

# Is What We Share Enough?

On the night he was arrested, Christ prayed for unity. The challenge remains ever-present today: loving one another despite our differences. | PETER HAWKINSON

*So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another (Romans 12:5).*

It was a Thursday afternoon, and this text was roaming around in my spirit. As often is the case, I found myself feeling restless, and I decided to get lost in the crowd at the food court in the mall. I sat down with my Caesar salad and a plan to read the whole letter of Paul to the Roman church straight through.

Somewhere in the middle of chapter 8 a three-year-old boy and his mom sat down at the table next to mine. I noticed how excited he was about their order from McDonald's, until he realized there was no Happy Meal. There was just one bag containing two cheeseburgers and one box of fries for the two of them. His question mirrored the worry on his face: "Do we have enough to share?"

His mother didn't hear him, she was too busy trying to organize it all. So the boy asked again, this time mixing up his words: "Mama, is what we share enough?" She comforted him, and I watched, and it was enough.

I went home that day with that haunting and inviting question following me: *Is what we share enough?*

That question returns to me early

each Sunday morning at the communion table, where we come to what we share: the redeeming grace of God, new life in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit alive among us still, and in all these things the life we are called into, the mission before us. *Is what we share enough?* Is unity possible—the kind of unity that Christ prayed about just before his arrest? "That they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me" (John 17:22-23).

Is there anything more crucial to our mission or witness than unity? Why do we struggle to get along in the body of Christ, even as we take in Christ's body? Why is it normative these days for churches to linger in conflict that leads to fracture? Why are so many colleagues in ministry resigning without a new call or leaving vocational ministry altogether? Is what we share enough?

The table ever before us, spread with grace, proclaims Christ's sufficiency. Scripture bids us to prepare for the meal by going to brothers or sisters with whom we have broken relationships, and do the work of reconciliation. Having come to the table, we are reminded that we are no longer free to withhold mercy and

grace from each other. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about our life together, "We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for eternity. Unity is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."

Our lingering capacity for sin does not let us off the hook. The unity of the church is not one of the fruits to be harvested at Christ's return. Instead, unity is to be that unique, present, daily reality that causes the Christian community to love well and contagiously in the world.

Paul proclaims to the struggling early church who they really are: "So we, who *are* many, *are* one body in Christ, and individually we *are* members one of another" (Romans 12:5). The word isn't that we are *like* a body, or that we *can* be members of one another. Paul proclaims the reality of who in Christ we are, and what the reality of our life together is. It is as our spiritual forebear Carl Johan Nyvall said one day standing at the Lord's Table: "It is not identity in thought and comprehension of all possible particulars that constitutes our unity, but our unity is the mutual filial condition into which we have been birthed, from above, by Jesus, in



the Spirit's power.”

If this is true, then for all of us who live by faith in Jesus, there shall be no issue that keeps us from sharing this feast and living together in community and doing God's restorative work of love in the world. There shall be vigorous discussion about every moral issue, even passionate disagreement, but we shall come together to the table before, and return after. Differing worship approaches and ministry directions and theological interpretations, as important as they are to us as individuals, are set aside when we hear this invitation: “Come to this table, not to express an opinion, but to seek God's presence and pray for his Spirit” (*Covenant Book of Worship*).

What is to be radically different in the church from in the world is the order of things, that we submit everything having to do with our individuality to Christ, and to one another. We, though we be many, are one people in the Lord.

I miss that hymn from the red Covenant hymnal of 1973:

*We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,*

*and we pray that all unity may one day be restored.*

*And they'll know we are Christians  
by our love, by our love,  
yes, they'll know we are Christians  
by our love.*

We will walk with each other hand in hand, and we will work with each other side by side, because it is the Christ of God and the Spirit of God who make us one people.

Will we do this, really? Even though we share different political views about healthcare reform, can we look into each other's eyes and say, “This is the body of Christ, for you”? Even though we feel at odds with each other about many theological issues flowing out of Scripture, will we still stand side by side because together we love Jesus who wants us to feed someone who is hungry? *Is what we share enough?*

If our differences lead us to become divided, it is because we have lost Christ at our center. For this reason I imagine that the risen Christ is still praying with passion and longing for his church.

This has always been a particular challenge for our Covenant Church. We have gathered from our beginning

around this word from the psalmist: “I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts” (Psalm 119:63).

We are a church that has found membership in the church to be about new life in Christ, and baptism into this life with Christ. Out of that simple and clear reality we serve on boards together even if we interpret Scripture differently, we worship together even though we have a hard time understanding our different theological viewpoints, we share the good news in our neighborhood and world because we embody the reality of God's grace in Jesus, who with the Holy Spirit makes us one people. We come from many cultures and every imaginable Christian tradition under the sun, and from no tradition at all. But there is one essential thing that we share in common: love for Jesus Christ, faith believing he has saved us from our sins. This is what we share, and it is enough for us.

Found among the remains of a woman at her death in early nineteenth-century Ireland was her Bible, with a note tucked into the page of John 17. It read: “Read the prayer of Jesus, both its weight and its wonder, and bow down under a sense of it, in the dust before God. You are one of Jesus's redeemed people. You bear his glory! We together as one with him, now can be one with each other. Hallelujah!”

*Is what we share enough?*

We come to this question, again and again at the Lord's Table. What we share, we see with our eyes, and taste with our mouths. This is grace and mercy, new life with God for broken people. The question remains, asked by the lingering Christ, and the watching world. May our answer be a stubborn and labored “Yes!” that comes from the hard work of doing this love of Jesus in community. ■

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