

## Corpus Christi Sunday

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### Luke 9:10-17

<sup>10</sup> When the apostles returned, they explained to him what they had done. He took them and withdrew in private to a town called Bethsaida. <sup>11</sup> The crowds, meanwhile, learned of this and followed him. He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. <sup>12</sup> As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, 'Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.' <sup>13</sup> He said to them, 'Give them some food yourselves.' They replied, 'Five loaves and two fish are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people.' <sup>14</sup> Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Then he said to his disciples, 'Have them sit down in groups of (about) fifty.' <sup>15</sup> They did so and made them all sit down. <sup>16</sup> Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. <sup>17</sup> They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.

**The feeding of the people.** Luke 9:1-17 is an account of the first mission of the apostles: "He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (the sick)" (vv1-2). These were prophetic actions that Jesus had already given to the people and the leaders of the Jews. As the leaders began to reject Jesus, even while the outcasts begin to accept him, there is a growing vacuum of religious leadership. And thus Jesus, already having taught his disciples the meaning of the Kingdom, now sends them to proclaim God's reign in word and deed.

Now returned from their first mission, Jesus takes the apostles away for a time, probably to pray, rest and to discuss their experiences. Luke specifies the place as Bethsaida, the hometown of some of the Twelve (John 1:44). When interrupted by the needs of the crowds, Jesus again preaches and heals. The implication is also that even though the disciples have been given a share in his ministry, it is just a share, and thus they cannot take Jesus' place; this will be even more evident in their inability to take care of the hungry crowd without his help. The feeding of the five thousand had a meaning for the early church in the responsibility of the leaders to feed the flock, particularly with preaching and the Eucharist.

Luke's shares the story with the other gospel writers, but his account connects the feeding to the sending of the Twelve. Luke does not include Mark's mention of the compassion of Jesus for the people or the messianic allusion (Mark 6:34), but the abundance of good stands as a two-fold lesson to the Twelve: abundance is found not in the power to purchase with money, but in the power of the Lord; and, those who give receive back even more extravagantly. Both lessons reinforce what they have learned on their own journey.

As the other gospel writers, this miraculous feeding points forward to the Last Supper (Luke 22:9). But this account has another element on anticipation. Jesus here appears as one who provides food for the people – in other words, his authority to preach and heal is symbolized by table service. This is made explicit at the Last Supper when he tells the Twelve, "Am I not among you as the one who serves?" (22:27)

*Addendum:* This is the one miracle, apart from the resurrection, recounted in all four Gospels. Clearly it made a special appeal to the early church. But some in more recent times have found difficulty with it. Some commentators and homilists have suggested that perhaps the ‘miracle’ took place in people’s hearts. Their argument is that when Jesus’ disciples prepared to share all they had, others were ashamed and produced the food they had with them but had not wanted to share. When they did so there proved to be more than enough. If there was no more to it than this, it is hard to see how the story could have left such a mark on both the biblical tradition and the art of the early church (cf. the motif of the loaves and fishes in Christian art). This is not what any of the Evangelists is saying: they all describe a miracle. This does not mean that it was not symbolic. While it points to itself, it also points forward to the Last Supper, the Eucharist, and an anticipation of the Messianic banquet, the feast of Messiah with his people. There may also be something of a ‘farewell to fellowship’ aspect to it, as Jesus realized that he would not be able to move freely for much longer in Galilee. But such ideas should not be held in such a way as to obscure the miraculous.

### Notes

**Luke 9:11** *He received them:* *apodechomai* is a Greek verb akin to receiving someone in hospitality. This is a theme carried over from the mission of the apostles just completed.

**Luke 9:13** *Give them some food yourselves:* having just finished a mission in which they had accomplished great things in the name of the Lord, why is it that they suddenly lack the sense that all things are possible in God?

