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Sometimes it's hard to wait, isn't it? In the doctor's office. In the restaurant. In the grocery store checkout line. In church in the middle of the sermon.

When we're finally done waiting, we might mutter to ourselves: *It's about time; I've got places to go, things to do, people to see.*

Sometimes in the midst of our impatience, we might miss something, as was the case last week while sitting by the pond. A Blue Heron was standing in the water. I almost missed it, for it was standing still...waiting for something tasty to swim by to eat. I tried waiting as long as the heron, but soon I became restless as I watched the bird standing still...not moving...silent. I became impatient, and rather than waiting just a little bit longer, I moved enough to startle the heron, which then flew off down the stream. I missed seeing it capture its morning breakfast since I was too restless and could not sit still.

Impatience isn't a new thing, for 2000 years ago it appears those in the church in Corinth were

impatient as well. Paul wrote a letter to their church since he was concerned about their behavior at the table—they argued, didn't wait for one another, and left out certain people from the meal. He wrote, "When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in?"¹

When those in the early church gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper, they had an entire meal as part of the event, but some didn't wait for others. And even some at the meal didn't get to eat and remained hungry.

Paul reminded his readers of the purpose of the Lord's Supper—using words we hear each Sunday: "the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This

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cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”²

Finally, Paul told them to take some time and think about what they were doing before they ate together at the Lord’s Table. “Examine yourselves,” he suggested, “and don’t leave anyone out.

Jump ahead in time to two hundred years ago when one of our early Disciples leaders, Alexander Campbell, discovered that the Presbyterian Church in Scotland had taken to the extreme Paul’s suggestion to examine yourself before taking communion. The elders would examine each person to see if he or she was fit for communion, often accompanied by the individual having to recite particular memorized creeds. If a person passed the test, one would receive a lead token about the size of a small coin, which would provide admission to the Lord’s Table for communion.

While studying at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, Alexander became concerned that some were excluded from communion—those who could not pass the test, such as beggars in the street who

did not conform to the norms of the church. As he struggled with this insight and sat waiting his turn to receive communion, he left his token at the altar as he walked out of the church without taking communion.

About that same time, his father, Thomas Campbell on the other side of the ocean in America had reached a similar conclusion. Thomas had invited everyone to take communion, going against the tradition that only members of that particular branch of the church could approach the table.

Both father and son were in trouble over communion, which led to them leaving the established church and searching for a better way. We know that movement now as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Two hundred years ago some may have reflected, “Those heretics have gone against the rules of the church,” while others may have said, “It’s about time we change our closed table into an open table.”

Today we Disciples openly invite everyone to the Table, not just those who join our church or believe

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in exactly the same way, though sometimes congregations wonder when to welcome children at the table. Do they need to wait until they are baptized? Do they need to wait until they fully understand what communion means? If we wait for a complete understanding of what happens at the Table, many of us may feel reluctant to take communion, for the meal is still filled with mystery and we may each have unanswered questions.

One woman tells about her four-year-old niece's understanding of communion, which offers a surprising way of seeing what happens when we gather at the Table:

My sister and her children moved to my city not long ago and began attending church for the first time in their lives. They particularly loved the singing and the communion service. One day while babysitting, I fixed the children their favorite lunch of burritos and apple juice. As I left the room, I heard four-year old Alisha begin to celebrate communion with her lunch items. She seemed to have memorized the words of

institution quite well, until she came to the cup. I heard her say, "And Jesus took the cup, and he blessed it, and he gave God thanks for it, and he said, 'Fill it with Folgers and wake 'em up!'"³

I would suggest that this little girl gets the idea of communion—a meal to wake us up to what God is doing around us in the church and in the world. Two hundred years ago it was time to wake up and open the table, and now *it's about time* to wake again. What might God be calling us now to do at this Table? Who might we still exclude that needs an invitation? Are there some who are still waiting to be welcome, who might say, "It's about time you welcome me at the Table too."

Sometimes we get too hung up about rules and regulations, about who's in and who's out. We get stuck in times of the past or we worry about the time in the future. Sometimes we worry about time so much that we miss what God is doing right now. Theologian Henri Nouwen who taught at Notre Dame in the 1960s once wrote:

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When Jesus came to redeem mankind, he came to free us from the boundaries of time. Through him it became clear not only that God is with us wherever our presence is in time or space, but also that our past does not have to be forgotten or denied but can be remembered and forgiven...The word *eucharist*, which means thanksgiving, expresses a way of accepting life in which the past and the future are brought together in the present moment...Frequently, this eucharistic celebration of life takes place elsewhere than where it is formally planned. Life is not always really celebrated where [church is] held. Sometimes it is, but quite often it is not. Perhaps we have to become more sensitive to [other] people and places.⁴

Nouwen recognized that it was time to look beyond the liturgies and activities of the church and recognize that God's presence moves throughout

the entire world, not limited to specific times or spaces. When we gather at the Table to celebrate Christ's presence, the bread and the cup empower us to take our faith into the world—not to leave it at the Table or remove it before going out the door. The taste of the bread and the liquid in the cup remain deep within our bodies, giving us the courage to live in hope each day.

Don't you think it's about time to really trust God? Even on the sad days? Even when tears fill our eyes? Even when our leaders don't seem to know what to do to fix the problems of our nation? Even when the world seems in chaos?

At this Table, it's the right time to celebrate what God has done in the past, what God is doing now, and what God will continue to do in the future. Are you ready? It's about time—so be prepared to see what God is doing.

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, NRSV.

² 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, NRSV.

³ *1002 Humorous Illustrations* by Michael Hodgin, #491.

⁴ *Creative Ministry* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), as quoted on homileticonline.com, April 21, 2011.