

Martin White. Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2008

**They devoted themselves to... the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42)**

Last week I started a series of preaches about a subject that I believe is timely and very important for us – hospitality/fellowship/community.

I believe that this is something that God is speaking to me about for the church and, excitingly, I believe that if we let God move us on and shape us in this, then I think we will see God grow and move the Church on – it's as if He is saying "Just let me do this and see what I'll do through it."

In summary, what I said last week was that according to Acts 2:42, half of what people noticed about the Early Church was that they were devoted to being and eating together. This was as much part of them as the "spiritual" bits which we major on in the West of reading the Bible and praying (although the Early Church saw meeting and being together as being just as spiritual)

Today I want to add to what I said about fellowship – meeting together, by talking about another thing they were devoted to – eating together.

**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42 NIV)**

**They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 The Message)**

**And they steadfastly persevered, devoting themselves constantly to the instruction and fellowship of the apostles, to the breaking of bread [including the Lord's Supper] and prayers. (Acts 2:42 Amplified Bible)**

**They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together.**

**[Footnotes: *broke bread*: They ate together and celebrated the Lord's Supper.] (Acts 2:42 CEV)**

It's easy to try and make this passage sound completely spiritual by applying spiritual meanings to this – making “Fellowship” into “Church Membership” and “Breaking Bread” into “Communion.”

But that isn't what the passage says.

As we saw last week, fellowship simply meant being together and as the different Bible versions of this try to get out, ‘breaking bread’ meant eating together, which would have probably, but not necessarily, included communion.

Wolfgang Simpson talks about communion and says:

**The Lord's Supper was a substantial supper with a symbolic meaning, not a symbolic supper with a substantial meaning...Eating was a main purpose of them meeting.**

It has become such a small amount of food (tiny crumbs or wafers and wine in a glass that looks like it is from a child's tea set) that someone described it as “homeopathic”!

The Jews knew how to feast and party – and this carried on into Jesus' life:

At the wedding at Cana –

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."...

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

...the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine...Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." (John 2:3-10)

At an already fairly ‘merry’ wedding, Jesus chose for His first miracle – to display His Glory, making 180 brimming full gallons of best (strongest?) wine.

That's 681 litres, which is 1021.5 bottles of wine (or 1440 pints!)

His reputation was that He was someone who enjoyed parties:

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' (Matthew 11:18-19)

When Jesus came to Levi's home, the most natural thing to say seemed to be "Let's have a party!"

And it carried on into the New Testament.

The Early church met (daily) to eat in each other's homes:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (Acts 2:46)

Corinth – clearly enough food & wine for people to eat so they're not hungry anymore and drink enough to get drunk (Students: it's not saying this is a good thing!)

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. (1 Corinthians 11:20-21)

I don't know how many little communion cups full of wine you'd need to get drunk! Has anyone tried???

One of the most memorable times of communion I have ever been in was in a church in Newcastle – half night of prayer with communion in the middle – "Stotties (rolls) and large glasses of wine!

**I believe that, as with fellowship, this is a hugely important thing for the Church to understand and do well.**

But we live in a society where, despite all the cookery programmes on TV, we are fast losing the habit of eating together, and my fear is that church is following society in this

For a lot of people in the West, food has become fuel – it's a necessity; you do it; but if you can keep it as convenient

University of Manchester → 87% of meals in UK are less than 30 minutes

People spend less time eating @ other people's houses or hosting other people for meals – considerably less than 30 years ago.

Large increase in "Eating on the go" (British Council.org)

Less than 44% of British families have a sit-down meal once a week

Britain eats the highest number of processed "ready meals" out of the whole of Europe.

Sadly, where we have lost the art of eating together, we also lose the benefits of it that God intended for us to enjoy.

### **So if the Early Church was so devoted to eating together, why was it so important?**

I believe that there are a number of reasons why this was so important for the Early Church and I also believe that the very same reasons that were important then, still apply to us today – especially so in a multicultural church. And I want to look at a few of them this morning.

### **What's so important about breaking bread?**

- **Including people**

When we spend time with someone, that's great; but when we eat with someone, I believe that it joins us with them in a bigger way.

Christian "Breaking Bread" was something that was for everyone.

And eating together for first century Christians meant eating with a wide range of diverse people – different cultures; people from widely different backgrounds; people who had lived sinful lives and people who had grown up as strictly religious Jews (who would never have eaten with Gentiles); Men and women; Godly leaders and new converts; Wealthy citizens and poor widows.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

**Sharing one of the most basic of human needs, ordinary food, was and still is a sign of deep and revolutionary fellowship, cutting through all previous national, caste, clan and tribal affiliations. In some nations, eating together is one form of sealing a legal contract, or making peace with each other. (Wolfgang Simpson, p.83)**

- **Humility**

There is something humbling about serving someone by preparing them a meal; sharing what you have with them; and waiting on them.

