



"From Where I Sit ..."
**"Things I Remember ...
Such as Concerning Communion"**

After 50 years of ministry, when I witness certain programs or events I often have the opportunity to reflect on the differences in the practices that have evolved over the years. Needless to say, much seemingly has changed. And it is difficult for me to ascertain whether these changes have occurred because our current practices are more correct than our former or vice-a-versa.

Let me begin by first saying that I am no expert in the right or wrong way of these practices. All I know is what I learned as a child about our traditions and the logic that appeared to support them.

I will pose just a couple of examples in the area of Communion, one of our two sacraments. In the sacrament of Holy Communion, the tradition of "serving" communion was heavily impressed on me as a young person. In the small, rural church where I grew up, serving communion was more than just making it available to the worshipping attendees. Serving communion meant that, under the auspices of the Pastor in Charge, the communion elements were individually served to each and every person who came to the altar. The attending ministers would ceremonially wash before beginning the ritual and when the time came for the elements to be shared with the worshippers, the ministers would "take" the bread and "place" it in the hand of each worshipper and likewise afterward "take" each cup and "place" it in each hand. The plate with the bread not just capriciously passed to each person for them to reach in and take a piece of bread or a cup from the tray, but with an intended deliberateness, the minister (especially the Pastor), through the actual giving and receiving of the elements, would serve each person and in so doing establish or renew a connection with them as pastor and member or even shepherd and sheep. I remember one elder pastor explaining to us younger preachers that such an act could go a long way in eliminating clergy-lay disharmony in the life of the church because, "It's hard to bite the hand that feeds you!"



Additionally, when the Pastor or attending ministers serve "each" person" by placing the bread or the cup into the waiting hand, it eliminates the opportunity for "well meaning" persons to feel the need to try and assist others in the process. The same is true when serving younger children who often don't fully understand the sacredness of this act. On occasion, as children sometimes do, they may become playful but when "served" by a minister their attitudes are much different. There is a reason why at least a Deacon's ordination is required for assisting in the serving of the communion elements just as there is a reason why an Elder's ordination is required for the consecration of the communion elements. When the sacredness of the consecration of the elements is devalued, then something is taken away from the whole experience.

Lastly, and with all due deference to the role of Stewardesses, I remember that after the elements were arranged and the table prepared, when the elements were consecrated by the Elder only the ordained clergy were permitted to handle the consecrated elements thereafter. Of course, I am a realistic and I understand that many of these changes have occurred because of the implementation of more modern techniques such as the self-serving communion rail. With the use of the self-serving communion rail, instead of actually serving each worshipper, the minister symbolically serves by inviting the worshipper to "serve themselves." It saves time, but lacks

the human connection. It's more efficient, but is it more effective? In a day and time when the presence and the Spirit of the Lord is so greatly needed in our congregations, I wonder if our time-saving efficiencies aren't costing us more than they are saving us.

Let me close by saying that when I pastored churches, I tried to take the middle road by following the traditions of the day and utilizing the features readily available with the self-serving communion rail. But at least twice each year, I would break from the "current" traditions and take whatever time was necessary, to "serve" communion as I thought it was meant to be served by the example given by Jesus, the Christ. I invited (and strongly urged) every mobile person to come to the table and I served each one, one by one, and it was a beautiful experience. Now I can't say what would happen in other congregations, but in every church I pastored, in the midst of what became to be known as these non-traditional communion services, my members and I truly felt a "sweet, sweet spirit" that lasted beyond the benediction and well into the following days.

Yes, I remember communion in a very special way where the traditions and practices of our participation were based on a logical understanding of the ritual and the beliefs of Methodism. However, I could be wrong. But if I am then I would hope that someone would help me to understand and appreciate these new traditions and the logic and scriptural basis upon which they are founded. This is important to me and maybe even to someone else. Or at least that is the way it looks to me ...

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