One of my favorite memories growing up was when all my aunts and uncles and cousins would all meet at my Mama Grace and Papa Claude’s house for a day together. We would all play all day and then we would all have a wonderful meal together. Although I admit the deserts were my favorite (my Mama Grace made a mean cobbler,) that meal with all of us together was symbolic – I was part of this family, I was loved, and the meal was a symbol of what brought us all together.

As Christians, the Lord’s Supper, with the elements of bread and wine/juice, is the meal we have together as an act of joy and thanksgiving for the work of God through Jesus Christ. As Methodists, we practice an open table, inviting anyone who loves Christ, repents of their sins and seeks peace to participate.

There are several names for this meal together – each one highlighting different aspects of this Holy Meal. When we use the term The Lord’s Supper, we are acknowledging Jesus Christ as the host of the church family table and we are at the table with Christ’s invitation. The term Eucharist means ‘to give thanks’ and reminds us to thank God for the gifts of creation and salvation. When we use the term Holy Communion we are reminding ourselves that when we eat and drink together we are in the presence of Christ among our brothers and sisters in Christ. You can use the name that you find most appropriate since they all refer to the eating of consecrated juice/wine and bread in the worshipping community.

As Christians, we receive the sacraments as nourishment and sustenance to go out into the world spreading the Gospel and living a life loving God and loving others.

Each time we celebrate in Holy Communion, we are reminded of who we are, whom we belong to, and how God wants us to live. Each time we participate in Holy Communion, it is a means of remembering Christ’s life, death and resurrection and also of encountering the risen and living Christ. Will Willamon, a retired UMC bishop, writes, “The Lord’s Supper is not some doleful memorial for a lost hero. It is a joyful celebration for a resurrected and reigning Lord.”

In Luke and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Jesus tells his disciples, “Do this in remembrance of me.” When we participate in Holy Communion, it is a re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ. We still use the elements Jesus used with his disciples: bread symbolizing the body of Christ that was broken because of humanity and wine symbolizing the blood of Christ that was shed as a result of our sin. However, we do not believe this is the actual body and blood of Christ. The ordinary elements of bread and wine are transformed when the Pastor calls on the presence of the Holy Spirit upon the elements and also upon the communicants themselves. We believe that in some mysterious way, Christ is spiritually present in the elements, not bodily present. John Wesley considered Holy Communion as food for our souls. It gives us the strength to move towards perfection, to living a life of love of God and loving others.

There are so many layers to the actual receiving of the elements. When we place the bread in the hand of the person receiving, rather than have them take it – it is a symbol of our belief in the gift of grace being given freely to all. Going forward to receive the elements symbolizes our belief in the need of human response to divine grace. Using a whole loaf, breaking it and distributing it to everyone shows how all the different people with all their different backgrounds, gifts and talents combine to make the unity of the church. Using a single chalice/cup of wine/juice also shows the unity of the church as one body in Christ. The Hymn One Bread, One Body speaks to this unity of the church:

One bread, one body, one Lord of all,

one cup of blessing which we bless.

And we, though many throughout all the earth,

We are one body in this Lord.

We believe all persons, regardless of age, are invited to the table of our Lord. Most United Methodist churches use grape juice instead of actual wine in order to allow children and teens to participate and to allow those who have issues with alcohol to still be able to participate.

Scripture

Read Matthew 26:26-29

Reflection – reflect on each part of this statement and think 1)about the importance of it for your personal worship and partaking of the elements, 2)why do we, as a church, feel this is important for anyone taking communion

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