And there is also something hugely humbling about being served (remember Peter having his feet washed by Jesus.)

The most expensive meal I ever had (and one of the most humbling experiences) was in Romania – it was a tiny bit of cheese; half a pepper; a tomato and a small cube of rancid pig fat. But it had cost the family that gave me it a huge amount.

Nothing in my upbringing prepared me for the way I have been served by non-European friends who have served me so lavishly; I have been completely honoured and humbled both at the same time!

To people with a gift of hospitality (or from a culture that highly values hospitality) I want to say “Don’t let the world – specifically British culture – squeeze you into its mould.” Rather, please be patient and forgive us who are still learning this good, godly value. Please teach us and shape this church.

I would add a few other comments though:

- We should be givers *and* receivers
- The worth of a meal doesn’t come from its cost; it comes from the value put on each other.

Being devoted to breaking bread wasn’t only something rich people could do, like a dinner party where you try to impress your friends (although the First Century Society had this kind of feast.) It’s not meant to be a competition, and it’s certainly not meant to score points!

Romans 13 says: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another” (v.8)

Our call is to break bread – simple, something that most people can afford. It is within reach of all of us.

I had a friend in Bedford who was not rich. He used to say “Come round for chips and beans tomorrow night” And you’d go round and get chips and beans! And it was great, and he was a great host!

If you can’t cook, then serve each other with a cup of tea made with care and love.

The cookery skill, and the expense, and the extravagance isn’t the issue; being devoted to one another, and preferring each other, and walking humbly is.

- **Remembering Jesus**

There are not really many things in the Bible we are told we must do; but one of them is that we are to regularly remember Jesus as we eat and drink together.

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NIV)

Now this is speaking about Communion, but actually the Last Supper and communion were using normal, everyday meals – just making them more purposeful.

Jesus said ‘when you break bread – remember Me.’ He didn’t say only in communion.

And He didn’t say ‘when you drink communion wine, remember My Blood.’ He said “Whenever you drink it,” let it be a reminder to you.

I don’t think He was only talking about communion wafers and thimbles full of wine; I believe He was reclaiming all meals.

- **Remembering God's Promise**

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, (v.26)

Jesus put a time limit on communion – we're to do it until He comes again. After that, we will be sharing the ultimate meal with Him; the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

Until then, when we eat together it points towards something greater that is to come.

So breaking bread together now is prophetic – pointing towards the Day when we, together with people from every tribe and language and people and nation:

Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory!  
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.

...Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' (Revelation 19:7&9)

- **Accepting God's Hospitality**

For anyone accepting hospitality in the Middle East at the time, there were strict codes. Eating with someone and accepting hospitality meant that you offered your friendship to them.

It would be unthinkable to sit with and eat with someone you held a grudge towards; if you ate at a meal table with someone you disliked or held something against, it would be an insult to your host, and a good host could not allow discord at his table.

Breaking bread as Christians means coming to Jesus' Table and honouring Him as the Head of the household.

Whenever Christians ate together (and eat together) it was (and is) both a declaration of unity and a line drawn to enforce unity.

And this applies to communion, but I think that Communion is just an extension of what eating together – around God’s Table would have been like anyway

I have preached before about communion and said that where people can get confused and nervous of the charge not to take communion ‘in an unworthy manner’, some commentators have pointed to the part where it calls us to recognise the “Body” of Christ as meaning The Body – the Church, in other words, it’s a call to unity.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:27-28)

What Communion does is to remind us of our obligations to unity that breaking bread together already requires; – more so as we remember Jesus.

Communion calls us to remember that we have all received the blessing of Jesus’ Sacrifice on the Cross, and we are all equally receivers of His Grace and Mercy, equally grateful to Him, equally unable to save ourselves without Him, equally forgiven, equally loved.

And as such, called to unity.

We’re on a path that God has set us on as a Church, to truly reflect and affect and serve the communities around us.

I believe that this is His idea; not ours.

And I believe that He is at work in us, opening our eyes to an amazing New Testament blueprint He wants us to grow towards.

This is important work – and He will give us all the Grace we need!

**Pray for those with a gift of hospitality – use it to shape the Church – let your heart for people infect us!**

## **Community Group Questions on Fellowship & Breaking Bread**

### **(Acts 2:42)**

1. What were the key points from the preaches that spoke to you?
2. Do you feel you have any 'blind spots' regarding community/hospitality?
3. Describe the best example of being 'devoted to fellowship' you have experienced.
4. How much do you feel you separate out 'holy' and 'other/ordinary' areas of your life?
5. How easy do you find it to give and receive hospitality?
6. When was the last time you shared hospitality with someone from a different social or racial group? What was it like?
7. How do you think of communion? What would be the best way to do it?
8. Are there any things in your life you feel you need to change as a result of this?