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Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Place: Kingscliff/ Tweed Heads am/pm

Title: Making sure we don't forget

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The story is told of a little girl who was watching her mum prepare Sunday lunch. She noticed that her mum cut each end of the pork before putting it in the roasting tray. So she asked 'why?' Her mum explained that she did that because it allowed all the juices to enter the pork and so flavour it and also because that was the way her mum had roasted her pork.

So the little girl goes off and asks her grandmother why both ends of the pork were cut off before roasting. Sure enough she got the same answer but her grandmother added that she should ask her Nana because that is what she did. So the little girl phones her Nana and explained that both mum, and granny had said that they cut off both ends of the ham to allow the juices etc and that was the way she had taught them to roast a ham.

Her Nana started to laugh and said – "I cut both ends off the ham because my roasting tray was too small." You know there are times we do things for the wrong reasons because no one has ever stopped to ask 'Why?' There are also times when we continue to do things for a long period of time based on nothing more than ignorance. Today we are going to stop and ask why the Lord's Supper?

1. A celebration.

And we are going to concentrate on Paul's explanation of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. But before we do that, we have to understand that when Jesus instigated the Lord's Supper he did it in the context of another meal, the Passover meal.

The Passover if you remember started when the people of Israel, when God's special people were in slavery in Egypt. These people were terribly oppressed, these people had lost their land, their rights, their dignity. But these people were sent a leader, Moses and he declared that God would rescue his people out of the hands of the Egyptians, in fact that they would go to their own land and on the way out of slavery they would plunder the riches of the Egyptians.

To show them that he meant business, he sent the Egyptians the 9 plagues. And then on the evening of the tenth plague, the plague when the angel of death was going to kill the first born sons of all the Egyptians, the Jews met together for the Passover meal to celebrate the fact that the angel of death was going to Passover their houses. And that soon God himself would lead them out of Egypt. The Passover feast then was a feast of celebration as it pointed to the time that God saved his people in a wonderful, in a miraculous way. Out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, into the Promised Land.

This weak, poor, suffering people who were not strong enough to help themselves were

saved by the strength of God's mighty hand. So they met together each year to celebrate that great act of salvation gifted to them by God.

Now it is interesting that the Jews still celebrate the Passover festival. Of course they use the Hebrew name Yom Kippur. And I was reading in the paper recently about Yom Kippur has now turned into a fundraising bonanza. For Sydney's synagogues recently started selling reserve seating for the services, offering packages for up to \$200 a person.

Can you imagine that, paying for your seat at Church in the same way that you pay for a movie ticket or for a concert? But paying for a seat to remember God's gracious saving acts. Paying to remember when God freely saved his people. Paying for a seat to remember that God had delivered the poor, the downtrodden, the unworthy through his grace. Jesus used the celebration of Yom Kippur, or Passover to encourage his disciples to celebrate the fact that God had saved them!

That is why he took the bread and gave thanks and broke it. That is why he took the cup and after giving thanks he made a pronouncement over it. That is why Jesus was so eager to eat this feast with his disciples. He loved to celebrate God's gift of salvation and he wanted to instil the same spirit into his disciples. And if the act of God bringing the Israelites out of Egypt had been great, how much greater was God's forgiveness of our sins. How much greater is it that God would adopt his followers as his sons and daughters. How much greater is it that God would lead us to our Promised Land kept for us in heaven? How much more have we to celebrate as Christians?

But I want you to notice one thing about the celebration of the Passover and the Lord's Supper, and that is that when it was instituted it was a celebration about something that would happen in the future. For when the Israelites ate the Passover had they been saved? Had they been rescued out of Egypt? Well yes and no. No they were still in Egypt, but yes God had given them his word that they would be rescued. So it was an act of faith in God to celebrate something that had not yet taken place.

Similarly when we sit down for the Lord's Supper have we been saved? Well yes and no? No, we are still sinful people who are yet to enjoy the full benefits of our salvation, but yes God has promised that once we give our lives to Jesus we are saved. Once we ask for forgiveness, our sins have been forgiven. So when we come to the Lord's Supper our celebration is also an act of faith. For we have to trust God at his word. By faith we grasp again the promises of God.

I love the story of the private who ran after and caught the runaway horse of Alexander the Great. When he brought the animal back to the general, Alexander thanked him by saying, "Thank you captain."

With one word the private was promoted. And when the general said it, the private believed it. He went to the quartermaster, selected a new uniform and put it on. He went to the officer's quarters and selected a bunk. He went to the officer's mess and had a meal.

Because the general said it, he believed it. But I wonder, do we do the same thing with God?

When he says you are forgiven, do you unload your guilt? When he says you are valuable do you agree? When he says he has given us gifts and abilities, do you go out and use them? When he says he will provide for your future, do you stop worrying? And when he reminds us to celebrate his son's death for you, do you actually celebrate?

The first thing we do, when we come together for the Lord's Supper is to celebrate what God has done for us through Jesus death on the Cross. Unfortunately the Lord's supper has often been a sombre, solemn affair. But lets not forget it should also be a celebration!

Do you know that near the end of his life, the great emperor Napoleon was talking to a historian. The historian said, "What was the happiest day of your life? Was it the day of your victory at Lodi? Was it the day you entered Vienna? Was it the day you marched through Berlin in triumph? Or was it the day you were crowned emperor?"

Napoleon said, "It was none of these things. The happiest day in all my life was the day of my first communion. I felt so close to God. I'd do anything to get that feeling back again!" When we take the Lord's Supper we need to celebrate. God has offered his salvation to us and when we can respond by accepting it, which means God is near.

