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1 Corinthians 11:17-25

Divisions Among You…

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1 Corinthians 11:17-25 Common English Bible

Now I don’t praise you as I give the following instruction because when you meet together, it does more harm than good. First of all, when you meet together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and I partly believe it. It’s necessary that there are groups among you, to make it clear who is genuine. So when you get together in one place, it isn’t to eat the Lord’s meal. Each of you goes ahead and eats a private meal. One person goes hungry while another is drunk. Don’t you have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you look down on God’s churches and humiliate those who have nothing? What can I say to you? Will I praise you? No, I don’t praise you in this. I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread. After giving thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me.” He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me.”

This Sunday is World Communion Sunday, a day when Christian churches celebrate how interconnected we are. We often don’t feel interconnected because there is so much that divides us in our world. But this division isn’t new. In our scripture we learn about the people in Corinth who were divided. Paul says, “I hear there are divisions among you…” Did you catch what was happening? When the Christians in Corinth get together it brings out their worst side instead of their best.[[1]](#footnote-2) The church family is competing and criticizing each other. They aren’t “making nice” when they come for worship. The divisions continue in worship. They come together and instead of sharing Communion together, they bring in food from the outside and are making pigs out of themselves. Some are left out, some go home hungry. Others have indulged so much with the cup, they did not use grape juice, that they have to be helped home.

In the Message translation it asks, “Why would you stoop to desecrating God’s church? Why would you actually shame God’s poor? I never would have believed you would stoop to this. And I’m not going to stand by and say nothing.” The Bible reminds us again and again that we are called to stand up and say something. We are called to stand up and speak out against injustice. Remember the vows that are made when we profess our faith as a member of the Christian Church: Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? We are supposed to say yes to that question. God gives us the power to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.[[2]](#footnote-3)

In our nation we have seen countless young black men lose their lives at the hands of police with varying circumstances. We have also seen police lose their lives at the hands of a young black man right here in our own city. In Orlando and throughout our world we see acts that are evil. Where will this fear and hate and racism end? When will it end? How will it end? It has to end now. It has to end by us teaching our children a better way, the way of Jesus. It has to end with us reminding ourselves that we are interconnected and living in a way that shows that we are interconnected. It ends by us learning to love one another through our differences.[[3]](#footnote-4)

I think about what young black children must learn in our country. “Do whatever the man in uniform says. Don’t make eye contact. Don’t raise your voice. Don’t reach into your pockets. Don’t defend yourself. Don’t resist. Pray that someone records footage of the interaction. You might do all of these things, and still, you might not be protected. The footage can do nothing to bring you back.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

I think about what we want young white children in our country to learn as well. “As a white child you are afforded a range of privileges and protections that children of color are not afforded and it’s important for you to recognize this and actively work to change it. This is deeply and historically rooted because our country was founded on optimism and pluralism, but also on slave labor, exploitation, violence, and dehumanization. Remember our history, no matter how painful it is to face. The only way to ‘move on’ from that reality is to never ‘move on.’ This means we must understand that just as people of color have to spend a lifetime thinking about their own skin color and how it affects [the way they are able to walk through the world](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html), we must think about our whiteness as we walk through the world, this country, this city, these streets. We must make awareness of our whiteness a part of our daily consciousness even when it seems tiring and burdensome. We must commit to interrogating the privileges that we inherit and constantly look for creative ways to subvert hierarchies, redistribute power, connect the unconnected. This isn’t about being a ‘good white person.’ This is about being brave and convicted and imperfect and tireless and loving and devastated and sometimes feeling dumb about how to make change and taking it personally. We are not above bias and racism. We must apologize when we say or do something racist. We must learn to be quiet and listen. We must make real friends who will push us and hold us accountable. We must push and hold other white people accountable.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

The first Methodist, John Wesley, had these three simple rules. Do no harm, do good and grow closer to God.[[6]](#footnote-7) In our scripture Paul is talking to those who are doing more harm than good. I was listening to the Road Back to You podcast and Michael Wear who worked with the Obama administration on faith said, “It seems like the last acceptable remaining form of bigotry is with those we disagree with. It is the last form of discrimination that we overlook.”[[7]](#footnote-8) Then he said something that gave me pause. He said, “If you can’t fathom a reason why someone would vote for the candidate you are opposing, that is a problem with you, not a problem with them.”[[8]](#footnote-9) Wow. Jesus said, “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Michael Wear continued, “We should be as concerned about what happens on November 9 as we are about November 8 because people are going to wake up on November 9 feeling like they don’t belong in this country, no matter who wins.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

John Wesley preached a sermon where he said it doesn’t matter whether you allow baptism or Communion, he says, let all these things stand by. He said, “My only question at present is this, ‘Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart?” We have created a system that dehumanizes people. We are all made in the image of God. All of us. Those voting for Trump, Hillary, Gary Johnson and Jill Stein. All of us. I went to a Conference the last few days in Chicago called Why Christian? The description for the conference said, “Why, in the wake of centuries of corruption, hypocrisy, crusades, televangelists, and political sell-outs do we continue to follow Jesus? In the opening session, Rachel Held Evans said, “I am not sure that we can do the work of justice and repentance if we don’t recognize God’s way of using each one of us.”[[10]](#footnote-11) Those who disagree with us included.

On World Communion Sunday there are Presbyterians, Methodists, Catholics, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Baptists and thousands of other denominations having Communion together. In wealthy churches and in churches serving people in desperate poverty congregations are eating the bread and drinking the cup to remember how much Jesus loves us. The bread is given to people who have enough to eat every day and to people who have no idea when they will eat again. We all come to the same table of our one Lord. And when we do we pray that the Holy Spirit would pour out on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and cup so that we may be for the world the body of Christ. We ask the Holy Spirit to work within us to make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

As we celebrate Communion we celebrate that the “love of God is bigger, wilder, more wonderful, more beautiful, more healing, more alive than we even dare to hope. And it's for us.”[[11]](#footnote-12) Jesus isn’t waiting for us to make ourselves so good that we don’t need him. Jesus knows all the ways we need him. The life changing news is that Christianity isn’t something we do, it is something that gets done to us. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. The Message translation [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. By Water and the Spirit. http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website\_Properties/what-we-believe/documents/baptismal\_liturgy.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://llumc.org/blog/pastor-stan-that-which-divides/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/courtney-martin-the-conversation-we-must-have-with-our-white-children/8806> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/courtney-martin-the-conversation-we-must-have-with-our-white-children/8806> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/general-rules-of-the-methodist-church [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Road back to you podcast, Michael Wear. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Road back to you podcast, Michael Wear. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Road back to you podcast, Michael Wear. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Rachel Held Evans. Why Christian Conference 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. https://twitter.com/sarahbessey/status/780935791539130369 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)