

## **Anabaptism at 500: Services of Renewal**

**February 2, 2025**

### **Singing Renewal at the Table of the Lord**

#### **Scripture & Reflection: John 13:1-9, 12-15**

Our first scripture reading from the Gospel of John sets the scene of the meal that Jesus had with his disciples on the night that he was later betrayed. As was explored in our experiencing the story time, the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples was preceded by a surprising act of service performed by Jesus: he washed his disciples' feet.

I want you to imagine with me how that act would have totally transformed the setting of that meal. Jesus took on the role of a servant—a slave—not one whose authority set him over others. Jesus, the master and lord of the disciples, set an example of what true greatness and true love looked like. When we gather here at this table, we are being asked by Jesus to follow his example. The Lord's table, to put it plainly, reminds us of our calling to mutual service and love. As we sing this next song from VT #490, may we renew our commitment to following Jesus through love and mutual service:

Hymns of Preparation:

VT # 490 Jesus took a Towel

#### **Scripture & Reflection: 1 Corinthians 11:23-29**

Paul's instructions to the Corinthians surrounding the communion ritual of remembrance were seen as crucially important to early and later Anabaptists. In particular, Paul's admonition to "examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup" was heard as a call to ensure that relationships within the body of Christ were put right before sharing in the meal. Where unresolved conflict, sin, or injustice were present in the community, the call was to be reconciled to each other first and only then share in the meal (cf. also Matt 5:23-24).

In Paul's context, the problem centered on a lack of charity and love in the community - the sharing at the table was happening unequally and some within the community were being neglected and ignored. Paul cautioned the community that remembering Jesus in the communion ritual cannot be rightly practiced without "discerning" or "recognising" the presence of Jesus in the *whole* body of believers. When we gather here at this table, then, we are being asked by Jesus to seek renewal through seeing each other in our need and in our shared covenant fellowship. The Lord's table, we learn, calls us to habits of self-examination too, where we ask: am I treating my siblings in Christ with charity and love? Here opportunities for both repentance and yielding to God, the themes of our last two Sundays, show up in the communion meal.

Let us observe a moment of silent reflection to examine ourselves and our relationship to one another before we sing VT #773, Ubi caritas et Amor, a song with Latin lyrics that mean: "Where charity and love are found, God is there."

VT # 773 Ubi caritas et Amor

#### **Scripture & Reflection: John 6:27-35**

This passage from John chapter 6 draws us deeper into an altogether different aspect to our time spent around the Lord's table. While our previous two passages emphasized how the Lord's table calls us to mutual service, and self-examination directed towards charity and love in the body of Christ, this passage from John emphasizes the spiritual transformation that comes through trusting in Jesus as our nourishment. At this table, we do not simply hear a call to imitate Jesus by our own strength and power – by our own kind of "spiritual mastery," rather we hear a call to *come to* and *rely on* Jesus as the nourishment and the source of life that will sustain a life in service to God.

Jesus' words, "I am the bread of life" add a new dimension to our eating around this table. When we gather here at this table, we do so to be

nourished in the depths of our souls – here we participate in a mystery – that our Spirit's receive nourishment that no earthly bread can give us.

As we sing this next song from VT #476, Eat this Bread, let us be reminded that our renewal occurs at this table because God bestows *life* upon us – life that cannot be achieved by our own powers.

Hymn Around the Table:  
VT #476 Eat This Bread (Coman de este pan)

### **Scripture & Reflection: Matthew 26:26–30**

#### **Invitation to Communion**

Up to now, our scriptures and songs have helped us think about communion in terms of service, charity and love, and spiritual nourishment. Now, with this passage from Matthew, we are drawn into the dramatic moment around the table when Jesus took the humble elements of bread and wine and associated them with his very body and blood. Jesus knew that his body would be broken and that his blood would be poured out – he could anticipate the confrontation that was coming between his life and the realities of sin and death that would seek to snuff it out through violence and force. And yet, knowing all this, Jesus knew something more – and that is that the realities of sin and death would not have the last word. Jesus knew that his faithful living and faithful dying would bring deliverance from sin and death, ushering in the beginnings of new life for the world - resurrection life – where sins would be forgiven, and renewed covenant community would grow.

While the disciples may not have fully understood this the night they ate this meal with Jesus, they must later, after Jesus' resurrection, have started to look at this meal with new eyes. For in their encounters with the risen Jesus they saw that he had opened a new way for them through death. Each time that they shared the bread and the cup together after that, they would remember not only Jesus' death, then, but also that Jesus was alive among them in their remembering,

renewing them – moving them forward despite their fears about the future.

And so, while Jesus' words about his body and blood can often make us approach this table with a sombre attitude, we do well to remember, too, that when we gather here at this table, we do so with thanksgiving for love that endures and is more powerful than the death dealing forces of our world. As we sing this next song, VT #478, "I come with joy," let us be reminded that our renewal occurs at this table because here we are freed to live as Jesus lived because in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God is making us new. In grateful praise for this, let us sing one more song together before we feast.

Hymn at the Table:  
VT #478 I Come with Joy

#### **Communion (Instrumental Music: VT #476 & #467)**

At this time, I would like to invite our communion servers to come up to the front. In just a moment, Beatrice will begin playing and then I will invite all who wish to participate to come to the table to partake of the bread and the cup. When the bread is served to you, it will be accompanied by the words: The Bread of Life, and when the cup is served to you, it will be accompanied by the words: the Cup of Salvation. These words are reminders to you that in this shared meal you are nourished with the life of God and that you are renewed for the journey ahead together in covenant community.

To make the flow of traffic smooth, I will invite everyone to come up the right isle and exit out the left aisle. If you wish to receive the bread and the cup, you may approach our servers. There will be two sets for the bread and the cup. If you would prefer today to receive a prayer of blessing or if any children would like to receive grapes at the front, I would invite you to come to me.

So, come. Jesus sets the table before us and invites us to come with joy, for here we affirm that we are children of God, loved, and free to live as Jesus lived.

### **Hymn of Response**

VT #581 Jesus, je voudrais te chanter (Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song), verses 1-4