



The Lord's Table is Open to All

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August 6, 2017

The worship experience at the Abbey on the Isle of Iona off the West coast of Scotland was a special time. At the time, I was with a group of young adults from various countries working together in a World Council of Church's project. When we went to Iona one weekend, we gathered for worship as we entered the Abbey with its Medieval architecture.

The worshipping community consisted of people of different ages from different parts of the world. As we made our way forward, we saw a massive and ornate Iona marble communion altar at the front of the worship area. It was beautiful and took a prominent place in the worship space as sunbeams filtered through the ancient stain glass windows. The worship began with prayers, a message by the Director of the Iona Community, and many hymns leading up to the Communion service.

I can still remember the large round crystal goblet filled with wine that was etched with the continents of the world. It was passed from one person to the next as we each drank from the same cup. Then the loaves of bread were passed and we served each other. The event gave me a better appreciation of the Lord's Supper and who was and is welcome at the Lord's Table. All who were there knew the Lord's Table was open to them, to us all.

The sharing of the Lord's Supper at the Abbey gives me a better idea of what Jesus did in the feeding of the 5,000. The crowd was made up of people from surrounding areas and of different ages. He too fed people who were hungry for food as well as the nourishment of God's love.

The writings of Matthew gives us the full picture as well as some of the details to the feeding of the many. The scene tells of the Lord's moving to a quiet place away from the crowd which had gathered on the shore. Scripture tells us what happened when he returned ¹³ **When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.** ¹⁴ **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.**

Now the disciples were more concerned as to how they were going to feed the people at such a late hour. ¹⁵ **As evening approached, the disciples came to him**

and said, **“This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”** ¹⁶ Jesus replied, **“They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”** Imagine the bewilderment of the disciples at this command. ¹⁷ **“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.** Jesus said to them ¹⁸**“Bring them here to me,”**

Jesus then ¹⁹**...directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.** ²⁰ **They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.** ²¹ **The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.**

How can this be? How can this miracle really happen?

Friends, the many that were there that day were being fed by the Messiah. They recognized him as the one sent from God to love them and to redeem them. Just like then, we too must remember that he invites individuals to a feast of food and love. Just like today. He is the only one who invites us no matter how sinful or spiteful we can be, we are all invited!

For the people who gathered around that table in Iona so many years ago and for us today as we gather around this table, and thank God for what Jesus has done for us. We must remember that the Lord is inviting us to a nourishing meal and a loving relationship; a covenant relationship. Christ is inviting each one of us.

There is a passage from Isaiah chapter 55 verses 1 thru 5 that invites the people of old and us today to share in life of the people of God. The invitation has no regard for one’s economic or social status in the community. Each person is invited into a Covenant relationship with the Lord. A Covenant relationship.

Those seeking a strong relationship with God are asked to do as Isaiah puts forth ³**Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant...** Everlasting covenant for all time.

Those seeking a strong relationship with God will find this as we are faithful in our own faith.

This everlasting Covenant God made with the faithful of old is affirmed in the Covenant relationship we have with Jesus today and everyday. People from different nations are called to be in Covenant with God, with our Lord Jesus Christ and also with each one of us because we are a covenant community called by Christ.

The everlasting Covenant is open to all who are faithful.

You know, throughout my ministry of almost 32 years I have been in different situations where tables were used for communion.

I remember a TV tray table that was set beside a woman who was homebound and it was her ministry was to set up appointments to go serve communion to other homebound members. I remember the time that she set up for me to give Communion to three members of the church. In that church, they used wine. And by the second person I had seen, I was feeling a little tipsy because I’m not used to drinking wine. So when I got the third person, she got a lot of wine in that cup and I had very little. But we shared in the meal together. After that, I went back to the parsonage and went to sleep.

Well there is also the food tray in the hospital room where crumbs of the bread were placed in the man’s mouth because he was not very responsive but he

was aware of what was going on. Family gathered around that bed and he was given crumbs of bread by one of his Grandson's. We also had a little dropper to place some of the juice into his mouth by the same Grandson. Another table and people were gathering; people were celebrating.

I also remember the time we had worship in the round and what that basically meant was that all the chairs were around in the Family Life Center. The Communion table was in the middle and it was made up of plywood and covered by an ornate table runner.

Well the people were gathered around and went through the service and we had multiple teams as they stood around ready to serve the people. I remember the big loaves of bread that we got from Panera Bread. Have you seen those big loaves? And then holding them up and tearing them; ripping all four of them. Pouring the cup and then how people came to a time of worship. We all gathered around the table and the teams served the people as they came forward. Those who were unable to come forward, we went to give them Communion too. No one was left out. No one!

I can remember the time a week before my Father died. I had arranged for a couple of clergy friends back in Kansas City to come and give my Dad Communion. At that point in my Dad's life, he was not able to move very well and he was not able to talk very much. Yet as we went through that Communion service I could hear dad say the Lord's Prayer. It was very quiet but I could hear him.

Then when it came time to give him the cup and the bread, he did something that surprised me. He reached out for the cup and reached out for the bread. This was in a care facility and we were using one of the food trays.

I can also remember the picnic table that was used at a youth camp and how we all gathered around for that time of worship. It was hot and humid. All the youth were singing as we were all leading up to a time for when the Lord's Supper was to be shared. Again, Panera Bread was used as I ripped the bread for all to see. Then members of the congregation who were Elders or Deacons came forward to help serve. Yes, the young people came to the table so that they could participate in this meal. The Lord's Supper was a special time for all.

Well my dear brothers and sister in Christ, the Lord invites us to this table as we are reminded of what Christ has done for us. He invites each one of us to this table so that we can be nourished; we can be refreshed. This bread and this juice is a reminder to us of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

This is a massive table but you know it is a table of the Lord's. It's a place where we come to enjoy a meal. A place that we see on Sunday mornings in worship. A place where we know that we all are welcome to come to the Lord's Table. So come, let us join together and celebrate the Lord's Supper. Friends, we are all welcome to come to this place and to come to this table.

My Christian friends, we are all welcome to this meal that the Lord invites us to celebrate this day.

Let us pray. Dear God, you invite us to this table as redeemed people. Your Son invited many people of many nationalities and stations of life to a shared meal that was and is blessed. We accept your invitation to this table and welcome all who know your Son Jesus. We thank you, Lord, that we are among those who accept the invitation to be with your Son at the table and to enjoy this meal. In Jesus holy name we pray. Amen.

Scriptural Support:

Isaiah 55:1-5 (NRSV)

- ¹Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
- ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
- ³Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
- ⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
- ⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Matthew 14:13-21 (NIV)

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." ¹⁶ Jesus replied, **"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."** ¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. ¹⁸ **"Bring them here to me,"** he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.