

"What Binds Us? – Gathered at the Table"
Sermon Series 2 of 3
By Rev. James C. Ramsey

Texts: Psalm 133
Colossians 3:12-17
1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Preached: 10/7/18

This morning I continue with our sermon series exploring the question "What Binds Us?" This is the second in a trinity of sermons exploring how we are connected...bound together as God's people here at East Union. We'll also entertain ways we are held back, bound and kept from realizing our full potential.

We are surely bound together as we gather at Christ's table...as we eat the bread and drink the cup. We neglect this meal to our detriment.

There was a family, torn apart by conflict, that sought out the services of a family therapist. Even in the therapist's office, they kept sniping at one another. The father was distant, the mother complained of how she got no respect, the teenage son slouched moodily in a chair and the young daughter dissolved into tears every time the others raised their voices.

Despairing of making any headway with this dysfunctional bunch, the therapist decided on a simple intervention. "I have just one prescription for you," she said. "I want you all to sit down together every night and eat dinner together. Nobody rushes out. You all stay at the table until everyone is finished. And I want you to start the meal by holding hands around the table and saying grace."

"We're too busy," said the mother.

"I hate cooking dinner," complained the father.

"I'm afraid to," objected the daughter. "We'll just fight."

"We're not even religious," sneered the son. "How phony would that be?"

But the therapist held her ground. When the family objected that they didn't know any graces, she told them to just say, "God is great, God is good, and

we thank God for this food."

The father spoke up next. "You mean to tell us that, for a hundred dollars an hour, that's the only advice you have for us?"

"That's it," said the therapist. "Trust me on this one."

Skeptical as they were, the family agreed to give it a try.

On the return visit, the therapist began by asking how things were going. To everyone's surprise, the sullen teenage son spoke up first. Still looking down at the carpet, but with an unfamiliar smile on his face, he replied: "This is the best thing we've ever done. Now, at least I know I can see my dad once a day."

The family has a lot of work ahead of them, but the shared meal was the first step. In every culture, it is a powerful symbol of unity, understanding and peace. No less for us – the people of God!

When we eat together...sharing the cup of blessing and breaking the bread, it helps us heal from the wounds of living in a divided culture...a polarized society. It helps us remember *there is one bread, and we who are many are the one body of Christ, for we all partake of the one bread.*

Our unity goes beyond the issue of the day – whether you believed Brett Kavanaugh or Christine Blasey Ford...whether you vote red or blue...or whether you identify as conservative or liberal.

In his letter, Paul urged the Christians in the city of Colossae and surely urges us, to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts to which indeed we were called in the one body...as many grains go into one loaf, so we who are many are one body...the Body of Christ, and individually members of Him.

What do you think about as you prepare to eat the bread and taste the cup? Are you bound by all the things that crowd your mind...the game later...nagging chores you must get done...a particular conversation this week...your irritation with a family member...so many bills to pay? How will we focus our hearts and minds that we might commune with Christ in this meal? Perhaps you have a familiar, pious routine. That's good. But if

not...here are two illustrations – ways to approach the Table.

The first is a brief reflection on a creative way to receive the elements:

In her memoir *Girl Meets God*, Lauren Winner writes about the importance of communion to her [own] spiritual life. “The eucharist, mass and communion all have their place,” she writes, “but I want to start a campaign to revive an older name for communion: the Viaticum.

“Viaticum was a Roman term: It designated the food, clothes and money that a Roman magistrate took with him when he traveled on state business. It was the necessaries he needed to get him through his trip.

Since the days of the early church, Christians called the communion you gave to one on the verge of death the viaticum. Like the money and food that outfitted the Roman envoy for his journey, this final communion was the provision dying Christians needed as they stepped out on their journey from this world to the sweet hereafter.

“Sometimes, early Christians used viaticum to designate not just the deathbed communion but any communion. Communion, the Viaticum, was the necessaries for our journey through this life.

It was, in the words of one minister, ‘the sacrament of maintenance.’ It is like what the angel said to the exhausted and broken prophet Elijah, collapsed in a sleep under a broom tree. The angel waked him and said, ‘Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you.’

“And that is communion,” Winner muses. “If I did not eat, the journey would be too great.”

The second illustration I share with you is to imagine how this bread, which our Lord serves us, comes to be with us...and to take that process as a lesson for our calling as God’s people. It binds us together with common, unified purpose.

Where, then, does bread come from?

Bread comes from stalks of wheat, harvested out of the field. The wheat is cut down in its prime by a sharpened blade. The severed remains of the

plant are then gathered up, flailed and winnowed until the kernels emerge. Then those kernels are carried to a central place and brutally crushed between two millstones.

The product that remains, in a humble pile on the mill floor, is the fine white powder we call flour. But it's not over yet. After this ordeal, the flour is mixed with other ingredients. The mixture is kneaded and rolled out flat. Then, it is subjected to the intense heat of the baker's oven. In the fiery darkness it rises, transformed — emerging at the last as a crusty, brown loaf, fit to nourish the children of God.

A humble loaf of bread -- symbol of the brokenness of this human life of ours — the brokenness, and yet the emerging wholeness.

Saint Augustine, preaching to his 4th century congregation in an Easter sermon said this:

“You are the body of Christ. In you and through you the work of the Incarnation must go forward. You are to be taken; you are to be blessed, broken and distributed; that you may be the means of grace and the vehicles of the eternal charity.”

It's good and important that we share this meal together. By it we are bound to each other and to Christ, our Savior. The Apostle Paul would write to the Corinthians with this encouragement: *As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Let us lift the cup of blessing...let us again break the bread!