

Insiders / Outsiders at the Lord's Supper

Marie here: Ed's health is improving, but there's still a way to go. Headache is gone, nausea gone. Double vision persists (ergo computer incompetence), and weakness.

He suggests we send to you Brian Heinrich's "Street Ministry" newsletter we just received. Brian's been on these pages before – Ed's TA from Seminex days, Canadian Lutheran, street priest for Lutheran Urban Mission Society (LUMS) in Vancouver BC. His topic here is the regular Saturday gathering for Holy Communion and for a meal hosted by different congregations in the area and served to all who come from the streets where Brian has been all week. Years ago we both were there making the rounds together with Brian. It's straight out of the New Testament. And so is he. But he reminds us as you read on that that's true about all of us who follow Christ.

Ed's been debating whether to offer something for this American election weekend that would speak to the chaos in our country and elsewhere in the world – at least some of which is occasioned by our country. But that's such an apocalypse. His alternate notion was to draw attention to that Amish community (Lancaster PA) who sure look like Jesus in their forgiving response to the murderer who butchered their children. He says "I know as a goldie-oldie Lutheran I shouldn't be siding with the Amish. But here they may be more Lutheran than some of the rest of us are. They have no scheme for making our country into a Christian nation, or the world into a Utopia of peace and justice, prosperity and democracy. Luther, too, was against such ideological madness (megomania) for saving the world. The world's salvation is only in the theology of the crucified

Messiah who brings peace on earth in those places where the people trust it (those Amish folks) and in places like Brian's Vancouver – and, we hope, in your midst as well. Not in Bush's vision or yours or mine, or Constantine's, or Mao Tse Tung's, about heaven on earth. That's why Luther always expected Christ's return at any moment, for in 16th-century Europe, too, the Constantinian Christ was the model for the rulers. And the real Christ is clean contrary to that one. Luther knew that.

"Christ's kingdom is always local, where his Gospel is trusted. As soon as you want to globalize it without the Gospel itself as the agent to make it happen, you have to invoke an 'other' gospel. All the megalomaniac schemes in world history have had to use some other gospel. And they all end in apocalypse now. For Hitler's Germany, for Stalin's USSR, for the American empire extended into the Middle East."

Now listen to Brian. He's talking about the one and only Gospel there really is.

Peace & Joy!

Ed and Marie

Street Ministry

We have never taken a money offering at the LUMS eucharists we have celebrated over the years. And frankly I'm surprised that, especially during our more recent bouts of financial aridity, none of the LUMS board members has succumbed to the pressure & suggested to me that we reverse that early-established tradition.

Perhaps initially it was because we considered it ridiculous to ask money of the urban poor we were serving & insensitive to

solicit those who already were so generously giving by coming to participate in serving the banquet. But as the years have progressed it has become clearer that the offering we bring to our worship is ourselves, making other offerings derivative & redundant.

The distinguishing borders between worship & service have become blurred among us. Our physical service has become worship, acts of devotion. Not surprising, I suppose, considering the Matthean scripture (25:31ff) that undergirds our mission. When serving the hungry, ill clad, unwell, displaced, vulnerable & disenfranchised we expect (Luke 12:35-40) to meet our incarnate Lord as really as Mary in the garden (John 20:11ff) or Peter on the sea shore (John 21).

Occasionally in our community the group coming to help us host the meal doesn't understand this profound connection between our worship in the eucharist & the subsequent animated mission that ensues. Fortunately not frequently, the majority of the serving group might not choose to come into the chapel for worship, remaining aside in the gym. Or sadly, thankfully rarely, the group might come to chapel but due to theological imperatives remain en bloc in the pews & not join us around the altar for eucharist. Our worshipping community is diminished by these occasions. It kind of knocks the breathe out of you. There is a failure to recognize (1 Corinthians 11:17ff (esp. vs.28f)) that the meal service is an extension of the worship & the Christ encountered in the eucharist is the same Christ incarnate in His vulnerable siblings. The two are inseparably intertwined & indistinguishable.

