

**Keep the Fire Burning**

I Corinthians 11:23-29

Luke 24: 30-35

October 5, 2008

World Communion Sunday

First Federated Church

Peoria, Illinois

The Rev. Dr. Forrest.Krummel

There was once a member of a church who suddenly stopped attending worship after years of regularity. After a few weeks the pastor decided to visit him in his home. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the parishioner home alone relaxing before a roaring fire. Guessing that he knew the reason for the visit the parishioner invited the pastor to have a seat across from him, also near the fireplace.

The pastor settled into the overstuffed chair and began to stare into the fireplace without saying a word. He seemed to be lost in thought as he watched the mesmerizing dancing flames around the burning logs. After a few minutes he reached out and took the fire tongs and carefully picked up a brightly burning ember placing it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair in complete silence.

The host watched all of this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

The pastor glanced at his watch and realized that it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold dead ember and placed it back into the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

Not a word had been spoken since their initial greeting but as the pastor put his hand on the doorway the parishioner gently reached out and touched the pastor's arm to make him pause. With tear trickling down a cheek the parishioner said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially the fiery sermon. I shall see you in church Sunday."

In her newest novel, Marilynne Robinson, who wrote the best selling book Gilead, continues her story, this time from the perspective of the Congregational pastor rather than from the Presbyterian pastor. Early in the book the daughter of the Congregational pastor comments upon the nature of worship. "God does not need our worship. We worship to enlarge our sense of the holy, so that we can feel and know the presence of the Lord, who is with us always." (Marilynne Robinson, Home, p. 110, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, c. 2008)

It was Oliver Wendell Holmes who once wrote in a letter to a friend, "There is a little plant called Reverence in the corner of my soul's garden." If we want to keep our spiritual fires burning, if we want to nurture that little plant in the garden of our souls called Reverence, we need to intentionally develop the habit of worship. The ancients knew this. When the writer of Acts was describing life in the very early Christian community, the writer noted that the first followers, fellow Jews with Jesus, observed the Sabbath in the Temple and then worshipped together on the first day of the week, Sunday. The writer described their life together in these terms, "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" (Acts 2:42)

One of the elements of their worship life was the “breaking of bread.” The first Christians understood the power of meals together. I was reminded of this power recently in an email sent to me by someone telling me of the death of their mother. She wrote: “I am sure you will agree that the most important thing to mom was her family. However tied closely with her love of family was her love of good food. Family celebrations always meant certain dishes were sure to be enjoyed. If it was Thanksgiving or Xmas, we had to have her famous yeast rolls. We could not celebrate a birthday without homemade ice cream and angel food cake. Even impromptu gatherings, like bringing my children for dinner would yield steak and French fries, Chester’s red dressing for the salad, and a jar of tart applesauce, still with ice crystals...just beginning to thaw. Oh, and black raspberry cobbler for dessert.

“I think my favorite food experience with mom was our annual holiday candy day. It always takes place on a Saturday in December. The perfect day was just below freezing with bright sunshine. A rainy day or high humidity meant we had to reschedule. On that perfect day we turned out batches of rich toffee, crisp peanut brittle and sticky divinity fudge. Mom was a precise cook. Every dry ingredient was leveled off, nuts were hand-chopped so finely they could have fallen through the holes of a sifter. Recipes were followed TO THE LETTER. However, she loved to experiment with her cooking, so adjacent to the recipe were her carefully crafted margin notes, such as needs more vanilla, or add 2T. of flour here.

“The same care, precision and creativity were evident in mom’s life. She followed her recipe for life which included trust in God, devotion to family, belief in hard work and persistence. Sometimes things didn’t work out as planned, just like what sometimes happened with the divinity fudge; an illness, a family crisis, a disappointment. And so, she went back to her recipe of life and added margin notes.

“In the last 7 years mom has not cooked, but that has not slowed her enjoyment of good food. Among her favorite activities with family were visiting a restaurant with food to delight her palate, digging in to a hot fudge Sunday, or coming to our homes where she devoured amazing portions of food for someone so tiny.

“I will still have candy day in December and I am sure she will be there to softly remind me to get the Nestle chocolate instead of Hershey’s for the toffee. And so a bit of mom’s spirit will be in the margin notes of not only my recipes for angel food cake and divinity fudge. Her spirit will be in the margin notes of my life.”

So many of the stories that Jesus told were about food. He often compared the Kingdom of God to a great feast and a wedding banquet. When his disciples told stories about him they recalled how he freely dined with sinners and tax collectors, how on a hillside he fed 5,000 with only a few fish and loaves of bread, of the time in the upper room when he surprised the disciples at a Passover meal saying, as he broke bread, “*Take and eat; this is my body.*”

And then picking up the cup of salvation he looked at them saying, “*Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.*”

The disciples also told the story that stands as today’s gospel lesson. They remembered how two of them were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on that first Easter night, trying to make sense of everything that had happened as well as the fantastic

story that the women who visited the tomb that very morning had told about Jesus and angels. They remembered how he came to them that evening as a Stranger. When they reached Emmaus it appeared as if this Stranger was going on but they entreated Him to stay with them and have an evening meal. As they sat around a table the Stranger picked up the bread and broke it *and they recognized Him* before disappearing from their sight. What the women had said was true! The two ran back to Jerusalem that very night to tell the eleven what had happened!

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about the nature of the meal that they shared when they gathered saying, *“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”*

Today, on World Communion Sunday, we gather with Christians around the world to celebrate our unity in Christ. We put aside nationalities and race and tribe and celebrate with the One who once prayed, “Father, may they be one as you as I am one.”

The Table is set before us. Join in the meal that celebrates our life together.

To God be the glory. Amen.