

Hot Potatoes (3): Come to the Table

(Acts 20:7-12)

I. Introduction

- A. Like the old TV show *Dragnet*, the story you are about to hear is true...
1. “Jack” grew up in legalistic church with dogmatic, dominating Dad
 - a. There was no discussion or debate; it’s Dad’s way or the highway
 - b. Truth wasn’t narrow—it’s hopelessly, harshly, oppressively narrow
 2. As you might expect, Jack rebelled and joined a community church
 - a. **Shock:** Huge, interdenominational, praise band, Saturday service
 - b. **Good:** Positive, uplifting, encouraging, practical, and helpful
 - c. There was a focus on Christ without fussing and fighting he’d seen
 3. Jack left and came to Denbigh. *Why leave a church where he grew?*
 - a. It wasn’t theology (*premillennial, a bit Pentecostal, Calvinistic*)
 - b. It wasn’t worship (he *liked music*), or a different name on the door
 - c. Why? He preferred my preaching? *No, it was the Lord’s Supper*
 - 1) He felt disenfranchised without having communion each week
 - 2) Without the Supper, church never really felt like church (*devo*)
- B. People notice two things when they 1st visit here—music & communion
1. I agree with Jack; latter is a more significant difference than former
 - a. There’re good reasons for cappella music (*another lesson in series*)
 - b. But communion is about the cross and ids linked to the gospel
 2. Our practice is to have Supper every week; that’s good! (*no change*)
 - a. Some traditions observe it less frequently (*quarterly or monthly*)
 - b. But my point today is not to examine their practices— but our own
 3. Re-examine longstanding traditions is a hot potato (*ask Jack’s Dad*)
 - a. Some say our weekly practice makes it less special or meaningful
 - b. It’s hard to argue; all of us at times zone-out or slip into auto-pilot
 - c. But having dinner each night is monotonous, but I’m still for that!
 4. The usual proof text used in this discussion is our text— **Acts 20:7**

II. Come to the Table: Is There a Pattern?

- A. In **Acts 20**, Paul and Silas are on the return of the third missionary trip
1. They had left Ephesus and travelled through Macedonia (*Philippi*)
 - a. He then made an eventful trip Greece (*Thessalonica, Berea, Athens*)
 - b. Paul's entourage including Luke ("we" section) came to Troas
 2. In our text, Paul has an eventful stay in Troas (**Read: Acts 20:7-12**)
 - a. Paul stays week (**v. 6**) in Troas & leaves after he meets with church
 - b. They met to "*break bread*," which sounds lot like communion
 3. Traditionally, we've seen this as the pattern for communion today
 - a. The church met here on the first day of the week to break bread
 - b. Paul knew that, and he ordered his schedule so he could be there
 - c. Every week has a first day; we must eat communion each Sunday
- B. But is **Acts 20:7** really a pattern for today? *It doesn't really feel like one*
1. This is one story; generally the word "pattern" suggests... a pattern!
 - a. This story is of a travelogue where Paul is in Troas on one Sunday
 - b. Did they do it every Sunday? Did Paul happen to be there that day?
 - c. We can't even know "*breaking bread*" refers to Lord's Supper
 - 1) Sometimes this phase does seem to be communion (**Acts 2:42**)
 - 2) Same term ins used ion same context for a meal (**Acts 2:46**)
 2. In **Acts 20:7**, the church did meet on first day to "*break bread*"
 - a. They didn't "*break bread*" until after midnight on Monday (**20:11**)
 - b. Did they "*break bread*" Monday? Is Luke using Jewish time here?
 - 1) Was this breaking bread communion or just a common meal?
 - 2) Each week? Did Paul hit right week? Had it because of Paul?
 - c. This *could* be lot of things; what it doesn't seem to be is a pattern!
 - 1) Have been churches that see a patter in eating in upper room
 - 2) Why not see it as a pattern for how LONG sermons should be!
 3. There is one text with a time reference to when to eat (**1 Cor 11:26**)
- C. Should change our practice? NO! Two important things happen here—

