

Beth Singleton

September 11, 2009

1 Corinthians 11:17-33

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!

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.' 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.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

This summer I received a lesson in waiting from a community of people called Zapatistas. The Zapatista people decide everything as a community by complete consensus. We traveled to their community, having sent questions ahead of time, to speak with them and learn about their struggle for rights and justice for the indigenous people of Mexico and for all people of the world. When we got there we had to wait for about 20mn while they decided to let us enter into their community. Then, we had to wait ½ an hour longer as they paged through copies of our passports and recorded information about each of us. Next, we went to wait outside the meeting place of the Good Government Board for them to receive us. Once we were in we were sent back out to wait until they found our questions and decided on answers by complete consensus. Everyone had to agree on the questions they would answer, how they would answer them, and who would answer them. While we waited we walked around the small community, and ate lunch (where we sat waited for the food for about an hour) When we were finally welcomed back into their meeting space after many hours of waiting they answered 3 questions in about 15 minutes. Typically all of this waiting would have

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driven me crazy... but we were waiting for something we had never seen before, in a community living a way we had never lived before. There was a peace in the waiting because we were waiting for unity; we waited because peace takes time.

I spent 10 days in Chiapas, Mexico, learning about a new way of life; I learned from people who do not define a community as individuals, but defined an individual by the community which included the land and other life as a member of the community. They had an understanding of their complete dependence and connectedness to the world, thus believed their own struggle for freedom was a struggle for the whole world. The Zapatista people willingly gave what they could for the betterment of the community and as a result received what they needed. Decisions were not made by majority or by a powerful minority, but by complete consensus of those whose rotation it was to serve as leadership. Further one did not lead being guided by their will, but by listening to the will of the community, the will of a united humanity, the will of the body of Christ.

The body of Christ, my brothers and sisters, does not exist in the bread and the wine. The body of Christ exists in a united people. Without one member of this body it cannot function. The text read today requests that as we commune we wait for one another and that we do not take too much so that another goes hungry. Communion is supposed to be about community, it is supposed to be about peace. All should be welcome at the table and receive the gift of life through a meal and a promise... equally distributed. During the last supper Christ did not approach each disciple individually, they sat together and although his death was near they consumed the very meal that gave them life *together*. The son of God, throughout his life, dined with those on the fringes of society. In sharing a meal we acknowledge that we are not Gods, we are merely humans who depend on something far larger than ourselves to have life. It brings us all to the same level, it doesn't matter what sort of power we might hold, the money in our bank accounts is irrelevant, each of our past actions become equally shameful. Every individual comes to the table hungry, sinful, and in deep need of the promise of life, accompanied by a meal that sustains all of us.

Communion is to be a humbling experience. One must come to the table vulnerable in front of their brothers and sister willing to look into the death and the dependence in another's eyes in order to have life. This is the body and blood of Christ given for you because you alone are not enough.

The Zapatista community in Mexico has a great understanding of the dependence of humanity. In their struggle for freedom in Mexico they are struggling for the freedom of humanity, for the world as a whole to live in peaceful community. They are asking for the freedom to be human, to live together as humans united welcoming our differences... the way they speak of this is by illustrating "one world in which many worlds fit." To me this looks like the body of Christ... each part with a different purpose but each part fully necessary for the body as a whole.

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It is ironic that even in communion, a word that shares the same roots as community, the body of Christ is divided. Certain people are only welcome at certain tables, and some have just stopped trying to come to the table altogether. Our sins killed Christ once; do we really have to tear apart the living body as well? Christ's promise is present in the bread and the wine in that the meal allows us to stay alive, it give us life. Christ is truly present, the living body of Christ, is present in community that comes together, embraces all differences, acknowledges each individual's limitations as humans and gifts as children of God, and receives together the meal that sustains us.

In recognizing our humanness, our brokenness, and our helplessness we are able to humble ourselves and join together to receive the body of Christ. Receiving the body of Christ is not about holding out your palms to receive a piece of bread, it is about being in community with the people and land around you, recognizing your dependence in order to stay alive, and to receive the freedom to be human. Yes, we are hungry and we NEED food to sustain our lives. Yes, we are sinful and we NEED the precious gift of forgiveness to receive new life. Yes, we disagree... I think it is safe to assume that many of you disagree with something I have said in the last five minutes but if we begin to define our selves in terms of a community we can and will receive the body of Christ because the forgiveness we receive through Christ can and will leap the boundaries we have set in place. However, only when people are united and welcome one another's differences will the body of Christ live as a whole. So then, my brothers and sisters let us wait together for life, let us wait together for peace, and let us wait together for the body of Christ.