Recently a group served a meal of a Saturday morning. While waiting on tables I overheard one of the guests complain about the food (quite exceptional, as we usually get rave reviews in the 'hood – our meals have a good reputation), (specifically,

too meager meat in the pasta) initially I was burned that he should be so ungrateful ('twas his second helping!). Fortunately I didn't do further damage by engaging. I only thought it in my mind. But later in reflection, I thought I should have said, "I am sorry you are disappointed, brother, we try to do our best. I will pass on your concern to our cooks. Hopefully your next experience will compensate." That would have been the appropriate response to an honoured guest's disappointment.

The story doesn't end here. That same morning, one of our regular volunteers overheard one of the hosting servers say as food was dispensed, "this food looks good, almost good enough for us." Later the volunteer mentioned the troubling comment to me. I pointed out that we both had sat down toward the end of the meal with the last stragglers-in & had eaten of the "almost good enough."

Tellingly, not incidentally, this host group resists participating in Communion. There is a failure, in Pauline language, to discern the Body (1 Corinthians 11:28ff). The Body is consubstantially Christ's Body & the living organic community, in all its woundedness & even unattractiveness, a motley crew & the shared gifts of bread & wine, very Body & Blood! They are inextricably intertwined & enmeshed. To sever Christ from His Lifegiving sacrament is not possible, His Body, His Blood. Likewise Christ affirms He is to be found in the needy poor; service to the poor sibling is "you did it to Me."

In the scripture we listened to at Liturgy that morning (1 Corinthians 4:6-15) St. Paul used a number of telling adjectives; "left outside," "the last," "foolish," "weak," "nobodies," "hungry, thirsty, illclad, homeless, & abused," "insulted, cursed & slandered," "disposable, scum-of-the-earth" to describe his apostolicity. He was authenticating his apostolic office by these identifiers! Because, if we pay close

heed, we will recognize these are the very marks of The Sent One (that, amazingly, even after the resurrection He bears to identify Himself to us!!!).

Recently I was asked to animate a series of lunch-hour conversations at Christ Church Cathedral, the topic being "Rich & poor together here on Georgia & Burrard streets." In the initial session we talked about rich & global, then the next time poor & local. To my relief when I asked who around the table considered themselves rich, everyone agreed we were privileged. Unlike that past Saturday when folks from the non-communicating group identified themselves as "spiritually poor," to my shock. If we fail to acknowledge our privilege we are of course unable to recognize our own need to own & participate in the wounded body of Christ.

The superscription to our LUMS inclusivity statement is the third article of the creed. That is to say, we understand inclusivity to be an explication of our confession of the gathering activity of the Holy Spirit. Communion is not incidental, but constitutive.

There is a movement afoot in christianity today to usurp the Divine prerogative & expel those prejudged disfavoured. We are heirs of just such an historic expulsion. Reformationtide celebrates our owning the derisive epithet "protestor" much in the same healing way the marginalized homosexual community has owned & redeemed its "queer" slur. Yet there remains an underlying sadness that communion is fractured, the undoing done.

Communion is about trusting God. Communion is allowing God to be God (Matthew 20:1ff (esp. vs.16)); Luke 15:11-32; Matthew 13:24-30/36-43). After all, God is the one who invites us all to participate in His Divine Life. Who are we to exclude those we

don't particularly fancy? That belongs to the Host alone. And as these scriptures consistently warn, it is the excluding who will to their surprise & consternation find themselves left out (Lukel8:11), self-excluded.

The service we render here each Saturday morning is a confession of faith. It says we embrace the Divine Generosity that has apprehended us, & that caught up in that Grace, we cannot help but embrace the wounded Christ as He comes to us in challenging guises. We welcome unreservedly & find ourselves embraced too.

...in the Communion Christ enables among us,
your street priest
pastor brian