

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

2/7/10 "The Holy Communion, the Essence of the Gospel" Luke 14:15-24

In his entire ministry, Jesus emphasized sharing a meal as an important symbol of the love of God. Holy Communion is an enactment of that truth.

The "Parable of the Great Banquet" which was read earlier illustrates this point.

A person prepares a dinner party and sends out his servant to invite friends to attend. But they make excuses for not being able to attend. So the host sends his servant to bring anyone he can find off the streets.

We can imagine how crazy the situation would have been. If anyone had been brought in off the street, there undoubtedly would have been people of different sexes, classes, ranks, and ethnic groups.

Anyone could have been sitting next to anyone else: female next to male, free next to slave, socially high next to socially low, ritually pure next to ritually impure.

A Pharisee sitting next to a tax collector, a scribe sitting next to a prostitute, a rich young ruler sitting next to a woman with leprosy.

That would have been a social nightmare. However, Jesus is saying that this social nightmare is exactly the way God wants us to live.

In contemporary terms, Jesus provides a table at which the CEO of a large company sits next to a homeless person, a Christian sits next to a Jew, a Jew sits next to a Muslim.

They are sharing a meal together, passing bread and wine, conversing amiably. It is the open table with Jesus as its host.

The table of Jesus symbolizes oneness and equality under the fatherhood of God.

As we celebrate Holy Communion, let us be reminded that we are at the Lord's Table with Jesus as our host.

The person who is kneeling next to you is your brother and sister in Christ. Every partaker is infinitely precious in God's sight apart from status, rank, class, or occupation.

As Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, "In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, men nor women. We are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is this affirmation that is enacted in Holy Communion. Holy Communion is the essence of the Gospel.

Many years ago, a student of mine was working as a part time security guard for the large corporation named Nissho Iwai.

One Sunday morning, the young man walked in a near by church for curiosity's sake. An usher welcomed him graciously, led him to a pew, helped him open the hymnal, and gave his own Bible to read.

The young man was surprised to recognize the usher. The usher was Masaru Hayami, president of the company the young man was working for.

Later the young man wrote in his essay, "At that moment, I said to myself, 'This is Christianity.'"

We are invited to the community of the faithful where everyone is important to everyone else. We are invited to the religious community centered on the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

It is this affirmation enacted in Holy Communion that braces us for the living of these days.

Thanks be to God.