns, some sourdough bread, some healthy whole wheat bread, and some with a little flavor for life like cinnamon raisin bread. The point is that even though we are different, we are all one in Christ. Jesus Christ is the bond that brings us all together this morning in His name.

No scene in Jesus' life is more beautiful than the one in which He shared His final moments with His disciples over a meal in the Upper Room. Think about it, here is Jesus approaching the supreme crisis in His life, fulfilling His destiny with the cross; He knew the horrible death that

awaited Him. Yet, in a spirit of fellowship that the impending danger could not disrupt, Jesus did something wonderful for His disciples and for all believers throughout the centuries. He shared a meal with them, and in turn, left this sacred meal for all of us to share throughout the ages. This meal is a supper of sharing, displaying in one unified act the solidarity of the Lord's people. As we participate together, we are reminded that following Jesus Christ is a continuous experience of sharing with all fellow believers.

Now some Christian denominations and churches like us refer to this meal as the Lord's Supper. Others call it the "Eucharist," which comes from the Greek word meaning "to give thanks." However, on this special Sunday, I think the most appropriate reference is "communion." Now the Greek for this word indicates joint participation in that which is common to two or more; in other words, "sharing." This word also means "partnership," but the most common translation is "fellowship with." In this morning's text, Paul is reminding the Corinthians and all Christians that the Lord's Supper expresses one's fellowship with Jesus Christ and with each other.

Our coming together this morning to participate in Christ's meal is an open expression of a deep, genuine, meaningful fellowship. Fellowship was an emphasis on that first supper when Jesus gathered with His disciples. It was designed, I believe, as a continuing encouragement and challenge to the kind of healthy relationships that must be present in the church and among all Christians. Consider for a moment those who were around the table that special night: there was Judas who had already betrayed Jesus; Peter who would deny knowing Him three times in a few hours; Thomas who would doubt Him; and all the disciples who would desert Him before the night was over. Yet through their love and devotion to Jesus, they were united as a body that would change the world forever.

Over the years, several colleges have developed rallying cries when faced with tragedies. For instance, there is a movie entitled "We Are Marshall," which documents the renewal of the football program at Marshall University following the tragic airplane crash in West Virginia when most of the team and coaches were killed as they were returning home after a game. Following the tragedy at Virginia Tech University several years ago when several students and professors were killed by another student, one of the deans gave an inspiring speech in which the phrase "We are Virginia Tech" was coined.

Now these are slogans that you normally don't hear at college football games. Usually the fans are yelling "We are number one." However, this is something that you would never hear Jesus saying, because it implies competition; an attitude of superiority, dominance, and that we are better than you. While this competitive nature is a natural human tendency, it is definitely opposite of what Jesus taught. However, the Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus unfortunately had to deal with this very same human trait on the night on which He broke the bread and shared the cup with His disciples. We are told that an argument broke out among the disciples

as to who was the greatest among them. The *Message* says that they were “bickering among themselves.”

Can you imagine that? On the night that Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper and encouraged oneness among all believers, here are the disciples arguing as to who is the greatest, the most important. I wonder if Jesus feels the same way today as He sees the bickering in churches and among Christians today, and watches how the different Christians and denominations are trying to outdo one another by claiming that they have all the answers and are the only way to eternal life?

It is like a story that I found about two congregations that were located only a few blocks apart in a small community. They thought it would be better if they merged and became one united body, larger and more effective, rather than two small struggling churches. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but unfortunately, they were unable to pull it off. The problem? They couldn’t agree on how to recite the Lord’s Prayer. One group insisted on “forgive us our trespasses,” while the other group demanded “forgive us our debts.” The local newspaper reported that one church went back to its trespasses while the other returned to its debts!

Instead of claiming that we are number one, we are to proclaim that we are one. This implies unity, togetherness, and a common cause and purpose. We are one in Jesus Christ. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said: “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jesus’ definition of love does not include any competition, dominance, superiority, or one-up-man ship. Love says that we are one! We are called to practice agape love, seeking the best for each other no matter how we may disagree on political or social issues.

Now I am not endorsing the concept that there be only one Christian church. There are definite advantages to having different denominations. One is that different churches offer various ways to worship our Lord and Savior. We each see God in many different ways which is normal. General George Patton once told his staff: “If we are all thinking alike, then somebody is not thinking.” One size does not fit all; we are all different and need to find a church where we can feel comfortable and can grow in our personal relationship with the Lord, and I emphasize grow. It is my hope and prayer that each one of you is growing spiritually in your personal relationship with the Lord here at High Desert. The point is that in churches and in life, we usually focus on our differences rather than our common bond in Christ. As Christians, we should celebrate our differences, but we must also focus on and be thankful for our unity in Christ Jesus.

This morning fellow believers all over this state, nation, and world are coming together to receive the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation. And we do it in many different ways

depending on where we worship. Over the years some have come to the communion rail; others have received the elements in their seats; and still others have come forward and the priest has placed a wafer in their mouth. Some kneel, while others remain seated. Some use wine and others use grape juice as we do.

But what Jesus emphasized on that fateful night long ago still holds true this morning, we are still one in Jesus Christ. We come as one, each in need of the grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness that only Jesus can give to us. And if we are really honest, we are all unworthy to gather even the crumbs from the Lord's Table, but, but, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are not only welcomed, but are also invited with open arms to come to the table and share in the same meal that the disciples and other believers have shared throughout the ages.

You are part of a community of faith that is not just here but stretches all over the world. It stretches back through history and stretches forward into the future when we will all feast at the heavenly banquet. It is a community built around the memory of Jesus Christ attached to these gifts of bread and juice. Let us prepare now to come and celebrate this wonderful fellowship, this oneness with all Christians, for we are truly one in Jesus Christ. Amen