**Luke 9:14** *five thousand:* Two OT events are often noted as providing the proper framework in which to understand Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand. First, the short account of Elisha’s feeding of a hundred men in 2 Kings 4:42–44 provides a number of structural parallels the presentation of the bread to the prophet (9:13; 2 Kings 4:42), the prophet’s order for the people to be fed (9:13; 2 Kings 4:42), the reaction of the prophet’s followers (9:13; 2 Kings 4:43), the new order from the prophet (9:14; 2 Kings 4:43), the distribution and eating of the bread (9:16; 2 Kings 4:44), and the note concerning the leftovers (9:17; 2 Kings 4:44).

As the Elisha story builds on the feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 16–18), so may the setting in the account of Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand evoke the same event (9:12; Exod. 16:1–3). Moreover, the connection between fish and quail is already made in Num. 11:22, 31, and thus the “five loaves and two fish” may be a reference to the manna and quail that God had provided for his people during the wilderness journey. Others have further traced this connection between birds and fish through Second Temple and rabbinic literature

**Luke 9:16** *Then taking . . . :* the actions of Jesus recall the institution of the Eucharist in Luke 22:19

**Luke 9:17** *They all ate and were satisfied:* This is a narrative fulfillment of the Beatitude, “*blessed are those who are hungry now, for they shall be filled*” (6:21). Both verses use the root word *chortazō* (satisfy). The **twelve wicker baskets** is a clear reference to Israel now cast in the scene of eschatological wellness.

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## 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

<sup>17</sup> *In giving this instruction, I do not praise the fact that your meetings are doing more harm than good.* <sup>18</sup> *First of all, I hear that when you meet as a church there are divisions among you, and to*

a degree I believe it; <sup>19</sup> there have to be factions among you in order that (also) those who are approved among you may become known. <sup>20</sup> When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, <sup>21</sup> for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Do you not have houses in which you can eat and drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and make those who have nothing feel ashamed? What can I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this matter I do not praise you.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading for Corpus Christi**

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' <sup>25</sup> 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.' <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

<sup>27</sup> Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. <sup>31</sup> If we discerned ourselves, we would not be under judgment; <sup>32</sup> but since we are judged by (the) Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. <sup>33</sup> Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. <sup>34</sup> If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that your meetings may not result in judgment. The other matters I shall set in order when I come.

**Introduction**

First Corinthians 11-14 deals with problems in the services of worship at the church of Corinth. Verses 2-16 of chapters 11 addressed the question of women covering their heads while praying and prophesying in the service of worship. Problems with the Lord's Supper are treated in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Paul then moves on to the question of spiritual gifts and the exercise of prophecy, tongues, and interpretation.

Paul had introduced the subject of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16-22. There he appealed to the meaning of the cup and the loaf as *koinonia* or shared commitment to and with Christ. After concluding his treatment of meat offered to idols and the problem of women not covering their heads in worship he returns to the subject of the communion meal. However, his treatment now addresses a problem in the way the Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper. Paul's response unfolds in three sections.

- Verses 17-22 describe the wrong practices.
- Verses 23-26 reviews the way Jesus began the communion practice.
- Verses 27-34 turns to the question of what becomes unworthy participation in the Eucharist meal.

**11:17–22 Reported abuses.** Perhaps the Corinthians had implied in their letter to Paul that although they experienced some conflicts, such as what is appropriate liturgical dress (see 11:2–16), they nevertheless prided themselves on dutifully and regularly meeting to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Paul is not impressed. Such meetings as are described to him are not profitable

but harmful. The really faithful tried and true, those interested in deepening their faith, are challenged to “stand out clearly,” distinguishing themselves from the factious members.

The Corinthians are not assembling for the Lord’s Supper. They have ulterior, destructive motives. Two meanings are suggested. First, it is not their intention, when they get together, to celebrate in remembrance of the Lord (11:24–25), and second, in fact, this is not the result of the Corinthians’ gathering. In other words, from what Paul says, it is clear that the intention of many Corinthians is more divisive than reflective of the Lord’s command, with the result that they do not carry out this command in their meetings.

