

If the focus is on our sin and Jesus' death, do we miss the goodness of food and life?

# *Celebrating Holy Communion*

**Barbara Thorington Green**

**M**y daughters had tea parties while practicing for womanhood. We have Holy Communion while practicing for the heavenly banquet. Now we use small pieces of bread and small amounts of juice; then all will celebrate in abundance. Now we recognize God's presence in bits and pieces; then we will know it intimately.

The presence of God has historically been linked to bread and drink. Melchizedek provided bread and wine at the blessing of Abram. God provided life for the people with manna and water in the wilderness leading to the inclusion of the "bread of the presence" in the Temple. The Gospel of John suggests Jesus is the manna in the wilderness. Jesus changed water into celebratory wine. Holy Communion offers us the presence of Jesus.

At my father's memorial service, we acknowledged his death and then celebrated his life, sharing story after story until his life came into ours once again. During Holy Communion, we remember the stories of Jesus. His presence comes into ours as we remember and receive.

Can a little sip quench the thirst of our souls? Can a bite of bread nourish our spirits? Can they bring us love, life, health, and even holiness? Can we come closer to God and to Jesus as

we remember and receive with others? Will we become foot washers like Jesus? Will we become bread and drink for the multitudes? Will we become more united with each other as well as Jesus? Will we discover joy, nourishment, and strength?

What gets in the way of such celebrations on Holy Communion Sundays? Could it be the Matthean words used at the climax of Holy Communion Services: "This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins" followed by "The blood of Christ, given for you." The church no longer teaches that

blood contains spirit, or ratifies covenants with blood, or demands blood sacrifices for sins. I hear: "Does God really need blood to forgive sins?" "Wouldn't we imprison a father like that?" "I love Jesus, I can't celebrate his death." If the focus is on our sin and Jesus' death, do we miss the goodness of food and life? Are we missing the holy mystery of the presence of God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit?

After asking a congregation what they knew about Jesus, one after another replied: "He died for my sins"; no one verbalized Jesus' life. I yearn for a time when people recognize and desire the living Jesus, the present loving, feeding, healing, compassionate presence of God, in the celebration of Holy

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Communion. I anticipate grand celebrations. While I wait eagerly for United Methodist liturgies to become more clearly focused on the life and love of God in Jesus, I attempt to help people recognize God's gracious presence in the event. My suggestions include:

☞ Help people know the life of Jesus. Teach and preach the significance of the stories of Jesus: birth, baptism, teachings, parables, attitudes, relationships, and his spiritual and physical journey to Jerusalem, death, and Resurrection. Then the people can "re-member" the full life of Jesus.

☞ Guide discussions of Holy Communion with images: unity, nourishment, thanksgiving, healing, remembering, eschatology, forgiveness, covenant, etc. Use the full range of our Communion hymns as songs or poetry. They offer a variety of images to be explored.

☞ Deliberately work at creating cohesiveness throughout worship. Celebrate God's loving presence and the possibilities of love-focused living in the entire worship. Allow grace-filled, challenging preaching to set the tone for the Table. At each celebration offer an insight to help people realize that the gracious, loving goodness spoken in the Word is available to them at the Table.

☞ Let the Christian seasons guide preaching and celebration of Holy Communion: green for growth and nurture, white for the pure goodness of Jesus' life and the glory of God, red for the

excitement and life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit, Advent anticipating the heavenly banquet, Lent focusing on our journey toward God.

☞ Let the Last Supper accounts in Mark, Luke, and John usually guide your repetitive telling of that event. Use sentences at distribution that focus on covenant and/or John's reference to Jesus as manna, e.g. "the body of Christ, the bread of life," "the cup of the new covenant, Jesus abides in us."

☞ The attitudes we exude as we lead Holy Communion can help people see it as a celebration. We, ourselves, need to be inspired to let God's love move to us and through us.

Holy Communion can be a time when heaven does come to earth, when awareness of the heavenly banquet is "real-ized" and celebrated. Holy Communion can offer love, joy, growth, grace, and life to those who gather. Through remembering Jesus and recognizing God's intimate gracious presence, we will come to desire frequent celebrations, celebrations that lead us toward holy, God-centered living.

**Barbara Thorington Green serves as pastor of the Sidney United Methodist Church in Sidney, New York. She was a member of the Holy Communion Study Committee.**



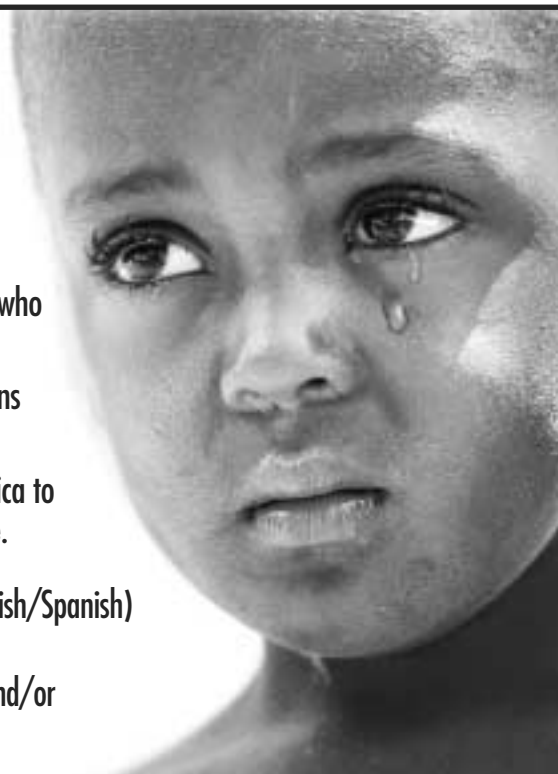
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