

The Potluck Communion
By
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Centre Congregational Church
Luke 6:20-31

INTRODUCTION

When I was asked to preach on this Sunday, I first thought - oh no, I'm retired and I'm going to have to work! This when my motto is supposed to be "do something fun every day." Fortunately, you folks are lucky since this being a communion Sunday, and we are also recognizing All Saints Day. — all these special day mean that my reflection thoughts will be on Communion and All Saints. So, you're spared a sermon on science and religion dialog or peacebuilding.

Now to the topics at hand. First, a metaphor about communion.

I'm a great fan of church potlucks, . I'm a fan of church potlucks for several reasons. Some theological. Some not.

The first reason I like potlucks is because at home, I'm not a very creative cook. My goal is to have something on the menu from all the different food groups - protein, veggies, carbs, and fruits. But at potlucks, I get foods put together in tasty casseroles and prepared in ways that are way too complicated for me. And I know from experience that this church has some great cooks!

The second reason I like church potlucks - and the more theological reason, is that I get to know you folks better when we share a meal together. It's very interesting that when we share a meal together, we have time to share our lives in greater detail. And this time together strengthens our sense of belonging to one another and to the bonds of fellowship among us grow stronger. (P)

Now, what does this have to do with Communion? The first thing to recognize is that Jesus shared the cup and the bread with the disciples when they were at a meal together. It seems that only after the meal was finished that Jesus spoke the words we remember during the Communion Liturgy. While Jesus' words point to him - e.g. "Do this in remembrance of me>", what we remember is that Jesus made this request when the disciples were all together at dinner in the Upper Room.

While Jesus spoke of the bread - this is my body broken for you and the wine "this is my blood which will be shed for you." It seems to me that likely they had more to eat than just the wine and bread. So, maybe that night it really was a holy potluck - a Potluck Communion? True or not, it's fun to think of the Last Supper as a Potluck Communion!

INTINCTION SYMBOLISM

In the potluck communion, we walk up the the altar, for this day, our spiritual serving table. There we are greeted by several of God's servants who are also members of our

spiritual community. While this is a more solemn occasion, and at the same time, we are blessed with background music. But it is just the same in the real potluck, where we arrive, take a plate, and find the gifts of food laid out before us. Often there is often someone who will ladle the good stuff onto our plate.

There is also something especially significant about taking communion by intinction. If we are able, we must get up and come to the servers. In other words, to meet God, we must do some spiritual work, and so meet God halfway. We meet God in the symbolic form of bread and wine, but since God is mystery and cosmic, it helps a lot to encounter something concrete in place of total mystery. There is, of course, biblical precedent for meeting God halfway. Moses, remember, had to go up a mountain to meet God, and found him in a burning bush.

It is also interesting to remember the worship style of the early Christians when there were not yet formal congregations. They met in homes, and as it says in Acts chapter 2, "Day by day...they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts." It seems to me that perhaps this is another example of a potluck communion. I don't know anything about first century dinner menus, but my guess is that if they were gathering for a meal, that the polite thing to do was to bring something to the meal. When it says, "they broke break," I take it to mean they celebrated the Lord's Supper.

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

The idea which is found in the potluck supper experience, and is present symbolically during communion, is that as a church we are an intentional community. (p) We're intentional in that many of us joined the church and in that ritual, made promises with the congregation and God. Also, with God's leading, we discern the intentional areas where we will focus our ministry in Brattleboro and the world.

The importance of community is found in all of Jesus' ministry, and really from the beginning. Jesus did not operate as a lone wolf evangelist. Instead, he created a community - the community of the 12 disciples to work with him and support him in his ministry. Not only did they work together but they traveled together, listening, observing and sharing in Jesus' ministry. Scholars might challenge me, but I think of Jesus and his disciples as the first little church. So in this regard, that little gathering in the upper room might well be the first potluck communion!

In this communion ritual we reconnect to Jesus and through Jesus we are connected to God, and through participating in the sacrament we are connected to one another. and together we are the community of the church.

And through a mystical spiritual connection, we are connected to the saints who have shared our table. We have remembered them through a ritual of reading their names and ringing the church bell.

ALL SAINTS COMMENTS

The recognition of the passing of some of the saints who recently sat among us is a variation on rituals of remembering those whose life propelled Christianity into the future, and kept it alive in their day. Recognition of the saints was begun by Pope Gregory IV in about 870 AD. Later in about 1080 AD Pope Gregory VII moved the feast day to November first.

I have thought that we might take this remembrance experience a bit further. Perhaps if you knew one of these recently departed saints, that you might recall their gifts and talents.

Perhaps, after you have shared the communion elements and have returned to your seat, as you are listening to the communion music, you might consider these saints and their gifts. Then, you might consider how you might imitate these saints in our church.

Finally, a few comments on this morning's scripture. The Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount, is the appointed text for All Saints Day. This litany of those who are blessed and cursed provides us with a good description of who might qualify as a saint. In this text, the blessed are the poor, the hungry and those who weep or are suffering. In Jesus' topsy turvey view of the world where the First are last and the Last are first, the Rich and the Satisfied do not qualify for sainthood., This, of course, is too strict an interpretation, but Jesus is warning the crowds to think carefully about how God might view them and their goals in life. Certainly those who are doing their bit to bring in the kingdom here on earth likely qualify.

Thus, as we go forth from this place, fed by the spirit, let us contemplate the best qualities of saintly living. Amen.