III. Come to the Table: Two Things Happens at Communion

- A. **First:** communion points us back to the cross itself (1 Cor 11:26)
1. In the Supper, we participate (“*commune*”) in cross (1 Cor 10:16)
 - a. We reenact and participate in the Christ event (*like in baptism*)
 - b. This reminds us of language of Jesus Himself (John 6:53-57)
 2. Communion is a celebration and participation in the message of the cross
 - a. What we are doing is not replicating the practice of early church
 - b. We’re not, as it can seem, having “*a memorial to a memorial*”
 - 1) We do tend to read texts where Jesus institutes communion
 - 2) We aren’t remembering or even replicating the “Last Supper”
 - 3) We are focusing on the gospel; we are focusing on the cross
- B. **Second:** Communion also points to our common-unity (1 Cor 10:17)
1. There is only one loaf because we are one body. *We are family!*
 - a. Some churches break bread into trays after prayer: *one loaf*
 - b. Others start with bite size to be easy on old: *also community!*
 - c. Supper proclaims we come to the cross and we come **together**
 2. Historically, we’ve stressed **everything** about Lord’s Supper but unity!
 - a. **Format:** We stressed having right format (*one cup vs many cups*)
 - 1) Jesus took “the cup” and not multiple cups (*that’s the pattern*)
 - 2) One church insisted the one cup have a handle (or it’s a glass)
 - 3) Marvin Phillip: “*My church had one cup until someone got T.B*”
 - b. **Frequency:** We fought over, as mentioned early, how often to eat
 - 1) In early days of our movement, communion was more infrequent
 - 2) But when they had it, that moved pews out brought tables in
 - 3) Some churches occasionally to back to practice of the table
 - c. **Formula:** We’ve also argued when to use wine or grape juice
 - 1) Dr. Thomas Welch developed a grape juice to use in communion
 - 2) When they didn’t use it, he sold it as “Welch’s Grape Juice”
 - 3) Churches have split over this. “*If we must use right bread...*”

3. **Point:** If you're fighting over communion— you're doing it wrong!
 - a. Communion celebrates the life together that we live (**Rom 12:4-5**)
 - b. I think Paul would find a lot about how we do church strange
 - 1) Church buildings for one thing. One-hour church services.
 - 2) Opening prayer, closing prayer regimented order of worship.
 - 3) You sitting quietly and letting me do all talking (*or snoozing*)
 - c. That would all be a curiosity to him. What we've made Supper?
 - 1) "*Me and God*" private meditation where song is disruption?
 - 2) Paul might not find that strange; he might find it wrong!
 - d. This is our family meal. This is our proclamation of unity.

IV. Conclusion

- A. How often to eat communion? Is monthly OK? Must it be weekly?
 1. How often should we proclaim Christ's death? Or unity in Christ?
 - a. Shouldn't we put the cross at the center of worship and praise?
 - b. Shouldn't we always focus on the price Jesus paid for our sins?
 - c. Shouldn't remember that this makes us one and points to unity?
 2. Mission statement: "*Living together as God's family under the cross*"
 - a. We want to lift up the cross and to lift up our unity under cross
 - b. What better way to do that than to eat Supper each Sunday
 - 1) We don't need a "pattern" of one verse to lead us to do that
 - 2) We don't need to criticize other tribes because they don't
 - c. We just need to focus on the cross and on being a unified body
- B. That is what we do now— we go back to the cross and go there together
 1. Supper points us to greatest mystery of ages (**1 Cor 10:16-17**, MSG)
 - a. Isn't that mystery? "*We take into ourselves the very life of Christ*"
 - b. Isn't that pretty important? "*Our many-ness becomes one-ness*"
 2. In this bread and grape juice, we participate in Christ... together
 - a. We come to a sacred moment because we participate in cross
 - b. We must never take this for granted; it points to Christ (**Prayer**)