

WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



SERMON

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Do This

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Communion.

Once again, I'm choosing scriptures that seem to fit the theme of the day!

In writing to the saints at Corinth, Paul has noticed that unlike any other church that has ever existed throughout human history, there appear to be divisions among the people who gather there. I know, I was shocked too! Worse yet, the division seems to be between the haves and the have-nots. Some are coming to eat their fill, drinking until they're drunk. Still others don't have anything to eat or drink. Beyond that, the congregation at Corinth seems to be eating the meal separately, everyone on their own. So, to correct this, Paul does what any good preacher would do:

He reminds them of the story.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as

you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Surgeon.

The story goes that there was once a surgeon. This surgeon was one of the greatest in the world, just about the absolute best heart surgeon you could ever find. One day a man in his 50s was experiencing some chest pain, and after meeting with the surgeon it was decided that he would need open heart surgery. The man, after hearing the news, started talking to his wife in front of the surgeon about how nervous he was, how this was going to affect their lives together, what would happen if something went wrong. But, ultimately, they decided that the best thing they could do was proceed with the surgery.

When the day finally came and the man was put under, the surgeon scrubbed up and walked in to the operating room. One by one he picked up the implements of surgery, examined them closely, and then set them back on the tray. After he had done that with every single tool, he congratulated his nursing staff, and walked out of the room.

When the patient woke up, he immediately noticed that there was no scar on his chest. As the doctor came in, the patient said "What gives! I thought you were going to operate on me?"

The surgeon coolly replied “Oh, well, you and your wife seemed nervous about the recovery, so I didn’t want to cause you any pain.”

Obviously, this doesn’t fall in to the best practices of medicine by any stretch, does it? But I wonder, how much of the Christian life is missing out on the healing we need because we’re trying to avoid pains?

A passed down tradition.

Paul starts this passage by telling us that this is something that he received, and is now passing on to the church in Corinth. This always makes me think of something that, at least for me, I don’t do enough in my own faith journey, so let’s take a moment together to do this exercise:

Take a moment, here and now, and think about someone who passed on this faith to you. Maybe it was your parents, or the folks who raised you? Maybe it was a really dedicated Sunday School teacher? Maybe it was a youth pastor? Or maybe even it was just a friend who cared about you and your walk with Christ?

Whoever it was, if you have the ability (and not all of us do any more), take some time today and give that person a text or a

call or something. Let them know what their faithfulness has meant to you.

And then, if their faithfulness means a lot to you, in what ways can *you* continue to pass this faith on? Maybe you want to help out with the youth group? Maybe you want to volunteer to teach Sunday School? Maybe you want to make a gift to *Sustain the Sound*, so this thunderous organ can keep bringing us to the throne room? Or maybe you just want to talk to someone you love about your faith and theirs?

In any event, Paul keeps talking about what he's passed down.

The Words of Institution.

Even if you're the new pastor at a church, you've probably heard these words of institution before!

On the night Jesus was betrayed, in the height of the Passover celebration, Jesus takes bread. The bread at the Passover meal is highly symbolic and rich, full of meaning in the Jewish telling of that first Passover. As he takes it, Jesus gives thanks. And then he breaks the bread right there in front of these disciples. While he's breaking this bread, he shares this interesting bit of language with the disciples. He says, "This is my body broken for you."

Now, we have to remember that we are on the other side of Easter morning, and so we have a much better sense of where this story is going than the disciples do. We know what all this body broken business is all about, because we know about the cross. But...they don't. In fact, I imagine Jesus staring out at a table full of clueless faces.

This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Now, I'm not an English expert, and even less of a Greek expert, but still I wonder. Which *this* is Jesus asking his disciples to do in remembrance of him?

Is it the breaking of the bread together? To be sure, saints have for generations gathered around a table just like this one. We've broken the bread. We've drank from the cup. We've tasted and see what forgiveness and mercy look like. Even when you've had the bread and you've had the cup a thousand times in your life, I don't know about you, but it always holds such a special place in my faith walk to receive those elements. I do this in remembrance of the God who loves us in Jesus Christ. Do this in remembrance of me...

