

Agape Feast—Teaching #1

We are going to be doing something a little different today with the communion celebration. I heard Stan Hasteley once say, “The last seven words of a dying church—we never did it that way before.”

The city of Corinth is located about forty miles south-southwest of Athens. Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of A-c-haia and was strategically located on the isthmus of the **Pe-lop-on-nese**. Corinth was on the frontier of the Roman Empire. The city had been reestablished by Julius Caesar in 44 BC and was significantly populated by the overflow of Rome’s freed-person population. Its commerce and arts drew many immigrants and Corinth developed a reputation for possessing wealth without culture and abuse of the poor. These were some of the problems that Paul addresses in his letter to the Corinthians.

Paul came to Corinth around 51 AD, and he found the congregation at Corinth to be a cross section of the socio-economic and religious makeup of the city. Most of the Greco-Roman world was poor and there was no middle class as we know it. Paul knew that most Corinthian believers were not wise, not powerful, and not of noble birth, but some were wealthy and supported the church of Corinth. Most were Gentiles, non-Jewish Christians. But there were some Jews.

Sos-the-nes, who helped write Paul’s letter to the Corinthians could have been the synagogue official mentioned in Acts 18:17. Paul also mentions two Jewish couples in his letter to the Romans, “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*” (Romans 16:3 NRSV) “*Greet **An-dro-ni-cus and Ju-nia**, my relatives who were in prison with me, they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*” (Romans 16:7)

By the time Paul wrote 1st Corinthians he had known the believers in Corinth for more than three years. They had sent him a letter asking about several issues because they valued his opinion and thought of him as their father in faith. One of the issues he rebuked them on was the way they celebrated the Lord’s Supper.

In the Greco-Roman world it was ethically correct to serve superior food and wine to friends and equals, to eat in the main dining room, and let the freedman and

clients at the banquet eat the inferior food and drink the bad wine outside or in the basement.

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper by tearing off a morsel of bread and dipping it in the juice. First century Christians ate the bread and drank from the cup but put it within the context of a full meal. Paul was never one to hold back what he thought, and in 1st Corinthians 11:17-22, he describes the deplorable behavior of the church in Corinth, *"Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!"*

Those in the church at Corinth who were wealthy were having banquets specifically for their wealthy friends and what Paul saw was that these banquets were a display of social stratification that **exalted the haves** and **humiliated the have-nots**. The wealthy called these banquets the "Lord's style supper." Some would come, bringing their best food and their best wine, and go home fat and drunk. The have-nots would come hoping to get some of the good stuff and usually went home hungry. Paul called these banquets "one's own style supper," which was not the "Lord's style supper" **where all came together**. The wealthy were using **all the right words**, but it still did not make it the "Lord's style supper." That was a communal meal, a supper to which everyone brought whatever they had and shared it with one another. That is what made it a sacred meal and placed it with the shared meals that the historic Jesus ate. These meals were not hand outs, charity, or welfare but an attempt for all to participate in a new creation that acknowledged God as owner of all things and we humans stewards of God's world. The problem, as Paul saw it, was not a problem of theology, but a problem of social relations within the Corinthian community.

In verses 23-26 Paul reminds the church of the tradition of the institution of the “Lord’s style supper” and his solution to the Corinthians problem is a three part order to the celebration of the “Lord’s style supper.”

1. Invocation and the breaking of the bread.
2. The supper itself.
3. Invocation and the passing of the cup.

Listen to what Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 23-24, and after the reading you are invited to come and take the bread. Please come down the center isle and go to the servers on either side. You may tear off a piece, receive the blessing and take and eat. After receiving the bread please return to you seat by the outside isles. The children are invited also to partake at the discretion of their parents. *“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”*

“Sharing of the bread and songs.”

