



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# **My Thoughts When I Serve Communion**

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## My Thoughts When I Serve Communion

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*1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

*John 15:12-17*

Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me” as he serves the bread and the cup, the words of institution for the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

I want to share with you some of my thoughts about the ‘doing’, about the ‘remembrance’ for serving communion and how Jesus’ words about friendship tie it all together, at least for me, as to what it means to be at this table.

In a little over forty years of serving communion in twelve different churches, each church has been different: differences in communion ware, the size of the table, how everything is placed on the table, how the congregation is served.

And when I’ve asked about it, each congregation has answered, as if I should know, “Well, this is the Presbyterian way!” More than anything, that says something about us Presbyterians!

As interim, I’m very aware of traditions that churches have. I try not to confuse one church with another as I step behind the table. In some churches, served by intinction or the bread and drink go out together to people in the pews and others where the bread and drink are served separately.

There are differences in how the elders receive the trays of bread and drink. Most were served from the table as here, but there was one where I would go to the top of the steps and bring the trays to the elders.

I remember my first communion Sunday at that church. I had come from a church where I stood behind the table, and the elders came to me. Because it was habit, I stood behind the table, and waited for them to come to me, and they stood at the foot of the steps and waited for me and looked at me as if somebody needed to honk the horn to get this old man to move because the light had turned green!

Oh, of course, I think about ‘what if I forget to say the right words...what if I drop the bread...I remember one time the loaf of bread was still frozen and it would not break...what if I mishandle the tray of drinks in passing it to an elder?’

In my forty years of serving communion, I’ve only had one elder drop the tray and spill all the cups of grape juice on this lady as he started to pass it down a pew. But he was a curmudgeon and proud of it, so I thought that was just God’s sense of humor on his behalf!

Yes, my thoughts do turn to things like that! But those are the logistics of Communion. We get so caught up in the ‘doing’ that we forget or neglect just who it is who told us to do this.

It’s not about the logistics, it’s about the love; that’s what we’re really doing when we do this in remembrance of him.

In our reading from John’s gospel, Jesus is at the table with his disciples, the night of the Last Supper. Jesus has washed the disciples’ feet, broken bread and poured wine, and Judas has left for the betrayal.

Jesus says to those at the table, “I chose you, you did not choose me.”

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I think it's so important to hear what he's not saying. He doesn't say, "I've got a dress code and a worship code and a doctrine code and a music code and a prayer code and a building code and a certain kind of people code for you to follow if you want to be my friend."

This table is where we hear the call of Jesus and share the friendship of Jesus Christ. Carol King, in her classic song about being a friend, said it best: "You've got a friend, all you have to do is call, and I'll be there."

I think about that because it has a lot to do with why I am Presbyterian. My Grandmother Lancaster grew up out in the country in Louisiana and attended a certain church of a certain denomination, not Presbyterian.

When she got married and moved to town, the ladies of the town church in the denomination in which she had grown up would not visit her...her new husband, my grandfather, had once owned a pool hall!

The Presbyterian women however, did visit. They made a visit they didn't have to make to someone who wasn't expecting it but who was very glad to receive it.

Those ladies were friends of Jesus, and I am Presbyterian because my grandmother experienced the grace and acceptance and friendship of Jesus through them: A mysterious joy of having people show they love you even when you see yourself as unlovable and unwelcome.

Friends do that for you, don't they; they love you no matter what. Maybe you remember Bruno Mars' song, "Count on Me":

*"If you ever find yourself stuck in the middle of the sea, I'll sail the world to find you  
If you ever find yourself lost in the dark and you can't see, I'll be the light to guide you  
Find out what we're made of when we are called to help our friends in need."*

That's what's at stake for you and me as we come to this table and do what we do.

Now let me be clear, it's easy to get distracted by the logistics of communion, or to conveniently forget the where and how these words were given and to get caught up in the sweet invitation to be Jesus' friends.

Growing up in the South, I was taught that "Everything goes better with sweet tea," and that's how we often think about friendship with Jesus. We romanticize the part of Communion that talks about broken bodies and poured blood, and we escape the struggle of what it means to live the life Jesus calls us to as his friends.

We sweeten the tough ideas that will cost us something if we live by them. We think all Jesus has to do in our friendship together is set the table for Sunday dinner and then we can go home for a nice nap.

But when Jesus calls us his friends, he looks for us to live as his friends by obediently and sacrificially serving the world from this table. We serve his love and we then we share his love. That's the 'remembrance' part.

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Perhaps it would help us to think that when Jesus calls us friends, he's calling us to a friendship that's deeper than anything we know in this world of superficial friendships that have no responsibilities and have no real commitments.

Henri Nouwen described the call to Christian friendship, prophetically I think, because he wrote these words in 1975. He said, "Our society seems to be increasingly hard and full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion, always expecting an enemy to suddenly appear, intrude and do harm."

Look around us, the conflicts between majority and minority groups, the 'identity tribes' based on ethnicity or race, sexual orientation or gender, economic class or lifestyle, political or religious or moral passions; all of it creating an intensified separation one from the other, barriers built, doors slammed shut, cold shoulders, what it feels like in middle school or high school to bring your lunch tray to a table and the other students sitting there tell you in no uncertain terms, "You need to find another place to eat."

When I serve communion, I think about what would happen if I saw my own worst enemy coming down the aisle to sit next to where I am sitting.

Think about that, what if your worst enemy came and sat by you as the bread and the drink were being served? What would it take for you or me to turn and say, "Take, eat...take, drink...for this is from the table of OUR friend Jesus."

This table ties us to the life and death of Jesus by service and sacrifice to love one another. "Do this in remembrance of me..."; the logistics of love, if you will, of how we are to



serve and share the love of Jesus Christ with all kinds of people chosen by Jesus, not by us.

I believe this table is the heart and soul of every table in our lives, every place where we are, in one way or another, in fellowship, in communion with, connected to other people in all sorts of circumstances.

So I want you to picture and remember the tables in your life: kitchen tables, formal dining tables, picnic tables, office tables, school lunch tables, all sorts of tables...sitting with strangers, sitting with loved ones, and can you remember those tables where you were being served and filled and loved?

I remember a table in my own life. From the time I was thirteen until I was eighteen, all the Lancaster aunts, uncles, cousins, lived within 30 miles of the Lancaster family home.

So, we would gather on the second Sunday of each month at the Lancaster family home for Sunday dinner: Adults and older cousins in the dining room, children in the kitchen at the yellow, Formica-topped table. I had been allowed to move out of the kitchen when I was twelve, to the adult table, sort of a Southern style bar mitzvah!

My grandmother went back and forth from the kitchen to the tables making sure everybody got enough. And even though some at that table didn't like others at that table (maybe that doesn't happen in your family!) even though they were at odds at other times, for that moment, that place, with those people, they were served by someone who loved us all, my grandmother, a true friend of Jesus Christ.

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Every time I step behind this table, my thoughts go to that other table where my grandmother's human hospitality revealed a divine hospitality where there's a place for everybody and everybody gets enough.

My deepest heartfelt thoughts as I step behind this table to serve communion turn to all who would come to this table, just being invited to the table myself.

Joyful, contemplative, humbled, expectant thoughts of being here to share in the mystery of God's hospitality as friends of Jesus, who calls us, invites us to come to his table, to eat with him, to learn from him, to love as he has loved us.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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