Reports allege that the many divisions among the Corinthians are allowed to be part of the Eucharistic celebrations. Violations of charity, directly opposed to Jesus’ command, are flagrant. Some are gluttonous, eating their own food, unmindful of the needs of others. On the other side, “one person goes hungry,” even in the midst of the assembled community whose obligation it is to provide for the needs of all, especially the poor (see Gal 2:10). Some people become drunk, dramatizing the inability of the self-centered to contribute to building community. If it is only for eating and drinking that they assemble, the Corinthians would do better not to risk the judgment of God by assembling without a willingness for conversion, as if the Eucharist were magic. The Corinthian temptation to be overconfident seems to need correction once more (see 1 Cor 10:1–12). Their coming together, when not motivated by charity, shows contempt for the community. By embarrassing them rather than showing hospitality to those who have nothing, some members test God and court judgment against themselves (11:29).

Paul cannot avoid his pastoral responsibility to condemn the disorder rather than overlook it. Paul will not condone the Corinthians’ gross misinterpretation of the real meaning of the liturgy. Apparently they mistakenly assumed that it was sufficient to come together regularly, and they seemed to have prided themselves on observing a ritual which brought together people of every walk of life or social standing. Nothing commendable in this, Paul says. In fact, such hypocrisy, while failing to reconcile the differences among them or make charity really practical, is, in fact, testimony against them. Even though in other parts of this letter Paul betrays a deep sensitivity to his fragile popularity in Corinth, he is not willing to soft-pedal his reaction to these abuses.

**11:23–27 Tradition of the institution.** Without suggesting that they have neglected the literal practice of the Lord’s Supper, Paul inserts in his general instruction on the liturgy an account of the institution of the Eucharist. For emphasis, Paul enhances this account with a repetition over the cup as over the bread of the words “do this in remembrance of me.” The memory of Jesus, who offered himself and whose death Christians proclaim in their liturgy, is the antidote to the factions in Corinth. Jesus’ life and death is more than a memory. It effects unity among all those who recognize him as Lord.

Paul begins his institution account using technical language of receiving and handing on the Christian tradition (see 15:1–3). The phrase “from the Lord” does not necessarily mean that this tradition was part of the revelation of Paul’s initial vision of Jesus which Luke describes as occurring on the way to Damascus. The tradition was an essential part of the gospel which Paul identifies with Christ. Even if the account was mediated by the Christian community, its authority, like the word prohibiting divorce (see 7:10), was the Lord’s.

Paul rarely refers to the earthly life of Jesus. But this account of the action of Jesus, specified as happening the night before he died, is particularly significant because of its uniqueness. The aspect of betrayal on the part of Jesus’ followers, which is part of the synoptic account (see Mark

14:17–31 and parallels), is accentuated in Paul’s account, too. Betrayal and human weakness provide the context for the Eucharistic institution account (see 11:17–22 and 27–32), wherein Paul describes the abuses surrounding the memorial celebration in Corinth. Similarly, the gospel reports the betrayal and denial of the disciples at the Last Supper. Luke, in particular, stresses the constant misunderstanding of the disciples who, even at the moment of the Eucharist, argued among themselves over which one was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (see Luke 22:24–30).

Jesus took ordinary bread and gave thanks for it. After it was broken, he identified it with his body. In contrast to the more original account of Mark, Paul has the words “which is for you.” This addition emphasizes at once the timeless but very real significance of the Eucharistic celebration. Whenever believers share this bread and this cup, they recall the Lord’s command to do this in memory of him. In so doing, they recall his death as they await his coming in glory. Three stages of time, the past (the original Last Supper and Jesus’ death), the present (the community’s celebration), and the future (the parousia) are brought together in this action. Anyone who performs this action unworthily, that is, separating one of these aspects from the other, sins in not fulfilling the Lord’s command.

**11:28–34 Practical recommendations for healing the body.** To avoid this sin, one must examine oneself, recollecting, in the literal sense, the necessary faith to transcend all that would prohibit a realization of the implications of eating and drinking as a disciple of the Lord. Such a self-examination allows one to recognize oneself as a member of the body. Anyone who eats and drinks without this recognition sins against the body and blood of the Lord, thus calling a judgment down upon oneself. This accounts, Paul says, for the suffering so many of the Corinthians experienced through sickness and death. These are the punishments of the Corinthians’ disbelief, most of all in the body, which is the church. Like the Israelites, who were chastised in the desert (10:5–12) for their complacency, the Corinthians are witnessing God’s displeasure.

