

“In the Breaking of Bread”
Mark 8:14-21
I Corinthians 10:16-17

Ben Johnston-Krase
October 4, 2009

Mark 8:14-21

Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.” They said to one another, “It is because we have no bread.” And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.” “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.” Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

I Corinthians 10:16-17

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.

I saw a number of you yesterday at the Party on the Pavement. You came and watched me endure the trials and tribulations of the dunk tank over here on 6th Street. Some of you actually paid money to throw 12-inch softballs at the target, hoping to be among those who were directly responsible for my getting wet.

I don't know what my daughter Sylvia enjoyed more—dunking me herself or watching you dunk me. It was great fun, though—fun to support the incredible work that the HOPES Center is doing here in the community—working to alleviate the stress of poverty for so many families—and fun to simply be silly for awhile.

It is good, too, to be here with you after one year together. I've caught myself thinking this past week, “Has it been a year already?” Time flies when you're having fun. And yet there's this wonderful sense that it's been more than a year—so many rich, meaningful, and lively moments we've shared together. There have been some sad moments, too—moments of sorrow and great loss. But families shoulder those moments together, and that's what we've done. Through it all I have enjoyed being and becoming family with you, and I am grateful.

This past week I reread the sermon I preached here one year ago, on my first Sunday with you. I said something on that day (which I'm sure you all remember) about the nature of worship—and I think and I hope that in some ways I've been saying it all year long. I'd like to reiterate it now. Basically, I said, when we worship God, three things happen: We give words to that which is ultimately beyond our words. We live into the

sacramental nature of our lives. We commit ourselves as a family to God's sense of direction in our world.

It's been a true pleasure to do those things with you here, in this place, with this family. A pleasure and a treat to search with you for words to describe God—the One for whom all our language ultimately falls short. A pleasure to live with you into the sacramental nature of our lives—finding the holy in the day-to-day with you. And a pleasure to sense with you God's direction for our lives and to commit ourselves to it together.

Along the way, we've shared some Communion meals together. And we do so again this morning. Today is World Communion Sunday, and so we are mindful today that Christian communities the world over are gathering at tables, breaking bread, sharing cup, remembering Christ in that way.

When we celebrate Communion here at First Presbyterian Church, I often say something like, "This is Christ's Table. It's not ours. It's not even Presbyterian. It's Christ's Table, and you are welcome here." This is not "Communion: sponsored by the Presbyterian Church." It's Christ's meal—Christ's Table—a Table where we recall that last supper that Jesus shared with his friends. It's the Table where Jesus said, "Remember me."

I'm always a little curious about how it is that we remember Jesus. When I was a kid, of course, I thought Jesus was white—white skin, long beautiful hair, perfect teeth. I figured he and all the disciples were white—that they all had these big, full beards and wore these long, flowing robes. Take away the beards and the robes, give 'em overalls and baseball caps and they look like Minnesota farm boys.

But we do that to Jesus and the disciples—we either make them look just like us, or we romanticize moments in their lives. And so when we think about the Last Supper, we get this image of a holy moment—Jesus and the twelve serenely reclining at table together. The candles are glowing and maybe there's some organ music playing in the background. Jesus ceremoniously breaks the bread, and the disciples all take a piece and the cup gets passed around.

What we don't picture is Jesus feeling exhausted and spent. He's been in Jerusalem for a week—came in with shouts of "*Hosanna!*" But since then, things went south. First, he turned over the tables in the Temple and drove out the money changers. Since then he's been trying to teach. But the priests and the scribes have been attempting to trick him—to trap him, asking questions to disprove him.

And all the while, Jesus has been just *a step away* from getting arrested. The only thing keeping that from happening is his popularity with the crowds. (Though we know that this will soon give out, for the crowds that shouted, "Hosanna" in the street will soon be shouting "Crucify him!")

And Jesus knows what's coming. But the disciples. You know, they're not getting this – they're not really understanding Jesus. And they've got to be tired too. They've been running around Jerusalem with Jesus watching as his life hangs in the balance.

And so back to the Last Supper. Picture Jesus and the disciples stopping for a meal. They're dirty, grimy, and tired. There's no organ music playing in the background—just the sounds of a city that will soon turn against them.

So now here's the thing. If we believe that Jesus was fully human, then we have to believe that this was a scary time for him—that for the crucifixion to be real, Jesus must've been horrified about what was about to take place.

And what does Jesus do? In the face of these insurmountable odds, in spite of intense fear, and despite his closest friends' misunderstanding, what does Jesus do? He gathers his friends in a dingy little room. He breaks bread, and he shares it. He pours wine, and he shares it. He says, "Remember me."

Even in the face of death, Jesus shows this incredible knack for linking the holy and the ordinary.

He's been doing this throughout his ministry. He's been teaching that the kingdom of God isn't some far-away, untouchable place. No, "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed," he says. "It's like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." He says to his followers, "You know, you are like salt – you are like light."

And in saying these things, we come to understand that God's glory, God's intentions, God's love... these things are found in the ordinary.

Jesus broke bread—took something ordinary and made it holy—perhaps so that we might find holiness in the ordinary. Friends, as I've thought about our year together here at First Presbyterian, that's the image I want to celebrate with you: holiness in the ordinary—holiness in the day to day. Once a month we might share Communion here in worship. But every day we're sharing Communion in our lives—in little conversations and phone calls, in the ways we express care and concern for each other, in laughter and grief—in learning and serving.

Communion is so many things for us:

- It's a simple cup of coffee in Ihrman Hall after worship.
- It's sending a card to someone who's feeling lonely.
- Communion is found in the laughter we shared, like that time Darrell Sutton hitch-hiked to church one morning.
- Communion is the cheer we gave Evelyn Covell when she turned 96 this past summer.
- Communion is found in the tears we shed when we lost people this year.
- And Communion is a new birth in our midst.

- Communion is listening to our children sing and watching them grow in faith and life.
- Communion is a daily habit of loving, listening, nurturing, praying.

Ordinary, day-to-day moments—all adding up to a holy experience of remembering Christ in our midst. I celebrate that with you today as we approach the Communion Table, and with you I look forward to countless Communion to come.

Amen.