

JESUS IN OUR MIDST

– Memorial 2013 –

“For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, **there I am** in their midst.” – *Matthew 18:20*

The Memorial Supper is our symbolic rendezvous with Jesus. The symbols serve as a remembrance aid of what he did for us (the bread of life) and what he will do for us (the cup of the covenant). But do not think that because it is conducted symbolically, that Jesus is present only symbolically. For if Jesus is present when two or more are gathered in his name, then he is **actually** ‘in our midst’ at the Memorial Supper.

This is the mind set with which we should approach the evening – that Christ is here with us. We are dining with our faith brothers, true. But primarily we are dining with our elder brother, Christ Jesus. This is his meal. It is hosted by the Father – Jesus is the person of honor.

This reminds us of the parable of the king who hosted a feast for his son, in the 22nd chapter of the book of Matthew. Verses 3 through 8 tell of the king’s difficulty in getting his invited guests to come. Verses 9 and 10 tell us that the king thereafter gave an open invitation to all who could be found to come to the feast. But then a problem arose:

“When the king came in to inspect the guests he caught sight there of a man not clothed with a marriage garment. So he said to him, **‘Fellow, how did you get in here not having on a marriage garment?’** He was rendered speechless.” – *Matthew 22:11-12*

The king’s generosity allowed for even the lowliest of mankind to come and share in the feast. Yet one guest was not respectful of the occasion. He had not come prepared to share in a marriage feast. The king wondered why he was there and who let in someone so indifferent to the occasion. The man had no answer. It continues:

“Then the king said to his servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and throw him out into the darkness outside. There is where [his] weeping and the gnashing of [his] teeth will be. **For there are many invited, but few chosen.**’” – *Matthew 22:11-14*

The disrespectful guest was forced out of the feast where he awaited certain judgment – the weeping and gnashing of his teeth. While all were invited, not all were chosen to remain.

It is similar with the Memorial Supper. The Father has invited all, even the lowliest ones of mankind, to share in the Memorial Supper with his son. Those who come must realize that they have come to eat and drink with Christ. It is a participatory meal, not a spectator event. We recall that at the first supper, there were no observers. Everyone participated. No provision was made even for servants or attendants.

So, it is appropriate to ask, Why have I come to the Memorial Supper? Have I come prepared to eat and drink? Or is the Father wondering why I am here and how I got in? And, more importantly, have I placed myself in judgment for failing to come prepared? If you are not clothed with the proper state of mind, now is the time to readjust yourself before Jesus arrives.

Behold, he comes!

“After evening had fallen he came with the twelve.”
(Mark 14:17)

On this night, Jesus’ apostles gathered first. They found the room as Jesus had told them and they prepared it for the meal. *(Mark 14:12-16)* However, they forgot one thing. They were full of obedience, but they were not full of humility.

It was the custom in those days that the servant of the host wash the feet of the guests. But on this night, there was no servant. One of the apostles could have taken on the role of servant and washed the feet of his brothers, but not one would take such a humble position. Nevertheless, Jesus allowed the meal to begin. But before he introduced a new aspect to the meal, he set aside his garments, took on the servant’s role and washed their feet himself, including the feet of Judas. And after he had demonstrated what true humility was, the meal continued. *(John 13:1-17)*

What can we learn from this aspect of the supper? That we must approach the evening with humility toward our brothers, all of them. It is not an evening of judgment or superiority. All are brothers on equal footing before God. Our master is one – the Christ. And as Jesus said on that night:

“For I set the pattern for you, that, just as I did to you, you should do also. Most truly I say to you, **A slave is not greater than his master**, nor is one that is sent forth greater than the one that sent him.” – *John 13:15-16*

Let us prepare ourselves to receive the presence of the Christ. In whatever way we can show humility to our brothers, let it be so. It is not our custom to wash one another’s feet; but it is the custom to be gracious to the host and to his guests. Therefore, let all matters of contention be dissolved and washed away so that when our host arrives, we will be found ready.

The meal continues. Our Lord lifts the bread and says:

“Take, eat. This means my body.”
(Matthew 26:26)

Our Lord has taken the first bite and the bread is passed. During the first supper, each apostle was personally presented with the bread. And each one individually responded to it. Our Lord has said ‘take, eat.’ And each apostle obeyed. This night, as it travels from brother to

brother, let each one respond personally to Jesus' invitation. Will we 'take and eat' or will we let it pass?

Contemplate the meaning of the bread. Jesus said it means his body. On an earlier occasion, Jesus made the same analogy. He said:

"I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the wilderness and yet died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, **so that anyone may eat of it and not die.** I am the living bread that came down from heaven; **if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever;** and, for a fact, the bread that I shall give is my flesh **in behalf of the life of the world."** – *John 6:48-51*

Thus, the invitation is given to all – to the whole world. All who want everlasting life must eat of this bread.

"Most truly I say to you, Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. He that feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has everlasting life, and **I shall resurrect him** at the last day; for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. **He that feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in union with me, and I in union with him.** Just as the living Father sent me forth and I live because of the Father, **he also that feeds on me, even that one will live because of me."** – *John 6:53-57*

Only those sharing in the meal are given a resurrection to everlasting life, and are in union with Christ. Those who do not choose to eat of it will die.

Of course, the bread of the Memorial supper is symbolic. It is clearly not the actual flesh of Jesus. Such a literal idea is offensive, even as many of his disciples commented:

"Therefore many of his disciples, when they heard this, said: "This speech is shocking; who can listen to it?" – *John 6:60*

Jesus was using the idea of bread as a symbol to which he gave a spiritual meaning:

"It is the spirit that is life-giving; the flesh is of no use at all. The sayings that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." – *John 6:63*

The bread of life is the living word of God as revealed in the Son. Jesus gave us this bread as a gift of sharing in divine sonship. When he said 'you must eat my flesh,' he is telling us that we must live our lives as he lived his, not as a carpenter, but as a son of God dedicated to doing the Father's will. And when we 'take and eat,' we are voluntarily demonstrating that we are willing to do just that. Will we 'take and eat' . . . or will we pass?

