



Do It (at least) Weekly in Remembrance of Me

Joseph W. Daniels Jr.

Like with most of us, the celebration of the Lord's Supper on first Sundays has always had great significance to my spiritual journey. Remembering the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the foundation of who we are as "Jesus people." But if many of us are honest with ourselves, celebrating Holy Communion just on first Sundays can turn the sacrament into ritual and routine, rather than a redemptive and transformative experience.

Once a month is not enough for a congregation to remember the deep sacrifice Christ made for us, and the unfathomable grace the Lord offers us. Like our ancestors practiced in the first church, daily we need to be reminded of the guidance, the grace, and the glory Jesus freely shared with us through his life, death, and resurrection.

I was moved to initiate weekly Communion at Emory Church in June 2004, after hearing the This Holy Mystery presentation at the 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh, Penn., just two months prior. Much of what was presented in Pittsburgh was not new to me, but in the fresh hearing of the presentation, my eyes were opened to the deeper possibilities our churches have of experiencing God's unifying grace in worship through communing at the Lord's Table regularly. It is at the Table where

every barrier that separates us can be broken. It is through a regular trip to the Table that we remember the trial of Calvary and the triumph of an empty tomb, that suffering souls consumed by the condemning chains of our sin and shame can encounter by faith the Christ setting us free and making us whole again.

And so I left Pittsburgh asking the Lord to make his presence real and revolutionary for us as we sought to move the congregation toward a weekly encounter with Jesus at the Table.

We look to the table as a second invitation to discipleship. The Word is proclaimed, the first invitation is extended. But then Communion is served, and God extends another invitation. It is a reminder that no matter how difficult life becomes, in the name of Jesus, we have the power to overcome.

Today, after two years, it is not uncommon for tears to be shed, screams for deliverance to be heard, shouts of thanksgiving to be rendered, and authentic release to be felt when people engage in the Communion

event at Emory. More and more, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is becoming a richer, more powerful experience.

The initial reaction of many to weekly Communion was one of joy. One young adult came to me early on to tell me thank you, because all his life he never fully understood why we celebrated Communion. Others said thank you for yet another chance to share in God's grace and mercy for our lives. Still others, particularly after studying Communion in depth through *Disciple Bible Study*, came to view Communion in a far deeper and more reverent way.

With the supporters, however, came the detractors. The traditionalists began to complain, saying, "Why are we doing this every Sunday? We're going to water down the importance of Communion when we celebrate it every Sunday. That's why we're supposed to do it on the first Sunday, so that it will remain sacred!" Still others said, "I come to a Methodist church, not a Catholic church." Then there were those who said, "Serving Communion every Sunday is going to make service longer."

My response was to encourage the detractors to read the accounts of the first church. The Book of Acts (2:42-47) tells us that in those days, day by day, believers broke bread and communed in each other's homes, and praised and thanked God daily for God's grace. Daily, we are told as a result, there were added to their number folks who were being saved. I told the detractors, "Read your Bibles. You will discover that we're following the tradition!" Furthermore I said to others, "We cheer and shout at football games and watch movies for two to three hours at a time. Surely, we can pause to worship God for more than an hour, can't we? Hasn't God been that good to us?"

God has been that good to us! In fact, our worship time and the order of worship have not been affected by Communion. If anything, we got rid of needless announcements that wasted time and interrupted the flow of worship.

More and more each week, the complaints calmed down. And, through all the joys and pains, this congregation has altered its approach to the table. What was once a boring, monotonous, somber, monthly ritual has now become a joyful and reverent celebration, filled with traditional hymns and jazz renditions, Allen organ selections with Hammond organ instrumentation—plus drums, bass guitar, electric guitar, trumpet, saxophone, and keyboards.

We brought the words to the Service of Word and Table in the hymnal to life, not reciting them in dull redundancy, but proclaiming them with power and excitement. And on Sundays where the Holy Spirit has led us differently, we follow the Communion order, without using the hymnal.

We regularly invite people to come to the altar, instead of passing Communion trays. We encourage people to spend time in prayer before we share the elements of Communion together. We form circles around the sanctuary as we prepare to eat and drink the meal together. We share the bread and cup as one family!

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I encourage you to lead your congregation to engage in weekly Communion. Do it at least weekly in remembrance of him. You will find

your congregation growing deeper in faith and stronger in the spiritual disciplines and means of grace that help us to live strong, vibrant, life transforming Christian lives. □

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