

Leftovers. We all face the decision of what to do with them. While some prefer to put them in a container and warm them up the next day, others dread the idea of eating leftovers. Sometimes those leftovers may stay in the fridge too long, pushed into the back corner, forgotten, until months later someone accidentally opens the container and discovers a fuzzy object that no longer resembles the original meal.

Just imagine what leftovers might have been like before the days of refrigeration, before Styrofoam take-home boxes or Tupperware. That may be why in today's story from Exodus, after God had given detailed instructions about the preparation of the lamb for a special meal, God told Moses, "Don't let any of it remain until morning, and burn any of it left over in the morning."

No leftover for Passover.

Passover was an important night in the life of God's people. They were preparing to escape from the Pharaoh, for whom they had been serving as

forced labor for generations. The people had seen nine plagues—from the river turning to blood to flies and frogs to hail and lightning. But Pharaoh was unconvinced that he should let God's people go to experience freedom. But on the night of the tenth plague, death would move through the area, and to protect those in bondage, Moses instructed his people to prepare a lamb and spread its blood over their front doors as a sign for death to pass over. "If a household is too small for a lamb," Moses instructed, "it should share one with a neighbor nearby. You should divide the lamb in proportion to the number of people who will be eating it." No one was to be left out of the celebration, not even the small families who could not afford a feast.

Along with eating the lamb, they were to prepare unleavened flat bread, for they didn't have time for the yeast to rise. They were to eat this flat, possibly tasteless bread, for seven days. I can just imagine what some children might have said after several days, "What? We're eating only flat bread

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again? I'm tired of eating this same ole stuff. Can't we have something different, maybe a little peanut butter or jelly to go with it?"

Through the 4000 years of sharing the flat bread and wine, Jews have realized that it's more than just leftover bread, for it's Passover bread, a reminder that death passed over them and they escaped from the Pharaoh.

When Jesus met with his disciples some 2000 years later during their Last Supper, they were sharing this Passover meal, recalling the story of the Exodus, their ancestors' escape from Pharaoh. Jesus told his followers, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." But he added an additional thought as he served the bread and the wine:

After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup after the meal and said, "This cup is the

new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you."

Sound familiar?

We repeat these words every Sunday at the Table, for as Disciples of Christ, we believe this is our central act of worship, of remembering what God has done in history and in our lives.

Over 200 years ago Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander, recognized that communion was a central act of worship. While many churches at that time required people to be members of their particular branch of the church in order to receive communion, our early Disciples of Christ leaders recognized that this was God's Table—a table set without barriers.

We still know today that gathering at the Lord's Table is the main reason we are here. Disciples minister Colbert Cartwright tells a story of a seven-year-old boy [who] slipped unnoticed into a side room called the annex, where deacons placed the communion trays on a table each

Sunday after serving the people. There the lad, glancing about, broke off a bit of the unleavened bread and ate it. With a glance toward the door he lifted one of the cups to his lips and swallowed the grape juice.

Quickly he was back out in the sanctuary to wait for his family to lock up the church. Each Sunday he followed this same weekly ritual—until his next birthday. That year it fell on a Sunday. This seemed to him a most fitting day to join the church. On this special day marking his birth he stepped forward to make his confession of faith and to rise from the baptismal waters a new person.

[Cartwright confesses:] I was that boy and my father was pastor of that Chattanooga Disciples congregation. This was my earliest experience of the Lord's Supper. I had heard my father say many times that the Lord's Supper is central to our worship—the reason we gather together on the Lord's Day. I wanted to be a part of that worship.¹

Cartwright tells another story of many years later while in seminary, he went to serve a small one-room Disciples congregation in Illinois. He had hoped to get an order of worship before the service began, but the congregation started right in, without warning. H explained:

I discovered later that since this small congregation did not regularly have a minister, it was their custom together, sing some hymns, have a Sunday School lesson from the Bible, and proceed directly with the elders leading them in the partaking of the Lord's Supper.

I quickly came to realize these people knew they were a church through their sharing in the Lord's Supper. At times they may not have a pastor. Never mind. It is living Christ meeting them at his table who makes them his people.²

Through the many years of this congregation's history, you have seen pastors come and go, changes occur in the order of worship, kids grow up and leave for college, babies born, changes in the

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design of the building, and many more events. But one thing has remained constant: the serving of communion every Sunday. Not all denominations experience the Lord's Supper every week, but on this World Communion Sunday we join with churches around the world in celebrating this sacred meal. Eighty years ago the Presbyterian Church first celebrated what was then called Worldwide Communion Sunday. Several years later Disciples pastor Jesse Bader helped expand the celebration into a multi-denominational event, launching World Communion Sunday on October 6, 1940.³

Although we Disciples serve communion every Sunday, it's not an ordinary event, for sometimes surprising things can happen, as was the case on one particular Sunday when a deacon discovered something a bit different:

When it came time to uncover the elements, the grape juice looked darker than usual. I thought nothing of it and began to serve the communion. Promptly upon receiving the cup, each recipient's face had a peculiar, stunned look. When it came time for me to receive I discovered why the strange looks...the juice was prune juice! One [member] stated, "Perhaps this is a divine commentary on our spirituality...we need a little loosening up!"⁴

We may not eat flat bread for seven days, but every seven days we do gather to eat a piece of bread and experience a taste of grape juice to remind us that God is present in our lives, who nudges us to loosen up and move where the Spirit takes us.

¹ http://greatcommunion.org/study/lords_supper/constitutes.htm

² Ibid.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_Moren_Bader

⁴ <http://mudmosh.com/communion-and-church-jokes/>