And our Lord takes the cup and says:

“Drink out of it, all of you; for this means my ‘blood of the covenant’”
(*Matthew 26:27*)

Our Lord has taken the first sip and the cup is passed. During the first supper, each apostle was personally presented with the cup. And each one individually responded to it. Our Lord has said ‘drink.’ And each apostle obeyed. This night, as it travels from brother to brother, let each one respond personally to Jesus’ invitation. Will we ‘drink,’ or will we let it pass?

Contemplate the meaning of the cup. Jesus said it means ‘his blood of the covenant.’ In the parallel account by Luke, Jesus said:

“This cup means **the new covenant** by virtue of my blood, which is to be poured out in your behalf.” – *Luke 22:20*

The Apostle Paul identified the new covenant mediated by Jesus as the same covenant spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah.

“But now [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent public service, so that **he is also the mediator of a correspondingly better covenant**, which has been legally established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought for a second; for he does find fault with the people when he says: “‘Look! There are days coming,’ says Jehovah, ‘and **I will conclude with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant**; not according to the covenant that I made with their forefathers in [the] day of my taking hold of their hand to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my covenant, so that I stopped caring for them,’ says Jehovah. ‘**For this is the covenant** that I shall covenant with the house of Israel after those days,’ says Jehovah. ‘**I will put my laws in their mind, and in their hearts I shall write them.** And I will become their God, and **they themselves will become my people.**”
– *Hebrews 8:6-10*

The new covenant is a covenant to be God’s people. The terms of the covenant are not written as laws. They are discerned by what is in our minds (acquired by spirit-led knowledge), and what is in our hearts (acquired by whole-soul belief and then faith). Thus, no man can judge another’s worthiness to be in the covenant.

Jesus said this covenant is established by his blood which is to be poured out on our behalf. Again, by what Jesus said in the 6th chapter of John, we know he is not referring to his literal blood. (*John 6:63*) Instead, he is referring to spirit:

“This Jesus God resurrected, of which fact we are all witnesses. Therefore because he was exalted to the right hand of God and received **the promised holy spirit from the Father, he has poured out** this which you see and hear.” – *Acts 2:32-33*

“However, when the kindness and the love for man on the part of our Savior, God, was manifested, owing to no works in righteousness that we had performed, but according to his mercy he saved us through the bath that brought us to life and through the making of us new by holy spirit. **This [spirit] he poured out richly upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior**, that, after being declared righteous by virtue of the undeserved kindness of that one, we might become heirs according to a hope of everlasting life.” – *Titus 3:4-7*

The outpouring of holy spirit, specifically the spirit of truth, was the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise:

“I have many things yet to say to you, but you are not able to bear them at present. However, **when that one arrives, the spirit of the truth, he will guide you into all the truth**, for he will not speak of his own impulse, but what things he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things coming. That one will glorify me, because he will receive from what is mine and will declare it to you.” – *John 16:12-14*

And the work of the spirit of truth is what validates the new covenant. (*Hebrews 8:6-10*) Therefore, when Jesus said ‘drink,’ he was telling us that we must allow the spirit of truth to dwell in our hearts and direct our steps. And when we ‘drink,’ we are voluntarily demonstrating that we are willing to do just that. Will we ‘drink’ . . . or will we pass?

“After singing praises, they went out”
(*Matthew 26:30*)

When the Memorial Supper was completed, Jesus went on to teach many things. The Apostle John recounts those matters. (*John 13:31-17:26*; see also **Our Most Holy Night.**) And when the teaching was completed, they sang praises and went out.

The meal ended with praise to the Father and, no doubt, thanksgiving. Likewise, as we complete our meals, let us praise the Father and give Him thanks for the gift of His son to lead us to life everlasting.

By our participating in this symbolic drama, we are confessing our union with Christ Jesus and allowing Jesus to confess union with us. (*Matthew 10:32-33*) We are voluntarily accepting our sonship with God and allowing ourselves to be led by spirit. We are submitting to

the baptism into Christ's death so that when we are released from the flesh, we will have a glorious resurrection like our Lord.

“Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through our baptism into his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, we also should likewise walk in a newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall certainly also be [united with him in the likeness] of his resurrection.” – Romans 6:3-5

Yes, the Memorial Supper is a symbolic drama of sonship with God and being heirs to the kingdom of the heavens. This was a fine culmination to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Everything he taught is summed up in this meal, along with the lessons of that night. Instead of a having set of rules on how to conduct ourselves, we look to the bread of life and we allow the spirit to lead us into all truth.

For example, when we are unsure of how to handle a certain situation, we look to how Jesus handled a similar matter. When we struggle with earthly life, we look to the courage and strength of Jesus who was ever mindful of the temporal nature of life on earth and the enduring life in the heavens. And when we experience doubt about our worth to the Father, we look to how Jesus treated his followers and see our true value.

Not all are willing to pick up their torture stakes and follow the Christ. (*Mark 8:34*) But to those who do, untold blessings await.

“Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, neither have there been conceived in the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him.” – 1 Corinthians 2:9

What a night for the sons of the kingdom! We have eaten of the bread of life and drank of the spirit in the presence of our Lord. We communed with our brothers and confirmed our dedication to live as faith sons of God until our release from the flesh.

In all of our subsequent gatherings, we must be certain to invite the Christ and acknowledge his presence. As he himself said, in all such occasions, he is truly ‘in our midst.’ (*Matthew 18:20*)

Let us praise the Father.

“Elaia Luchnia”