

Communion: Avoiding the Awkward and Encountering the Amazing

Growing up in the church, the Lord's Supper often seemed mechanical, cold and unfamiliar to me. Why? Because it was done in a mechanical, cold, and unfamiliar way. The subtext of many of these celebrations seemed to be, "We only do this once every three months and so we barely know how this will go. Let's not mess it up by forgetting something. So it's ironic that the theme of the Lord's Supper is actually remembering!

The Lord's Supper should be the most powerful, transforming, intimate act of worship we do together as the church. There have been times recently when these moments have been so powerful that I've saved my cup and keep it in my office days after the event. I just didn't want to forget that moment.

So how can we exile the awkwardness and set the mysterious table for worship?

First, suggestions:

- Get together to plan the Lord's Supper so that everyone knows how it will go. Don't meet days in advance. The best planning happens a few hours before worship.
- However you plan to celebrate the Lord's Supper, don't rush in the preparation. Fill the cups, get the table set? Yes. But also prepare by praying during this time. Think about the people in your church who will be there. Pray for those that come to mind. Ask God to inhabit the experience.
- During the celebration, make sure you fulfill your duties but have an attitude of blessing those you serve!

How do you do this? Simply focus on each person you serve with a heart of love and compassion. Trust me. You'll have moments of improvisation where you'll see someone who doesn't get served and you'll have to backtrack or give direction to your fellow deacons, but don't allow these moments to steal *the* moment. I'll never forget Julian, a 72 year old deacon who was a soft-spoken man, well respected and loved by our church but certainly a man of few words. I was sitting near the back of the church since I wasn't needed for serving that Sunday night. When he brought the plate to my aisle, he looked me in the eye and whispered, "Love you, Matt." That simple blessing over me transformed that night. He understood that it wasn't about the details. The Lord's Supper is always about love.

Now let's consider a few ideas for celebrating the Lord's Supper. While the fundamental elements of the Lord's Supper remain constant we can make this time elemental and unique. None of the following ideas or should be done every time the Lord's Supper is taken but, trust me, these experiential ideas had a deep impact on me as a believer and a deacon.

Exchanging of the cup

After the bread has been served and you move toward the taking of the cup, the pastor would ask the Church to stand with cup in hand and explain that the Lord's Supper is a symbol of love, reconciliation and unity. The pastor explains this to the church and then invites them to exchange their cup with another member (or more) of the church as a silent expression of their love for that person. This requires them to move around the auditorium and so you'll want to give them some time to do this. The pastor should direct them that they should do this in silence. Once as pastor, several years ago, I watched in amazement as two men, without words, reconciled simply through exchanging cups. I've often wondered if this would have happened in any other moment. The Lord's Supper

broke down the wall of disagreement they had been harboring. They reconciled without saying another word and in the following weeks I was stunned to see a friendship developing between them.

Communion at Midnight

Another experience to consider calendaring is a prayer event. Members would gather that evening around 8 PM. We would do this on a selected Friday night. We would pray at the church alone, in groups and all together for four hours. I know it sounds lengthy, but with a well-conceived schedule you'll be amazed at how the time flies! Because fewer people come to events like these, you'll experience an intimacy with the people that you don't get in a one-hour worship service. At the end of the night, we'd prepare a table with candles and the elements of the Lord's Supper. A couple of deacons did this while other activities were going on. At midnight I invited the group to follow me to the room. We walked into a room with a large table and the elements. It was the closest I've ever felt to being a part of an early Church experience. We sang familiar choruses and we shared what the Lord's Supper meant to each of us and then at the end we took communion. This became one of the most anticipated events on the church calendar.

Other ideas:

- **The Nails:** Before passing the elements, pass nails to each row and invite the worshipers to press the nail against their palm to remember the suffering of Christ and then pass it to the next person of the row.
- **Planned Spontaneity:** Before passing the bread have someone stand in the congregation and sing, "Sweet Little Jesus Boy." Then before passing the cups, have another singer sing "Were You There When the Crucified

my Lord” As the benediction the congregation is led to sing the last verse of “Were You There” (Where you there when He rose up from the grave.)

- **Family Communion:** Invite people to come to the front as families or as groups to share the elements together. As Deacons make sure to include singles and people away from their family to join *your* family so no one takes the Lord’s Supper Alone.
- **Deyanu:** Use the following responsive reading adapted from an ancient Hebrew litany called “Deyanu.” The congregation only has to repeat after each phrase. “It would have been enough.”

If we knew Jesus as Savior but we were never promised me eternal life.

It would have been enough us.

If we knew Jesus as Savior, were promised eternal life and never knew that He experienced our pain

It would have been enough for us

If we knew Jesus as Savior, were promised eternal life, knew that he experienced our pain but were not given His words and strength.

It would have been enough for us.

If we knew Jesus as Savior, were promised eternal life, knew that he experienced our pain, were given His words and strength and never knew Him as friend.

It would have been enough for us.

If we knew Jesus as Savior, were promised eternal life, knew that He experienced our pain, were given His words and strength, knew Him as friend but never had a chance to have a

spiritual family.

It would have been enough for us.

But we do and He did.

Jesus wanted us to remember. My prayer is that we will remember and experience the power of His sacrifice and every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we get a little closer to the glory of Christ.