

3. Lord's Supper

SERVICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Sermon Text: I Corinthians 11 :23-24

Prayer

This is a service of communion and thanksgiving and we ask you to bless it. Due to the immense challenges we face in our lives, many of us are often tempted to think that there is little to be thankful for. We pray that this service will once again enable us to see the many blessings for which we can be thankful. We pray that through this service we will view our circumstances from a different light. The fact that some among us may be HIV positive is reason to be especially thankful for the gifts of life, fellowship and communion. Lord, we ask that as you issue an open invitation for us to sit at table with you, the church may work to undermine and combat all stigma against HIV positive people and other stigmatized groups in society. We pray that this service may inspire us to combat all practices -said and done -, which undermine community. In this service, we pray that we will be moved from chaos to community and fellowship with you, oh Lord, and with one another as human beings created in your image.

Song

Bind us together Lord,
Bind us together Lord,
Bind us with cords
That cannot be broken.

Bind us together Lord,
Bind us together Lord,
Bind us together with love.

There is only one Lord,
There is only one King.
(Anonymous, popular chorus)

Introduction

In many cultures -African cultures included -the sharing of a meal is the highest form of fellowship and communion. The sharing of a meal is the most basic and most central family ritual, in which members of the family engage. The invitation to a guest to share in the family meal is accordingly an important gesture of friendship and communion. It is significant that Jesus chose a meal as the best context for us to remember him. As the time of his betrayal and crucifixion drew near, Jesus chose for farewell and remembrance purposes, the sharing of a meal. There is no better symbol of communion, friendship and fellowship than a meal. It is instructive that Jesus did not leave to chance the question of how he was to be remembered, but sought to give his disciples very concrete clues,

guidelines and a very definite context. It is also instructive that Jesus chose a communal rather than an individual meal situation for the context of his remembrance. But we live in a world where meals -even family meal times -can no longer be taken for granted. In a world where some have more to eat than they can consume, there are millions who go for days without a decent meal. There are families for whom a decent family meal is a luxury that happens all too rarely. Effectively therefore, in the global meal table, there are millions who are excluded. What excludes them? Poverty; patriarchy; racism; sexism; HIV / AIDS. The stigmatization of HIV positive people. As long as the global meal table excludes some, the world is unable to witness to and remember Jesus Christ. We must be careful that the Holy Communion does not become just another of the many exclusive and immoral meals in which a few get nourished, when many are going hungry. Not only does Holy Communion remind us of a basic human act, but it also inspires us to work for a world in which there is genuine communion among all human beings, and between humans and God.

We Listen to the Word of God

We read I Corinthians 11:23-34

DETAILS OF THE TEXT

This passage is a recollection -it is Paul's recollection of the instructions from the Lord with regard to Holy Communion. For Paul, it is important that this practice be kept just as the Lord had commanded. Here, it is clearly the theological significance of the meal that is highlighted. The central theological message is that of linking the bread and the wine to the event of salvation. Human made bread and wine become (metaphors for) the broken body of the Christ and his shed blood. We must not pass too quickly over the fact and reality of the broken body and the spilt blood. These two theological truths find much resonance in the experience of many in Africa today. Diseases such as HIV/AIDS are breaking the body of Christ anew. Blood continues to be spilt in a world where the sanctity of life is no longer respected. The world is broken. So the theological significance and the subsequent theological controversies about Holy Communion should not blind us to its socio-economic and ethical significance of Holy Communion. Paul was very much awake to the latter. After reminding his readers of the words of the Lord, he proceeds to caution against unworthy eating of Holy Communion. He suggests introspection before Holy Communion and advises against gluttony or greed at the communion table. In our context of poverty and HIV/AIDS, we may have to revisit these words of caution, and conceptualize them and think anew of the things that make for communion and those that destroy it.

We Apply the Word of God

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

- We learn that Jesus instructed that a simple communion meal is the context of his remembrance, and that he is best served and remembered in community.
- For communion to be real, all- including stigmatized and discriminated people -must be welcome unconditionally as God accepts us.

- Just as there are important theological issues in the practice and traditions surrounding Holy Communion, there are also ethical and socio-political issues.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO CONFESS?

- We confess all the practices, policies and words that kill and stunt community.
- We confess the danger that Holy Communion can become one more meal of exclusion in a world where so many are excluded.
- We confess the exclusion of many -including HIV positive people -from the table of communion.
- We confess our silence in the face of massive stigmatization of HIV positive people, effectively cutting them off and denying them community and fellowship.

WHAT CAN WE BE THANKFUL FOR?

- We are thankful that, sinful as we are, we are made worthy to sit at table with the Lord.
- We are thankful that in a world full of divisions, discrimination and exclusion, we are all welcome to sit alongside one another and alongside Jesus Christ.
- We are thankful that Christ left us this ritual of community, fellowship and thanksgiving.

WHAT CAN WE PRAY FOR?

- We pray for an end to all that divides, discriminates and excludes.
- In a society where community is being tom apart by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, we pray for healing and for resilient community.
- We pray for a global table where no one is discriminated or excluded.
- We pray for a world where all have something to eat.

We Apply the Word of God to the Congregation

WHAT CAN WE FEEL?

- We feel ashamed at the extent of cruel and irrational stigma attached to HIV positive people.
- We feel compassionate towards all discriminated people.
- We feel anger at the abuse of Holy Communion, so it becomes one more meal of exclusion, rather than a context of community, witness and remembrance.
- We feel inspired by the realization that Jesus wants us to live in community with him.

WHAT CAN WE BE?

- We can be builders of community.
- We can be activists against discrimination and exclusion.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- We can take action against stigmatization of HIV/AIDS sufferers.
- We can work towards making the communion table accessible to all within our own congregation.

- We can work for a global communion table that welcomes all and is able to supply nourishment to all.

Conclusion: A Word to Society

Holy Communion is a significant Christian ritual. In remembering the broken body of Christ, we recognize the broken world in which we live. We recognize the broken body of Christ -a body that is HIV positive. So we ought to pause to think of the things that break up our world and things that break up the church. We should think particularly of things that destroy and pervert genuine human community. In this ritual built around a most basic and community-inspiring human act, namely, the sharing of a meal, we are forced to confess that in our world, even the sharing of a meal is fast becoming exclusive, as many go hungry. We are therefore challenged to name the policies and practices that break the world up and spill blood. We are challenged to work for a world in which there is real community. In such a world, stigma and discrimination will be eliminated. This is what it means to remember and to witness to Christ.

Prayer of Commitment

Lord, we thank you for allowing us to sit at the table with you. Give us strength to continue working for a world that is not broken -a world where blood is wantonly spilt. Help us to have courage to work for a world in which all have something to eat. Give us the vision and courage to build churches, which are home to strangers, the poor and the sick. We particularly ask you to make the church a home and refuge for HIV positive people. Above all we pray that you will enlist all of us in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS, poverty and discrimination.

Song

An appropriate song of community or Holy Communion may be sung.

Symbols/objects/ideas and commitments: The usual Holy Communion symbols will suffice.

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Maluleke, T.S. (2004). Lord's Supper. In *AfricaPraying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*. 2nd ed. Ed M.W. Dube, 62-65. World Council of Churches Publications, Geneva, Switzerland.