

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Communion (Coalface 3) Fintry, 28/4/2013, pm

A Church at the Coalface is one where....

- ... we remember him together

Communion Controversy!

- Funny the things we **actually** get "het-up" about, things we know are comparatively minor...
 - experience as probationer at DMPC; asking questions of the practise of communion there (processing elements, different services and different routines and atmospheres), getting a surprisingly defensive response!
 - *order in which people are served, expectations about what people should wear (minister, elders, congregation), presence of children - not only sharing in communion, but also their very presence - how the church looks ("dressing the church"), the processing of elements, common cup or individual glasses, alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine!!*
 - all of these can be sources of contention, but we rarely explore what and why we do these things!
- **What is all of that about? Why do we do all these different things?**
 - one of the most fascinating conference sessions I had during my probationary period was when we explored the different traditions there have been even just in Scotland over the past few centuries;
 - fencing the table; communion tokens; eating at a common table down centre of church; communion seasons, etc, etc!
- What I concluded was that though there may be good reasons for many of these traditions, most do not go back to the Lord
 - where they are helpful, great; **but where they become more important than the feast itself, lets put them to one side!**

What happened (vs 17-22)

- Context: homes, meals towards end of a working day, rich could be there earlier, slaves and labourers had much less control of their time; full meals, including bread and wine, rather than the simply symbolic thing we do.
 - some going ahead, without waiting, and since rich might well be providing the food those others going hungry!!
 - its seems unbelievable to our ears, and to Paul's!!
- Critically, they weren't concerned for each other:
 - **their identity as brothers and sisters was threatened by their behaviour!**
- **Do we do anything that is similar? Are there major divisions within the body, festering? Relationships that aren't healed?**
 - maybe not so blatant, but we need to examine ourselves before God;
 - are there things about our fellowship, things that are in my relationships with others that I need to do something about?
- Incidental point about power of meal sharing for building relationships; do we offer hospitality to one another?

From the Lord (vs 21-26)

- From the Lord - not just any old made up tradition
 - we may do things differently, from other churches, from the past, as long as we cling on to these central elements!
- Not literal body/blood - he was standing there with bread in his hand!!
 - but more than just a memorial service; real, but spiritual benefits!
 - *acting out what we believe; not just saying, but doing!*
 - (like tradition I've seen at many Anglican churches where you get up out of your seat... participation... despite receiving from the minister, not from one another)
- Sacrificial dimension: Passover, that covenant language, pointer to saving significance of the his death
- Eschatological dimension - until he comes, pre-figures wedding feast of the Lamb!
 - this is a celebratory feast, not a funeral!

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- sometimes get so hung up on remembering Jesus' death - *with due solemnity* - that we forget that we are also remembering what happened next, and what is yet to happen!

So what? (vs 27-32)

- We've had the *problem*, we've had the description of how it should be (*the model*), now we have the "*so what?*":
 - firstly, so in light of what we are remembering, sinning here is serious - we've really, majorly mis-understood the implications of Jesus' death for us if we act in this kind of selfish way!
 - second, to guard against that, "so examine yourself..."
 - not a counsel of perfection... otherwise we'd never share at the table;
 - (*Western Isles and adherence and taking of communion!*)
 - grace!!
- But do we flaunt or ignore our sin?
 - *grace drives sin out...*
- Here the consequences were fairly immediate; for us it may be later/longer, but consequences there will be, judgement will come.
 - this is by way of discipline, correction, restoration, not punishment!

So then (vs 33, 34)

- Finally, don't just become introspective: "*Oh no, I've sinned again...*"
- Point of this examination is that we change!
- In particular, demonstrate love for one another:
 - here, waiting for others to come before beginning...
 - for us, maybe making reconciliation with others - going and saying sorry, going and saying "*I don't know exactly why, but there is something between us that shouldn't be - have I done something to upset you...?*";
 - or perhaps addressing some attitude or behaviour we have come to see falls short of the new life Jesus has brought us into...
- And that was very *practical*:
 - if hungry, eat at home first!
- Maybe there are things we can see we can do to address whatever our examination of ourselves has shown up?

Conclusion

- Come to the table with a fresh appreciation of what we do here.
- Come to the table having examined yourself.
- Come with a fresh appreciation of Christ's love in giving himself for us, and leaving us with such a wonderful celebration and reminder of all he has done!
- Come committed to one another, those who Christ has won for himself, those who we will not treat in anything but the very best way possible, without rancour or anger or impatience or pride...

- *Open the eyes of my heart, Lord*