2. A Memorial

But what we do this day is more than just a celebration, it is also a memorial. We remember Jesus body broken for us, we remember his blood shed for our sins. So in the same way that Anzac Day makes us remember the supreme sacrifice that many diggers laid down their life so we could live, so at the Lord's Supper we remember the Supreme sacrifice that God's one and only son left heaven and came to earth to seek and to save the lost. He came to die so that we might live. As he said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though they die."

And in the same way that we remember lost loved ones by going and seeing a grave stone, or by going to a place where their ashes have been cast, so the bread and the wine are physical elements that point us back to the life of Jesus. The bread symbolises his body, hanging on that cross. He was willing to die in your place. He was willing to go to the Cross, the most painful of all deaths, so that we might have a chance to miss out on hell, that most painful of all places to be in after death. And the wine symbolises his blood. For an OT principle is that where there was sin, there needed to be blood, their needed to be death for the payment of that sin. So instead of our own blood flowing for our sins, God's son's blood flowed where our blood should have been.

And in the same way that we all keep photographs to remember occasions in the past, a wedding, a birth, a holiday, so the Lord's Supper is a snapshot of time we can't afford to forget. So as we regularly meet together for the Lord's Supper it is like going through an old photo album, reminding ourselves that we are who we are because of our history, our

heritage. And because of what Jesus did for us when he was here on earth. The Lord's Supper then is a celebration, but it is also a memorial and it is also a time for

3. The family

Because when we look closely at the symbolism involved in the Lord's Supper we see that we all eat one loaf, we all drink the same wine, we all take part in the same ceremony. The Lord's supper then points to our one-ness. We are the one body, the body of Christ. We are all in exactly the same position before God. For we all have sinned and we all need God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's new start.

So we come together as one in order to take the Lord's Supper. In the apostle Paul's time people were coming together and were being openly divisive. Some were following Paul, others Apollos, others Peter, others Christ. In the chapter we read in 1 Cor 11 we read that some came to the Lord's Supper with lots of food and then proceeded to eat and drink in front of others who couldn't afford much food at all. The time when the body of Christ should be showing unity, there was disunity.

The Lord's supper then reminds us not only about what God has done for us, but it reminds us of our need for one another. It must then affect our commitment to one another. For we are a family. Sure families have their problems, families go through both good and bad times, but families all have a common heritage that should keep them together. And we have a common faith, a common Lord, a common baptism, a common Spirit from God, a common Father.

That is why the Lord's Supper isn't something we can't do on our own like prayer or Bible study, it must be done together. Many people say today you can believe in God and not go to Church. But you can't believe in God and then seek to break the unity of the Body of Christ. You must meet together, you must be involved with your fellow Christians, and if you don't have that love for the Church, if you don't have a desire for fellowship, if you don't want to come and hear God's word and serve your fellow Christians then you will not be growing in your faith. The Lord's supper reminds us that we need each other. And that we need to be here at Church not just once a quarter, not just once a week, but as much as possible.

A celebration, a memorial, a family and lastly a test of faith. **4. A test of faith**

Because when we look at 11th chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we see that the Lord's Supper is a dangerous exercise. It is dangerous because depending upon how we conduct ourselves depends upon whether this is a means of grace, or a means of judgement. Have you ever thought about that? That the Lord's Supper can do you more harm than good? Well it can!

Because Paul says in v.27 "whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." What could be an unworthy manner? Well Paul gives us a few hints to start with. We are

unworthy, if we don't examine ourselves. If we just come into Church and fail to repent of our sins, fail to want to change, if we are blind to what we have done wrong. As someone once said, "the unobserved life is not worth living". So have we failed to examine ourselves this day?

Paul says we are unworthy, if we come to this place selfishly. The Corinthians were coming only to satisfy themselves, they didn't care about others. If you are only in Church this day for what you are going to get then you are approaching God in an unworthy manner. You should be here to give - to give to God the praise He deserves, and to give yourself to one another so that their faith may grow.

Paul says we are unworthy if we are being divisive. If we divide into little groups, if we have a grudge against another, if we are nursing hatred concerning someone else. We are unworthy if we fail to recognise the body and blood of the Lord. If we fail to realise we are actually in God's presence now. And that he can see not only our outward actions, but our inmost thoughts.

But it is also true that we are unworthy, if we are here this day, to keep our name on a Church roll, that we turn up once in a while just to keep us in good standing with the Church, or if we are here just to catch up with old friends, or because we feel we have to be here, or if we are here with no intention of listening to God speak to us today. How we come is important.

A while back I read in the paper a report of a group of 75 people who went to St Patrick's Catholic Cathedral for mass on a Sunday. Each of them came with a rainbow - coloured sash which was there to show they supported the gay and lesbian cause. They were refused and were very angry. One said "to deny someone communion is a terrible thing." I don't think they have read the apostle Paul. For he says that it is a terrible thing to come to communion divisive, with an unexamined life, to make a protest.

Paul says that when we come to the Lord's Supper we are participating in Christ. This is a great privilege and we should never take it lightly. The story is told of the famous Scottish theologian John Duncan, of New College in Edinburgh. At the Lord's Supper one Sunday when the elements came to a 16 year old girl she suddenly turned her head aside. She motioned for the elder to take the cup away, that she couldn't drink it. John Duncan reached his long arm over, touched her shoulder and said tenderly, "Take it lassie, its for sinner."

That's the key in the end. If we recognise that we are sinners, If we know we need God's grace then we will remember what Christ has done, we will not take it unworthily, we will eat and drink as part of the body of Christ and we will do it with a celebratory heart.

