

The Healing Power of the Lord's Supper in the Church
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In a church I was a 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 the 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. A multi-layered gift. It is a memorial meal. A quiet moment to examine ourselves. A place we experience forgiveness. A sign of God's grace and abundance. And an experience of the living, risen Christ. And it all offers healing.

It is a memorial meal when in the sharing we remember Jesus' life and death and resurrection. "Do this in remembrance of me," he said. How many of you have worshiped 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' 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 “re-membered.”

It’s there that we also remember that we have fallen short – sometimes way short of who 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.” So we do. We take inventory and we confess our sins in those quiet moments. And we experience God’s forgiveness in the breaking of the bread.

One of my favorite Communion 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 might be laid down.”

It is enough to make us cry – the healing of 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 from a cup – 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 10 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 to bring some friends along too.

“Are you sure I can share in this meal? I’m not so good really.” I explain. “Yes,” God answers. “Well, what about her? And him? And those people over there? May they come too? Is there really enough grace for us all?” Yes, yes, and yes. God’s answer is always 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.

Because Christ Jesus who gave his all in love is the host of that table. He is the one who dons a towel and washes our feet. It is enough to make you 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 do 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 of 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 bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them." And in the breaking of the bread their eyes were opened – they were healed of their blindness to presence of the Lord and they recognized him.

And in an instant they were transformed from exhausted dispirited travelers to devoted disciples who couldn't wait to get back on the road, dark and all, to go share the good news with the eleven and others in Jerusalem. When they got there they told Jesus' friends all that had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The living risen Christ who is present with us always is still made known to us in the breaking of the bread; and 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?