The Healing Power of the Lord’s Supper in the Church

Diane Spleth
dspleth@sbcglobal.net

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol23/iss2/11

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact paul.stenis@pepperdine.edu.
The Healing Power of the Lord’s Supper in the Church

Diane Spleth

In a church I was part of years ago, there was a woman who cried every week during Communion. I first realized it when I began serving as an elder and stood at the table where I could look out at the whole congregation. I’m not speaking of a few discreet tears quickly wiped away. No. This woman wept, tears cascading down her cheeks through the words of institution, through the prayers, through the passing of the bread and cup. She cried through it all.

The second time I witnessed what looked like deep grief, I called her later that afternoon to ask if something was wrong. “I couldn’t help noticing that you were crying as we shared the Lord’s Supper,” I said to her.

“Oh, yes,” she answered cheerfully. “I cry every time. It’s the grace of it all. So much in my life has been wrong,” she said. “When I hear those words, ‘This is my body given for you,’ I just can’t get over the gift of God’s grace—for me and for all of us. Every week it just overwhelms me,” she said.

God’s healing grace made real, made manifest, made clear. God’s healing grace embodied in the breaking of the bread.

The Lord’s Supper has been, and is, many things to the church. It is a multilayered gift. It is a memorial meal—a quiet moment to examine ourselves. It is a place where we experience forgiveness. It is a sign of God’s grace and abundance. And it is an experience of the living, risen Christ, through which we are offered healing.

It is a memorial meal when in the sharing we remember Jesus’s life and death and resurrection. “Do this in remembrance of me,” he said. How many of you have worshipped in a church with that phrase carved or engraved on the front of the table? “Do this in remembrance of me.” And so we remember. We recall Jesus’s life and the love he lived so radically that it led to a Roman cross. We do remember. But it is so much more than mere remembrance of events that took place some 2,000 years ago. In that remembrance we also recognize and own the identity we have been given as sisters and brothers in Christ. We remember how he lived and strive to model our lives after his. And when we have fallen away, it is often at the table that we are remembered.

It’s there that we also remember that we have fallen short—sometimes way short—of whom God has called us to be. “Examine yourselves,” the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11. “Examine yourselves... then eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (emphasis added). So we do. We take inventory and we confess our sins in the breaking of the bread.

One of my favorite Christian hymns, “These I Lay Down,” begins,

Before I take the body of my Lord,
before I share his life in bread and wine,
I recognize the sorry things within: these I lay down.

Of those around in whom I meet my Lord,
I ask their pardon and I grant them mine
that every contradiction of Christ’s peace may be laid down.
It is enough to make us cry—the healing from sin we receive here.

It is also at the Lord’s table, paradoxically through a meal that barely qualifies as a meal—a bit of bread and a sip of wine—that we experience a sense of the abundance of God’s grace. Of hospitality and a welcome so amazing it can take our breath away.

We are amazed with that abundance because we are pretty comfortable with scarcity. “Oh, I don’t know, Lord. You may not have enough to go around. Times are tough. No one has quite as much as they did ten years ago. Maybe you better conserve what you have.”

But God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, sets a bounteous table and invites us to pull up a chair and bring some friends along too. “Are you sure I can share this meal? I’m not so good, really,” I explain. God’s answer is always yes—yes, yes, and yes. There is more than enough for you all. There is enough for all y’all, in fact.

The bread at this table is never fully consumed. The cup always runneth over. Come and share the abundance of God’s grace at the table. That is a healing word for Christ’s church. There is always more than enough when we trust in the truth of God’s bountiful grace. We can be healed of our fear of scarcity when we trust in the abundance of God’s amazing grace.

Christ Jesus is the host at the table, the one who gave his all in love. He is the one who dons a towel and washes our feet. It is enough to make us weep.

There is another verse of that hymn I love that speaks to this very thing,

Lord Jesus Christ, companion at this feast,
I empty now my heart and stretch my hands
And ask to meet you here in bread and wine,
Which you lay down.

We meet the living Christ in this meal. “For where two or three are gathered in my name,” Jesus says in Matthew 18, “I am there among them.”

In the breaking of the bread of life, in the sharing in the cup of salvation we are in the presence of the living Lord. And that is always a healing experience.

Remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus late on resurrection day? They walked for miles with the risen Lord without recognizing him, even though they marveled at the way he opened the scriptures to them. When they arrived at their destination, night was falling so they invited their companion to stay with them and break bread. Companion, a word whose root means “with bread.”

Though he was the guest, the Lord took on the role of host as they sat down at the table. “He took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them” (Luke 24.30). And in the breaking of the bread their eyes were opened—they were healed of their blindness to the presence of the Lord and they recognized him.

In an instant they were transformed from exhausted dispirited travelers, whose hope was gone, to devoted disciples who couldn’t wait to get back on the road, dark and all, to share the good news with the eleven and others in Jerusalem. When they got there they told Jesus’s friends “what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24.35).

The living, risen Christ, who is present with us always, is still made known to us in the breaking of the bread, and he can still heal us of all that blinds us to the God-soaked world around us.

It is enough to make you cry, isn’t it?

Diane Spelth is pastor of the Allisonville Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, Indiana (dspelth@sbcglobal.net).