... or ...

Maybe when Jesus says that this is his body broken, maybe what we should do is allow our bodies to be broken in remembrance of Christ?

For sure, I'm not not talking about any of us going to the cross on our own or anything quite so dramatic. We have a savior already after all, and it's not any of us.

But, there are ways that our bodies can be put on the line in our faith, aren't there? Ask any volunteer who has spent a night on a youth group lock in- that's our bodies broken in remembrance of Christ. Ask anyone who has taken the 20-something hour flight to Malawi to visit with our brothers and sisters there in the name of Christian love- that's our bodies broken in remembrance of Christ. Ask anyone who has given up their Saturday...you know, that *one and only Saturday where there isn't a soccer tournament...*so that they could go to Produce to the People to hand out nourishment to people in need- that's our bodies broken in remembrance of Christ. Ask anyone who has shown up for a neighbor in need, even when they were just exhausted at the end of the day, and they'll tell you that's our bodies broken in remembrance of Christ.

This is my body, broken for you. Do *this* in remembrance of me.

Versions of the story.

See, this helps with a few versions of the Christian story out there.

There is a version of this story that doesn't want to have our bodies broken in remembrance of Christ. There's a version of this story that believes that Jesus died for us, so that we get to go to heaven when we die. That's the whole point of this version of the story, to get to paradise when it's all over. The problem with this version of the story is that it ends up treating this life like the waiting room at the dentists office, where we sit around listening to soft rock and reading *Highlights for Children*. I really don't want my life to be like that, do you?

There's another version of the story, equally as dangerous and needing to be avoided. Because this version says that because Jesus had his body broken and invites us to do the same, we somehow earn Jesus' favor by going out on a limb. We think "If I do enough good deeds, Jesus will welcome me to heaven." Or "If I do enough mission work, Jesus will love me." The problem here is two fold: One, it sounds less like a spirituality and more like an anxiety attack. But two- it's very much not how this story goes.

So, how does this story go?

Infinite Life.

In the classic 1980's video game Super Mario Brothers...(I'm sure you all saw that segue coming) I used to have this cheat code that would give me infinite life in the game. No matter how many times I fell off a cliff or got eaten by a monster, I would just pop back to life right where I'd left off.

So imagine for a moment that I put in the cheat code, had infinite life, and just...sat there. I didn't do anything, because I guess since I have infinite life I don't *have* to do anything. That would be really boring, wouldn't it?

Imagine another scenario where I put in that cheat code, had infinite life, and just kept jumping off the same cliff again and again and again. I have infinite life, so I guess it won't hurt me after all, right? That too would be rather boring.

No friends, let this nerdy gamer tell you that when you get the infinite life cheat code, it means you get to run the race with reckless abandon. You run just as hard and as fast and as confidently as you possibly can, because nothing out there can hurt you.

Reckless abandon.

Through the grace of Jesus Christ, through his body broken and his blood poured out, we have received grace upon grace upon grace. We have the infinite life cheat code! That's exactly what we gather to remember around this table this morning.

So when we're done here, let's run this life with reckless abandon, what do you say? Let's put our bodies out there by helping the poorest in our community, both in body and in spirit. Let's put our bodies out there by risking big and taking on the next challenge in our faith walk. Let's put our bodies out there by showing up for the people in our world who are on the outside looking in. Let's run the race with reckless abandon, and in this way proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

Blessing.

So, may you gather around this table to taste and see how good Christ's love and mercy are. May you receive the body of Christ broken for you and the blood of Christ shed for you in a spirit of grace and love today. And then, may you go from this place to allow your bodies to be broken in remembrance of Christ, showing love to any and all you encounter. And in doing so, may you meet Christ in a spirit of healing and mercy.



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