Nevertheless, there is still hope that they will be converted and saved if they consider these chastisements as a warning. For Paul, Christ’s judgment is salvation for all who believe, but it is condemnation for disbelief (see 1:18). Paul’s stern words, then, are actually a loving admonition urging the Corinthians to show that they are different from the non-believing world. This difference can be expressed in very significant, concrete ways that will demonstrate for all to see that participants recognize the real meaning of the Lord’s Supper. When Christians assemble, they are to be considerate, waiting for one another. The hungry are to eat at home so that it is clearly not for selfish reasons that they gather. Since they will not be gathering merely to obtain food, there will be no danger of selfish motives prohibiting the genuine communal celebration.

The community must have raised other questions about the celebrations of the Lord’s Supper, but Paul defers instruction in these matters until he comes. This is the essential. The rest can afford to wait (see 4:19; 16:5–9).

## Notes

**1Cor 11:17 I do not praise:** v. 17 stands in obvious contrast to v.2 where Paul declared that he praised the Corinthians with regard to their observance of the traditions he had taught them. With regard to his teachings about the Lord’s Supper Paul was not able to praise the Corinthians.

**1Cor 11:18 *come together***: The key phrase ‘come together’ or ‘assemble together’ (the Greek expression is a single word *synerchomenōn*). Although *ekklesia* (those called to assembly, “church”) is not specifically used, nonetheless, the nuance should not be lost.

**1Cor 11:18-19 *divisions...factions***: These terms (*schismata* and *haireseis*) indicate social division. Noteworthy is the word ‘faction’ (*hairesis*) would come to be the root word for ‘heresy.’

***in order that (also) those who are approved among you may become known***: This is a difficult verse to interpret. Chapters 1-4 had forcefully argued against divisions in the church. Now verse 19 not only seems to accept division but almost approves of it. The expression ‘in order that’ was often used by biblical writers of necessity caused by God. One can even paraphrase the Greek text of verse 19 to mean, ‘It is the will of God that there be factions. . . .’

There are several explanations that scholars offer for such confusing words. The first and easiest is simply that Paul was being ironic. Given the contentious nature of the Corinthian church some believe Paul was saying, ‘You expected something different? Of course Corinthians have to fight about the Lord's Supper, too!’

Most recent scholars, however, do not consider Paul's words in verse 19 to be ironic. Most refer to the teaching of Jesus found in Matthew 10:34-37 and one of the so-called ‘unknown sayings of Jesus.’ The writings of Justin Martyr, an early Christian philosopher who died about A.D. 165, and two more obscure early Christian works quote a saying of Jesus not found in the gospels. According to these three sources Jesus taught, ‘There shall be divisions (*schismata*) and factions (*haireseis*).’ The fact that the exact same Greek words for the divisions and factions are used has caused several prominent New Testament scholars to believe that Paul was aware of this saying of Jesus that was not included in the gospels and was applying it to the Corinthians in verse 19.

The final part of verse 19 is also important to understand Paul's point. The divisions are necessary so it will become clear who among you are genuine. The apostle seems to be thinking in terms of the final testing process by which God will separate those who are approved and those who are rejected. Paul's point is that the divisions at Corinth are evidence that God has already begun the sifting of people that is part of the end of time. This interpretation is consistent with Paul's teaching in chapter 7 that people should not get married because of the nearness of the second coming of Christ.

**1Cor 11:20 *Lord's supper***: This is the only time the exact expression, ‘the Lord's Supper,’ appears in the New Testament. On the basis of the writings immediately after the writing of the New Testament scholars assume that every Christian worship service culminated in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Scholars have long been convinced that originally the earliest Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper as the climax of a church meal. It was thought that the problem at Corinth was that the rich brought far more and better food for the church fellowship meal and some of the poor may not have been able to bring any. The rich then insisted on eating their own food and the poor had nothing; a pretty sorry excuse for a church fellowship meal.