Agape Feast—Teaching #2

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the tradition he had taught them, the tradition of Jesus’ last meal with his disciples. The language of *“receiving”* and *“handing on”* indicates that Paul is referring to the early Christian tradition. Paul did not learn about the tradition through some revelation, but he received it *“from the Lord”* in a sense that it was Jesus himself who originated the tradition of sharing the bread and cup as a sign of his death and of the new covenant. There were no written gospels in Paul’s time so the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection came from oral tradition. Paul is not giving the Corinthians new information, he is recalling for them the story they should repeat every time they gather at the table. The Corinthians forgot the story and the meaning of the “Lord’s style supper.” They forgot that at the banquet table, the “Lord’s style supper,” there is a place for you and for me.

“Song; Come to the Banquet Table”

Agape Feast—Teaching #3

They forgot that the Agape Meal was an open meal. They forgot that the Agape Meal included groups not accustomed to eating together or mixing socially, the rich and the poor, the Jew and the Gentile, and women and men. When these groups feasted together tensions usually ran high. Paul had to lay out some ground rules. When believers eat together in open table fellowship they must treat one another as equals and share their food equally. This was reminiscent of Jesus’ own practice of open table fellowship, sharing meals with people and groups unaccustomed to eating together. What Paul is saying here is what he says in Galatians 3:28, *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”*

In the first part of verse 25 Paul says, *“In the same way he took the cup also, after supper.* A restaurant in Toronto Canada has a quote from Virginia Woolf on the back of their menu, and it reads;

One cannot think well,
One cannot love well,
And one cannot sleep well,
Unless one has dined well.

Now is the time we will dine together. During the next song I would ask you to come forward and use the doors to the north and the south of the stage and head down stairs. Joanie and Terry will lead you to the Agape Meal after the first chorus of the song. All you need to do is to find a table and sit. For those of you who need to use the stair-glide they are out the back doors of the sanctuary. When everybody is seated and we have finished the song we will have a prayer and we can eat. There are two vegetarian tables; they are the ones with the blue table cloths and orange signs. There are also two tables for children towards the back of the fellowship hall by the door to the 3rd through 5th grade class room.

Agape Feast—Teaching #4 Downstairs

While we eat there will be announcements, an offertory prayer, and the offering will be received.

Paul says, *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”* As the Corinthians gathered around the table Paul may have also said:

*“You’re loved,
You’re forgiven,
And dinners ready.
All come together at the Lord’s Supper.”*

Agape Feast—Teaching #5 Downstairs

In verse 25-26 Paul continues, *“In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”*

Paul drives home the point of the “Lord’s style supper” to the Corinthians with a double emphasis. He focuses their attention on both the death of Jesus, *“you proclaim the Lord’s death,”* and on his return, *“until he comes.”* These are the two events that Paul wanted the Corinthians hear. These are the two event that would frame the life of faith for the first century Christians.

You are invited to come and drink the cup. As you come someone will fill your cup and your job is to fill the cup of the person behind you. There will be two lines and as you get your cup please take it back to you seat and wait until everyone is served and we will all drink together.

Agape Feast—Fill the cups #6

Do this in remembrance.

Agape Feast—Song and Benediction #7

Once there was a child that was born with a multitude of physical problems. For the first three years of her life she had operation after operation. She spent the majority of her life in the hospital connected to IV's and feeding tubes in her stomach. But then her little body started to heal itself. One day the doctor said that she could soon come off the feeding tubes and start to take solid foods and go home. Her parents took her home on a Sunday morning, but instead of heading home they stopped off at their church to attend the service and hopefully get some prayer. That Sunday happened to be communion Sunday. When time came for the communion the child's mother went up to receive the bread and she carried her daughter with her. She tore off a piece of the bread, and then she looked at her little girl and decided to tear off another piece of bread for her. She went back to her seat, sat down and looked at the little girl. The mother gave the bread the little girl. The little girl took the bread and put it into her mouth. Her mother could see the little girl move the bread around with her tongue and finally her taste buds woke up and the little girl's eyes got real big and a smile came over her tiny face and she chewed up the bread and swallowed it. She had tasted the bread for the first time. This is the way we should always come to the Lord's Supper, to experience the supper for the first time.