

Holy (Coffee) Hour

John 6:56-69

Exactly ten years ago, Jess and I had just bought a former drug house up the street here on Lee's Summit Road. The house was in total disrepair, and the three acres in the back had long been neglected. We both felt a deep desire to be intentional with how we used not only our home but also the land. For the benefit of our community, we wanted to focus on building life from the ground up, redeeming and nurturing not just the home and the earth, but also our relationships and faith for the love of God and our neighbor.

One of the most meaningful ways we did this was by starting what some might call a home church. We called it Shiloh Group, because the city of Shiloh as recorded in the Bible was a sanctuary and temporary center of worship for the Israelites before the First Temple in Jerusalem was built. Most of us had been hurt by traditional built church systems and needed this unstructured environment to heal. Every Sunday, about thirty to forty people would come to our property. We set up tables in a giant circle on the land or in the barn, and everyone would bring a dish or drink to share. It was a simple yet profound gathering, built on the shared and very human experience of eating together as was practiced in the very early church.

Without hierarchy, we would break bread together, read scripture—usually the Gospel reading from the lectionary for that day—and practice Lectio Divina. It was a truly beautiful time that taught us so much about intentional Christian community. We realized that the Christian faith isn't just about individual practice; it's meant to bring us together, to connect us more deeply with one another, with God, and the good earth we all share.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." These words are the heart of our Eucharistic celebration. Every Sunday, we gather to partake in the bread and wine, believing them to be the body and blood of Christ. This act is central to our faith, a weird and wonderful mystery that binds us to Jesus and to one another. But is this holy act of communion truly complete if it ends at the altar?

To understand this more deeply, let's consider what Jesus is really saying here. He isn't just talking about a spiritual experience isolated from our daily lives. Eating and drinking are profoundly human acts. We need food and drink to survive. In a very real sense, we are all in the process of dying at the end of every meal until we take our next life-sustaining bite. When Jesus invites us to partake in his body and blood, he's meeting us in our most basic human need.

This is the same Jesus who, in today's Gospel, turns to his disciples after many have deserted him and asks, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Peter responds with a profound truth: 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.' In that moment, Peter recognizes that in Jesus, there is more than just physical nourishment—there is the sustenance of our very souls. Jesus is not just meeting our immediate needs; he is offering us the fullness of life, both now and eternally. When we come to the Eucharistic table, we are not just feeding our bodies but are also receiving the words of life that sustain our spirits.

Now think about what happens at a meal. It's more than just nourishment—it's an opportunity for connection. Around the table, we gather as equals, sharing stories, laughter, and sometimes tears. The table is a great leveler, where distinctions of rank, wealth,

or status fall away. Everyone needs to eat. Jesus understood this well. He often ate with people the world labeled as sinners and those polite society had cast aside. For Jesus, a meal was an opportunity to embody the kingdom of God—a place where all are welcome, where the last are first, and where everyone has a seat at the table.

This kind of welcome found at the table with the Lord ties back to our reading from the first book of Kings. When Solomon dedicates the temple, he prays not just for the Israelites but for the foreigner who comes from a distant land. He asks that God would hear their prayers too, so that all the peoples of the earth might know God's name and fear Him. This vision of inclusivity at the temple is a reflection of what Jesus shows us at the table—a place where all are invited to encounter God and their neighbor.

The table of the Eucharist, then, is not just about receiving Jesus in a mystical sense; it's about being formed into a community that reflects the radical hospitality of God. It's about becoming a people who, in the words of the Psalmist, "long for the courts of the Lord," where even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest. The Eucharist invites us into a communal life that mirrors this divine hospitality, inviting us to dine with God and neighbor where the cosmic kindness in Christ is shared and not hoarded.

But here's the thing: that community doesn't end at the altar. If our worship stops at the conclusion of the service, if the holy moment of communion doesn't extend into our interactions with one another and every neighbor, then we've missed something essential.

I would offer this is why we all mosey down to the parish hall for coffee hour immediately following the services.

Coffee hour, or the time of fellowship that follows our service, is not just a casual add-on. It's not just a time to chat about the weather or catch up on the week's events. It's a continuation of the Eucharistic table. It's a time when we practice what we've just proclaimed: that we are one body in Christ, called to love and serve one another.

This idea is reinforced in our reading from Ephesians, where Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God. This armor isn't just for personal defense; it equips us to build up the body of Christ. We are called to stand together, pray together, and, yes, eat together. The peace we share before the Eucharist is a powerful reminder of this. It's not just a polite gesture; it's a moment where we prepare ourselves to engage together in the sacred meal. It's an invitation to come to the table, not as isolated individuals, but as a community ready to embrace one another and the presence of Christ among us and to carry his presence into a hurting and hungry world.

So, how do we make coffee hour holy? First, we approach it with the same reverence we bring to the Eucharist. We recognize that in the breaking of bread, in the sharing of coffee, in the laughter and conversation, Christ is present. We intentionally seek out those who might feel on the margins—the newcomer, the person sitting alone, the one who seems burdened. We extend the invitation to join us, not just at the coffee table but in our lives.

Holy Eucharist is not holy unless coffee hour is holy too. The practice of the Christian faith is not one of merely private devotion, but one in which we grow into a community that invites the whole world to Christ's table. Just as the Eucharist draws us into the mystery of Christ's body and blood, so too does coffee hour draw us into the mystery of Christ's body—the Church—and it prepares us for our daily work and vocation outside these walls.

If you eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day, you have 21 opportunities to join someone at table with the Lord. Let us leave this place today with a renewed commitment to make every table we gather around a reflection of the Eucharistic table. Whether in the parish hall, in our homes, in our jobs, or in the wider community, may we always remember that we are called to be a people of radical hospitality, where all are welcome, where every table can be made sacred, where all are fed, and where Christ is known in the breaking of bread—and in the sharing of a cup of coffee. Amen.