

Scripture:

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

I Corinthians 10:14-17

Sermon

Introduction:

We all struggle, at different times in our lives, with who we are. I remember the first thing I seriously wanted to be; a baseball statistician.

I developed a whole league played games with 24 teams, and put together box scores like the ones in the newspapers. In highschool I even decided to take statistics instead of calculus. After I received the results of my first statistics test, however, I knew that this was a dead end for me.

What have you tried to be, only to find out it wasn't who you were made to be?

The struggle to find ourselves is not only expressed in the search for a career. We also struggle with a sense of belonging with relationships. We try to get into one group or another in school.

We search for that significant other during and after school. We are trying to find out who we are.

But we have also experienced rejection in the “relationship game”. And when the relationships we have built shift or break we are back in that place again of asking, “Who am I ?” and “Where do I belong?”

We all struggle, at different times in our lives, to find who we are, with where we belong.

But this morning the answer is right in front of us.

Move:

We are going to take communion together this morning. The bread represents the body of Christ. The cup represents the blood of Christ. The Corinthian Christians of almost 2,000 years ago regularly gathered to take communion believing the same thing:

16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

When we take communion, then, we share in an activity that millions upon millions of people across time and language and culture have participated in. (Even more people than have sat down around chicken wings and beer to watch the Superbowl!)

Many Christians have seen God's hand in bringing them to this table. They have seen it as the visible result of God's initiative. God has been drawing people together around Christ over 20 centuries of human existence, across barriers that have separated and hurt us, barriers which have left us feeling alone and questioning who we are.

Not only this, but as we partake of the bread and the the cup this morning we join with millions of Christians around the world **today**, across barriers of race, nation, politics, economics, which continue to divide human beings today. We join them in understanding ourselves as a people who understand themselves according to what God has done in Jesus Christ. We are a community of people who find their sense of belonging in responding to that grace and that love.

We are going to take communion together this morning!

Move:

Notice that Paul is not just making a statement about the meaning of communion in our passage. He is using this meaning of communion as a rhetorical question.

16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

He is using the Corinthian Christians' knowledge of Communion to make a point about idolatry.

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

We often think of idolatry as people bowing down to some stone sculpture of a god. But in this passage Paul is making some kind of connection between idolatry and communion.

Paul is not just defining the Lord's Supper. He is citing the Lord's Supper as a way of urging the Corinthian Christians to "flee" from idolatry.

Move:

"Participation" is repeated in verses 14-16. Often in the Scriptures, a repeated word gives you a clue to the meaning of the passage.

Many, when they have read this passage about “participation” in the body and blood of Christ, have tried to define the word in relation to the “substance” of the bread and the cup. People have cited this passage in arguments about the bread and the cup as literally the body and blood of Christ, symbolically the body and blood of Christ, or something in between.

But this isn't Paul's concern in this letter to the Corinthians. When he uses "participation" he is not concerned about the nature of the substance we digest in the Communion. He is concerned about what is happening to the community of people when they take the Lord's Supper together.

17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

"Participation" describes the effect that communion has on those who gather around the table.

“Participation” means that the diversity of people who gather around the table to take the bread and the cup experience a new identity and a new sense of belonging. That is, in taking of the bread and the cup we "live into" the new identity we have in Christ as a community of faith. The many become one as we form community around the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In a few minutes you will leave your seat and come to the table. This is a physical sign that you have heard God offering you the gift of relationship through Christ and that you are willing to receive this relationship and to accept the gift.

When you are in line with others to take the bread and the cup, you are experiencing the new community you are a part of in Christ. You belong with others who have received this gift.

When you receive the bread and the cup you are going deeper into this sense of belonging. We truly are brothers and sisters in Christ. We belong to one another. We strengthen each other in our new identity in Christ.

And as you return to your pew you will do so knowing that you have participated, not just in a religious ritual, but in the present and real activity of God.

Application:

Before we gather around the table, we must be honest about where we are in all of this. God is the origin of our new identity as the people of God. It is given to us as a gift. We are called to receive the gift and then grow into it. This is a very organic process in which we move from our old identity into our new identity over a period of time.

Paul wrote our passage to the Corinthians so that they might go deeper into this gift. He had identified something they were doing which kept them from growing into the fullness of this gift of belonging. They needed to face it and make a change.

Before they became Christians, they participated in eating and drinking feasts for other gods. Now that they are eating and drinking to the Lord they should give up this other way of being. Instead, they are taking communion while continuing to eat and drink to these other gods. Paul calls this idolatry.

Maybe this is a more usable definition of idolatry for us this morning. Idolatry is dividing our time, our talent, our energy, between God's gift and those things that established our old identity in our search for self.

When human loyalty is divided in Corinth thousands of years ago or in Silverlake today, we are unable to give ourselves fully to the beautiful identity we have as the people of God. The identity and security that God has for us is worth diving into!

As we prepare to take the bread and the cup, then, we have both a challenge and a comfort before us:

Have you developed an identity and sense of belonging out of a career or a set of relationships? Is this way of defining yourself in competition with what God is doing in your life? Are you trying to keep this way of knowing who you are while "doing church" as well?

Such an approach keeps us from fully experiencing the gift that tells us who we really are. Ultimately, it doesn't work.

This is the challenge.

There is also comfort. Have you lost employment that told you who you were? Have you ended a relationship that gave you a sense of belonging? Are you in a new phase of life in which the

identity and sense of community of the previous chapter is no longer possible?

There is a place of security and a place of rest for you. There is a way of finding a sense of self and a sense of belonging that can't be taken away from you, no matter what is going on in your life. It is before you this morning.

Let's take a moment and be honest with God. How far have you walked into the gift of identity and belonging that God has given you through Christ? What parts of your old identity and your old sense of belonging are you still holding on to?

(Prayer of self-examination in silence)

Conclusion:

Paul calls the Corinthians to let go of duplicity and be fully the beautiful people that God has made them to be.

In the bread and the cup before us God is offering us the opportunity to move further into the gift of identity that he has given us in Jesus Christ. By gathering around this table we find the community in which we will always belong. We participate in the Lord's Supper and we move further away from our old identity and our old way of belonging that, sooner or later, leaves us lonely and alone.

On that night, Jesus took the bread and said...

After they had finished eating he took the cup and said...

When you are ready, come and participate in the bread and the cup of the Lord.