**November 23rd, 2023- Bible Study**

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

**17Now in giving this instruction I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18For to begin with, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19Indeed, it is necessary that there be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you.**

Taking our reading from today out of its full context has caused many people discomfort and misunderstanding, as it speaks about examining ourselves before eating the Lord’s supper. Paul has a specific concern about the Corinthians’ lack of hospitality and love for their neighbour, not so much their personal sin. Our Christian worship and faith stands on the fact that through Jesus, all believers become part of one body, of which Jesus is the head, and are drawn near to God.

Paul begins by telling the Corinthians that he is disappointed with the reports that he has heard back about them. Getting together is not always for the best, because by meeting they cause harm. This is a strong warning. Meeting together is central to our faith and being a part of the body of Christ. But by coming together in a way that creates more division normalizes the damage that is done. Both those inside and outside the church begin to think that this is “just how church is”.

When Paul speaks about some factions being necessary, he isn’t suggesting that churches must have different groups that are at odds, he is saying that when damage being caused by some, those who are faithful must show it. Those dedicated to serving God must not go along with the others, but stand up and be different, both for the sake of the church, and also their witness to the world.

**20When you come together, then, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. 21For at the meal, each one eats his own supper. So one person is hungry while another gets drunk! 22Don’t you have homes in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you in this matter!**

Paul argues that although the people may gather together and *call* it the Lord’s supper, what they are doing has nothing to do with Jesus. This word translated as the *Lord’s* supper is only found one other time in the New Testament. This is a unique and special meal that belongs to Jesus. By making it about themselves, and humiliating their brothers and sisters, it is no longer Jesus’ meal. They have taken a holy and special gathering and treated it with contempt.

Instead of gathering for a shared meal (or the smaller representation of a meal that we celebrate), those who are rich bring all of their best food and drink and overindulge, while those who are poor have to sit beside them and go hungry. It isn’t a family meal; it is an excuse to show that they are different and better. It is the opposite of being the body of Christ. They don’t just humiliate those who are poor, they despise Christ’s church. It’s one thing to mark themselves as superior, but to do it in the context of the church family and have the audacity to call it *Jesus’* supper is unacceptable.

**23For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, 24and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.**

This writing from Paul is the earliest that we have about the Lord’s supper, and Paul reminds the Corinthians of what the Lord’s supper really is by repeating what he received from Jesus through revelation. This overall tradition is nearly identical to the tradition written in the Gospels.

This is the first explicitly Christian tradition that Jesus introduces, but importantly, it is an overt reworking of the Jewish celebration of Passover. The bread at Passover sustained the people while they left in haste, and the lamb was killed at the first Passover to cover the sins of the Hebrews. Jesus takes that well-known tradition and shows them that it points to an even greater example of God’s saving love. Jesus is killed to cover our sins. His body is given for us.

When Jesus does this, he shows us that he isn’t just repeating what has been done before, he is making it new. It is a *new* covenant that Jesus creates. This covenant isn’t sealed with the blood of an animal (as with OT sacrifices), or of a sinful man (as in circumcision), but with the blood of Jesus, who is God-become-human. Jesus invites us to join is a solemn and holy remembrance of what Jesus did on the cross when his body was broken for us.

The phrase about remembrance could likely be more properly translated, “do this in remembrance *of my remembering you*.” Just as the Passover was a reminder of God remembering his people, Jesus’ supper is where we remember how he remembered us, and that he continues to remember us. At the Lord’s supper, we remember and celebrate what Jesus has done, what he is doing, and what he will do. We celebrate and share what Jesus has done until he returns to make everything new. This meal is a big deal. The Lord’s supper is not just a nice thing to do, it is God sharing his very own body and blood with us. He died for us, and he lives for us as well.

Jesus includes us as a part of *his body*, and his supper is a powerful reminder of that. We take Jesus, and we make him a part of us. Just as the bread and wine sustain and become a part of our bodies, we are reminded that, Jesus really becomes part of each one of us, and we of one another through Jesus. Jesus says this explicitly in John 17:20-21: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

**27So, then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord. 28Let a person examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. 29For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep. 31If we were properly judging ourselves, we would not be judged, 32but in being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned with the world.**

The Corinthians come and say it is to eat the bread and drink the cup of Jesus, but really just gorge themselves while ignoring their neighbours, Paul says that is not Jesus’ supper, because that is not what Jesus did, and it is not who Jesus is. When we come to eat and drink together Jesus is always first and foremost. But how do we show that? By becoming a servant to all, and recognising that we are all equally a part of Jesus’ body. There are no distinctions between us. When we look around, it is not just other people having their own private remembrance, it is Jesus’ body coming together. We need to recognise and care for one another. every effort to repent and correct that.

Sometimes this has been interpreted to mean that anyone who doesn’t fully understand what is going on should not be a part of it. That if we do not specifically understand how the bread itself is the body of Jesus that we come under judgement, but it is clear from the context that it is the *people* who are Jesus’ true body, and that is what we must recognise. Chapter 10 reads:“The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? **17**Because *there is* one bread, *we* who *are* many are one body, for *we* all share from the one bread.”

The point of this text is not looking at our individual sin (there are other times to do that) it is to honestly look at whether we are recognizing that the people we share with are Jesus’ own body. There are echoes here of when Jesus will return and say, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’” Or “If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar.”

**33Therefore, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, welcome one another.****34If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you gather together you will not come under judgment. I will give instructions about the other matters whenever I come.**

The Lord’s supper is a time for unity, not division. It is a time to recognise Jesus at work in everything: the past, the present, the future, in our own lives, and in the lives of others. Jesus has given us a wonderful gift, and he wants us to recognise it. If we despise his people, we despise him, and he takes that seriously.