Recent studies in social customs have helped us understand why this strange division along lines of rich and poor might have happened at Corinth. Since this was long before church buildings were built the Corinthians would have been meeting in the houses of the members. Even in the larger homes of that time the dining area would not have accommodated more than 15-20 people and the Corinthian church was larger than that number. It was the normal custom of first century

Roman banquets to rank the guests by their social standing and seat the highest-ranking people in the dining room. People of lower rank were scattered throughout the rest of the house. Roman literature shows that it was not at all unusual for the highly regarded guests in the dining room to receive much nicer food than those in the other rooms.

Also, at the banquets the guests in the dining room were treated to ample servings of the finest wine while others were given a lower grade. Paul's complaint is that communion is not a private party held in the host's home. It is the Lord's Supper. Christ is the host and his customs must prevail not the social customs of Corinth. At the Lord's Supper everyone is treated alike because Christ does away with all the social distinctions that divided people of the first century (see Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11).

**1Cor 11:23** *For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you:* In this earliest written record of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Paul states that he "handed on" (*paredōka*) to the Corinthians what he had received (*paralabon*). The Greek words that he uses for 'received' and 'handed on' were technical terms for the reception of and passing on of oral traditions. The construction of the original language implies that Jesus was the ultimate source of the events described, but that others had passed the information on from Christ eventually to Paul.

**1Cor 11:23-24** *took...thanks...broke:* The ritual sequence of Eucharist is consistent the gospel accounts.

**1Cor 11:23-24** *remembrance:* *anamnesis* –meaning: calling to mind, remembrance, or memorial. Anamnesis is an essential dimension of all of Christian liturgy. It is always in memory of Christ that the church assembles, the biblical word is proclaimed, prayer is offered, sacraments celebrated, and all of the story of Christ remembered anew in the course of the liturgical year. In the liturgical actions of remembrance, Christ is rendered truly present in the assembly, and in word, prayer, and sacrament, especially in the eucharistic bread and wine. Christ's presence through anamnesis grounds the church's hope both now and for the future until he comes in glory. Liturgical anamnesis, therefore, is not the mere mental recall of something past, over and done with, nor is it the fond recollection of something or someone absent. Rather, in the church's liturgical anamnesis before God, Christ is truly present now. Anamnesis in this sense has no adequate English equivalent; "remembrance" or "calling to mind" may translate the word but cannot do justice to the reality.

**1 Cor 11:27** *eats...or...drink...unworthily:* It follows that the only proper way to celebrate the Eucharist is one that corresponds to Jesus' intention, which fits with the meaning of his command to reproduce his action in the proper spirit. If the Corinthians eat and drink unworthily, i.e., without having grasped and internalized the meaning of his death for them, they will have to answer for the body and blood, i.e., will be guilty of a sin against the Lord himself (*cf* 1 Cor 8:12 – "When you sin in this way against your brothers and wound their consciences, weak as they are, you are sinning against Christ.")

Verse 27 names the problem as eating and drinking in an unworthy manner, translated it as participating 'unworthily.' The frequent misunderstanding was that the question of worthiness applied to the person partaking. If worthiness were required no one could ever partake and the Lord's Supper could not be a means of grace. The context makes it clear that Paul regarded the Corinthian pattern of social discrimination against the poor as partaking unworthily.

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, while also emphasizing the communal aspect of these verse, has a

different analysis of what is participation ‘in an unworthy manner’ (Murphy-O’Connor, 268–69). He argues that St. Paul perceives the Body of Christ as an organic unity in which growth is only from God; all stems from God.

‘[T]he unity of Christians is that of a living person. No one possesses, but each one participates in a shared life. . . . As parts within the whole, believers are individuated, not by the assertion of autonomy, but by the uniqueness of their contribution to the common life which sustains all. . . . We consider unity as something to be created, whereas Paul saw this unity as primary and envisaged individuals as being changed by absorption into that unity’ (Murphy-O’Connor, 374).

In other words, the community *is* Christ. One participates in an unworthy manner when one does not discern the body (v. 29) as both Christ and the community—a single organic unity.

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