



Being Church

April 1, 2021

There once was a church that was struggling financially, when the Pastor read a book on Hypnotism! The next Sunday, he tested it out by dangling a pocket watch before the congregation and asking everyone to give an extra \$5. As the plates came back they were heaped with Abraham Lincolns! Not wanting to push too hard, the next Sunday he asked for \$10 bills and again the plates were filled with \$10 bills. He thought, "Next Sunday we will ask everyone to write a check for an additional \$1,000, all the debts will be paid and we will be ahead for our Mission giving!" But at the appointed time in the service, he took out his watch and began dangling it before the people saying "You will all..." At which the watch slipped out of the Preacher's fingers flew across the room and shattered against the wall. Instinctively the Preacher said words that should not be spoken in Church. It took ten years of dedicated hard work and three Transitional Pastors to straighten out that Church.

There is a part of me that loves the pageantry, majesty and solemnity of the Worship of God done well. However, the reality of the Church throughout the last 2020 years, let alone the people of God in Judaism for millennia before that is that BEING CHURCH is messy and real. Even Jesus had Doubting Thomas, Fickle Simon Peter, Judas, and the Disciples wrestling for who was greatest! How terribly fitting, that as arduous as this COVID year has been, we started isolating in mid-March and HOLY WEEK should be our Crescendo!

Following years of wishing we could broadcast worship for those who could not attend, we now have! Our SUNRISE Service Easter morning will be the first one offered at LaPosada at 6am! After years of decreasing attendance on Sundays, in churches around the world, people have begged for the chance to worship together! What this Virus has done, is to force us all to consider "if we cannot practice faith in the rituals that were normal to us, how can we celebrate our faith differently?" Most notable, the emotions and struggles of Holy Week are carried by singing hymns, and we cannot sing our faith! Someone greeted me Sunday, asking if we could sing together during Holy Week, and when I said "We are not yet allowed to." He responded "But you are the pastor of the church, you get to decide for us!"

Actually, in the Presbyterian Church the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, is the Person able to make rules between every other year meetings. When the Pandemic was first announced, he said "Not only can we not sing, we cannot celebrate the Sacrament in person, or virtually over the Internet!" His logic was absolutely sound. If we are serving one another, passing the plate, "CHURCH will be A SUPERSPREADER." If we serve the sacrament by Intinction, the Latin phrase

meaning “dipping into a common cup” All the Church, especially the Elders and Pastors who receive last, will consume the germs of others. AND reasonably How could the Church share COMMUNION Virtually? As I have described to some, “A piece of Toast or Donut and Coffee does not feel very Sacramental, but perhaps better than Pizza and a Pepsi!” LOGICALLY, he was correct. BUT, especially throughout THIS year, we needed to BE CHURCH for One Another, we NEEDED COMMUNION, not as a ritual, THE CHURCH NEEDED RELIEF FROM BEING ISOLATED AND AFRAID, we needed Communion with One Another and God.

Regularly on the first Sunday of each month, and some times every week during Lent, we recited the words of the Last Supper from the Gospels, recognizing that MARK contains an argument at the table over which of the brother-disciples is the greatest; and MATTHEW includes a time of introspection as Jesus states one of them will betray him and each in turn questions: “Is it I Lord, is it I?” LUKE emphasizes the PLOT Against Jesus. JOHN has the footwashing servant. But over the years I have had friends who tended to be more conservative theologically, who regularly reminded me that the Gospels were written decades after Jesus’ death, and the earliest version and therefore probably the most accurate is from I Corinthians.

What is humorous, because it is so painfully honest, is that Paul’s setting for describing Jesus’ Sacrament of Communion does not emphasize the Upper Room, or the setting as before or during Passover. The Apostle Paul chastises the Church at Corinth, because “the Sacrament of The Church” what sets us apart as BEING CHURCH is not the words that were said, or the food that is consumed, or really even the how to do Sacrament! BEING CHURCH is living our life together as the CHURCH as a SACRAMENT.

Ancient Corinth was in many ways like Green Valley. The Government had removed and relocated all of the indigenous population, so everyone who CAME TO BE CHURCH in Corinth came from somewhere else. COMMUNION even in its earliest recorded form, was shared by a people of faith in Conflict of some taking faith for granted while others see deep meaning and importance. COMMUNION, and for that matter THE CHURCH, is not about ritual or practice. Communion is BEING CHURCH with one another, for one another. Communion is owning who we are to each other in the midst of crisis and conflict and COMMUNION.

Several months ago, I went to the home of a man who was dying, and his wife took me aside and described “There was a time not so long ago when people could not agree on anything, some even argued over whether we were Valley Church while others The Presbyterian Church, and there were some who considered forming a church of their own. But I have started to simply describe “OUR CHURCH” and that makes all the difference.

Thankfully, our Meetings at our Church are not as contentious as what Paul describes at CORINTH, and no one here would receive COMMUNION in so gluttonous a manner. However, a few months ago, those who had been in leadership

during the Interim shared with me what was Titled as APPENDIX B: 22 pages single spaced of complaints that had been shared in CONGREGATIONAL FORUMS three years ago. All of which is past. We do not need to revisit, or give that anymore emphasis, than that it did happen and we do not want to be there ever again.

Following which, someone gave OUR PATIO SALE a collection of fossils, out of which the Amigos presented me one. Stating that a Pastor receives all kinds of stuff from all kinds of people, and they had Fossilized Dinosaur Guano that they thought I should have.

BEING CHURCH is REAL and personal! COMMUNION is personal! We have often said there are ARCHETYPES in the Bible: 40, 12, 7, 3, but also whenever there is WATER it refers to CHAOS; WIND to HOLY SPIRIT; BREAD refers to MANNA the sustenance of Life that came from GOD, BLOOD refers to a SACRIFICE and COVENANT. So when Jesus took Bread, Blessed and Broke it, the point was not Rye versus Wonder bread! Jesus was identifying how we have taken what was intended to SUSTAIN US in Life, and BROKEN it... BUT even more, Jesus identified his own life, his body, his INCARNATION as crucified by our brokenness. The body of the Bread Loaf can be broken, but WINE in a cup cannot be separated: Left and Right, it is continually remixed and reconciled.

There are Christian Churches, where the Priest is considered separate from the people as being ORDAINED and the Priest CHANGES THE BREAD & WINE by CONSECRATION, making the sign of the CROSS over the elements. The Presbyterian Church is different from this in several regards. For us, all PASTORS, ELDERS and DEACONS are ORDAINED, which recognizes that Pastors are very human; and LEADERS just as in the Book of Judges are set apart for a particular time and responsibilities. For Presbyterian Christians this is not an ALTAR, because an altar is a place where a SACRIFICE is Offered by a PRIEST; our SACRIFICE is JESUS and the intermediary between all of us and God is also Jesus. For Presbyterians, the elements are not changed in Communion; what is changed is us, as we forgive one another and are forgiven, by God and each other.

Jesus naming this as The NEW COVENANT would remind us that there had been earlier COVENANTS with NOAH, ABRAHAM, with MOSES and DAVID, which were cut into the Heavens, cut into Abraham's flesh, carved in Stone tablets, and future generations after David; but the NEW COVENANT is signed in the INCARNATE SAVIOR's own FLESH & BLOOD. Along with this, Jesus gives us THE 11TH COMMANDMENT; added to YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS, YOU SHALL NOT KILL, YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTRY, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, Jesus assigns YOU SHALL LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.