

Table Manners 101; “Pass the Grace, Please”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

February 7, 2010/Ord 5C

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

15 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,

4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,

5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Proclamation of the Word

In Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Indiana Jones must find the Holy Grail using the notes of his Historian father- a Jerry Reel of sorts. You may recall the scene where Indy tries to rescue his father as played by Sean Connery. He finds himself at a huge chasm that he must cross in order to rescue his father. The canyon is called “the Mouth of God.” It’s too far to jump across. No bridge is visible. Indiana is forced to step out in faith. He holds his heart for courage and steps out. An invisible bridge of stone appears and Indiana Jones steps across. The writer of Hebrews says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Faith is intricately woven together with hope and love as we heard last week. Paul shares with us today in 1 Corinthians about FAITH. Last week we were reminded about the most important action of faith which is love. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul reminds us that Faith, Hope and Love are the greatest gifts. But this week in the 15th chapter, Paul goes onto give us his Faith Statement itself.

Some Presbyterians are uncomfortable with the word “Testimony” so instead we have what is called a “Faith Statement”. Kind of like Baptists have “Revivals” and Presbyterians have “Renewal Events”- sounds like you just renewed your magazine subscription, doesn’t it? Well, today Paul gives his “testimony” or “faith statement” to the church at Corinth. He has been preaching to the faithful there at Corinth and then he tells him why he is so passionate about what he has come to believe. He has had an encounter with the Risen Christ...he has had a life-transforming experience of grace.

Listen to verse 3-5 again...

3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,
4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,
5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...

Paul’s simple little faith statement grows out of an encounter with the holy. Remember Paul was a persecutor of the Christians. He was keeping the status quo of his faith and was trying to squash this Jesus movement. Then he had a major conversion experience, an encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. And he came to faith in this Jesus. He sums it up succinctly. Now, we Presbyterians are people who say creeds and confession as many faith traditions do. In fact, we have a whole book of Confessions & Creeds, but Paul’s statement is perhaps one of the oldest creeds.

Now I just used the word Creed and you may know that creed comes from the word CREDO meaning “I believe.” Perhaps you have had to write your own statement or tell what you believe by publicly professing what you believe. I am sure our Confirmation Class members can attest to that. Or maybe you have stood before your church or your church’s governing body like our Session and said what you believe. Belief can be anything one holds dear. But faith is about where you place your trust. Paul tells us and the church that he places his very trust or faith in this Jesus Christ who has been revealed to him.

Have you had a faith encounter? Have you wrestled with faith? Rejected faith? Assumed faith? Longed for faith?

Many of us were taught faith, and then we caught faith.

Some of us were taught faith, and then put it on the shelf like a childhood security blanket whose time had come.

Others of us discovered a passionate faith on our own as we grew into maturity.

Faith in its very nature is an enigma, a mystery. But by the grace of God, faith found Paul. Paul was seeking to follow his religion, then he met Jesus. Faith found Paul.

William Slone Coffin, former Chaplain at Yale and preacher at the famous Riverside Church in New York, writes in his last book *Credo* about faith. In fact the whole book is his Faith Statement. Coffin, an intellectual, a peace activist who has advocated for nuclear disarmament and human rights for decades gives us insight into his passion for the possible in this simple statement.

“I love the recklessness of faith- first you leap, then you grow wings.”

Faith is leaping and trusting that you will grow wings. Sounds a bit anti-intellectual....it doesn't sound rational....exactly. Faith is an action just as Paul told us that love is an action not a feeling. Coffin goes on to say this about faith...

“What is faith? Faith is being grasped by the power of love. Faith is asking what makes God is infinite mercy, not infinite control; not power but love unending. Faith is recognizing that if at Christmas Jesus became like us, it is so that we might become more like him. We know what that means: watching Jesus heal the sick, empower the poor, and scorn the powerful, we see transparently the power of God at work. Watching Zaccheus climb the tree a crook and climb down a saint, watching Paul set out a hatchet man for the Pharisees and return a fool for Christ, we know too that our lives can become a channel for divine mercy to flow out to save the lost and the suffering.

There is nothing anti-intellectual about the leap of faith, for faith is not believing without proof, but trusting without reservation.”¹

Faith is trust. It is taking a leap and trusting that you will grow wings.

Back to Paul in our Scripture... He had been a religious man, but his encounter with Christ made him a man of faith. He became the passionate missionary and apostle who helped start churches throughout Asia Minor. Paul knew he was sinful. He had harmed many in the name of good religion. He had brought suffering upon the church. He calls himself the least of the apostles because of his own limitations and sin. But he also understands the key factor in faith better than most. Paul knows **abundant** grace....

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Grace is that unearned, unattainable quality of faith. By the grace of God I am what I am....grace makes the impossible possible. And once you have experienced grace, you are compelled to share it. Paul did that. His life sounds like a great action movie. He endured prison, shipwrecks, and suffering all because he was moved by grace and love to share the Good News with others even those annoying Corinthians to whom he has been fussing at all these

chapters before. But he is motivated by this deep sense of love for God and love for other people. Faith makes people do crazy things.

We gather today as God's people willing to take a leap...coming to Christ's table to receive Christ himself in the flesh...body and blood. And we are reminded to use our best table manners.

When I say use our manners, I am not simply talking about saying, "Please, pass the gravy," I mean that this table and what happens here has to shape the manner of our lives. We come in faith to the table and we leave to lead a life of faith. At this table we meet head on with Jesus and commit to fully consume him...take him into our very bodies so that we leave this place changed somehow. Leaping and trusting that we will grow wings. We know that at Christmas Jesus became one of us so that we might grow into his likeness...to show forth the family resemblance. To pass onto others that grace, mercy and love offered to us. We act out of faith just as Indiana Jones stepped out in trust and found a bridge to the other side so that he was able to rescue his father.

Every family has there own set of rules. My Dad's pet peeve was elbows on the table. You might get popped with an iced-tea spoon if you forgot and placed your elbows on the table. Then I lived with a family in France and learned that it was rude to place your hands in your lap- hands needed to be above the table mainly so one could talk with her hands.

Let's see if you know your table manners:

Always chew with your mouth_____.

Always say "Please" and _____.

Napkin goes in your _____.

Out of curiosity I looked up table manners and learned a few things:

1. In Afghan, if bread is dropped on the floor while eating at a table, the bread should be picked up, kissed, and put to one's forehead before putting the bread back somewhere other than the floor. If eating on the floor, make sure that your feet do not touch the food.
2. In Tanzania, Africa it is rude to show up early to dinner, always be 15-20 minutes late.
3. In Switzerland, it is rude to be late, show up on time.
4. In China, it is rude to bang your chopsticks on the table because it makes you look like a beggar!

But aren't we all beggars at God's table, hungry and starved for fullness, love, faith, grace? The Reformer Martin Luther said, "We are all beggars telling other beggars where to find bread."

Martin Luther believed so much in the freeing love of Christ he found by grace through faith, that our lives can only flow into witness and love to neighbor. He said, we are to be like “little Christ’s to our neighbor, for in doing so, we find our true identity as Children of God.”

So we gather today at the family table, as God’s children. And the most important table manner to remember is that Grace is meant to be shared with others. Bread shared and self-offered. Paul says, “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received...”

So let us prepare to receive what is graciously given to us,
unearned,

unmerited

...grace and love freely given

following the one who acted in love and grace first toward us.

¹William Slone Coffin, *Credo* (Westminster John Knox: Louisville, KY) 2004 pp. 7-9.