Mission at and from the Lord's Table: A Eucharistic Foundation for Mission

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"And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord" (Book of Common Prayer 2019, 137). In these words, the post-communion prayer in the Anglican Eucharistic liturgy, believers receive and declare their call to mission. Having given thanks to the Father and feasted at the Lord's Table, believers continue their worship through witness. Eastern Orthodox theologians call this the liturgy after the liturgy.

While mission is an outcome of communion at the Lord's Table, the mission of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) also begins at the Table. With Christ as host, the Eucharist becomes a space where believers may be renewed in the gospel, tasting and seeing that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8). The Table may also be a welcoming space where non-believers not participating in the Eucharist may come and see the gospel. In this article, following a brief discussion on the Passover, Last Supper, and Lord's Supper in the Scriptures and early Christianity, I discuss mission at and from the Lord's Table, which will invigorate mission practice.

Passover, Last Supper, Lord's Supper

From Passover to Last Supper

On the night before his death, the Lord hosted his disciples at a fellowship meal remembered by the Gospel writers as the Last Supper. Since Jesus was in the habit of practicing missional hospitality in the Gospels, this meal was not an innovative act but a crescendo to his earthly ministry. Each of the Synoptic Gospel writers claimed that the Last Supper was a Passover celebration (Mark 14:12; Matt 26:17; Luke 22:7-8). Though some scholars have questioned the timing of the meal (Jesus was arrested and suffered during the Passover, so his Last Supper preceded it), other scholars maintain that the Last Supper was a Passover Feast moved up by a couple of days (Marshall 2006, 57-62; Jeremias 1955, 15-105; Köstenberger 2010, 16).

At the table, Jesus remembered God saving the enslaved Israelites in Egypt who had covered their homes with the blood of an unblemished lamb. This was followed by God's mighty act of delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, particularly through the miraculous Red Sea crossing. At the cross, Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, shed his blood, covering the sins of those who believe and delivering them from the bondage of sin and the Evil One. Marshall notes: "Jesus took the Passover meal and proceeded to give a new significance to it as a meal whose repetition by his followers would enable them to remember him" (Marshall 2006, 143). A symbol of salvation history past and present, Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples becomes the model meal for the Eucharist (Marshall 2006, 16).

Amid the Passover celebration and Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus initiates what would become the Eucharist—a worship celebration forever remembering his saving work through his death, burial, and resurrection. As we trace this development from Last Supper to Lord's Supper, we must emphasize that the original context for the Eucharist was an actual meal in which Jesus was the physical and spiritual host. A saving host, Jesus welcomes betraying sinners like Peter and unbelieving traitors like Judas.

Matthew captures this portion of the meal in this way:

> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matt 26:26-28).

Building on the values of Jewish hospitality and his practice at the miraculous feeding of the crowds (both the 5000 and the 4000), Jesus initiated the Eucharistic portion by giving thanks. Thomas O'Loughlin argues that at the most basic level, the Eucharist celebration is marked by giving thanks *(eucharisteo)* to the Father (O'Loughlin 2015, 2, 28; Marshall 2006, 15).

Continuing his Bread of Life teaching (John 6:25-59) in a rather concrete manner, Jesus takes bread from their feast, breaks it, and declares the bread to be his body. He then invites the gathered Twelve to feast upon it.

After giving thanks again, Jesus takes a cup of wine, welcoming his guests to drink from it. Declaring the wine to be his "blood of the covenant . . . poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins," Jesus interprets his actions at the table with the cup (and his impending work at the cross) to be the fulfillment of the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34).

The Last Supper signified the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and discipleship relationship with the Twelve. Jesus told them directly that he was eager to feast with them before he suffered (Lk 22:15); yet, he asserted: "I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). Though the Last Supper would be the last time Jesus enjoyed table fellowship with his disciples prior to his work at the cross, it would not be the final supper. Jesus' promise meant that he would have ongoing fellowship with his followers once the Kingdom of God had been fulfilled (Marshall 2006, 80-82, 100-101). Jesus points them to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:19) and the expectation that heaven will be marked by intimate fellowship with the Lord (Pennington 2010, 58).

New Testament and Early Christian Teaching on the Eucharist

Paul

Since the Corinthian correspondence was written before the Gospels, Paul's instruction on the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34) is actually the oldest New Testament account. However, Paul is clear that what he is passing on to the Corinthians was what he received from the Lord (1 Cor 11:23). Though Paul may have learned about the Lord's Table tradition from the churches at Antioch, Syria, or Asia Minor, he most likely received it from the Jerusalem church where he had fellowship with the Apostles shortly after his conversion (Gal 1:18; Marshall 2006, 31-32).

In 1 Cor 11:23-25, Paul summarizes this inherited tradition:

> The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

While the Synoptic Gospels show us the historical account of the meal, Paul teaches about the Lord's Supper as an established worship practice. In what Marshall calls a "liturgical account," (Marshall 2006, 36), Paul indicates that Jesus had commanded that the Eucharist become a part of the church's worship and that it be celebrated on a regular basis. Similar to the Last Supper, Paul indicates that the Eucharist was celebrated during a normal meal. The bread and wine were probably consumed at the end (Marshall 2006, 108-111, 145).

Paul teaches on the Eucharist amid a controversy developing within the Corinthian church. The rich were feasting and even getting drunk at the meal while refusing to wait for poorer members of the church to arrive so that the meal and Eucharist could be shared together. Paul confronted the rich for taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, which nullified the worship experience. For Paul, these sinful habits and divisions at the Lord's Table are resolved when believers remember Jesus ("do this . . . in remembrance of me") and "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." As a result, the Lord's Table becomes a place where class and socio-economic divisions are broken down, and where believers—rich and poor alike—welcome one another to fellowship and worship (1 Cor 11:33) (Peeler 2018, 14-23).

Teaching on the Eucharist in the Early Church

The Didache

One of the best examples of early church Eucharistic practice is found in the *Didache,* a Gentile Christian worship manual that was probably developed in Syria (ca. 50-130). The *Didache* is focused on mentoring disciples in the "way of life" over the "way of death." Since teaching on the Eucharist occupies three of the *Didache*'s sixteen chapters (*Did* 9-10, 14), the early Christian community understood the Lord's Supper to be central to worship and discipleship. Like the Corinthians account, the *Didache* reports that the Eucharist occurred during a regular meal. Prophets or other community leaders presided over the celebration. Finally, the *Didache* is the earliest Christian document that shows the Lord's Supper happening on at least a weekly basis (Milavec 2013, 68, 87; O'Loughlin 2010, 85, 100-101).

In chapter 9, the authors offer this pre-Eucharistic prayer:

> First, concerning the cup: we give you thanks, our Father for the holy vine of your servant David which you revealed to us through your servant Jesus.

> To you [is] the glory forever. And concerning the broken [loaf]: We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you revealed to us through your servant Jesus. To you [is] the glory forever. Just as this broken [loaf] was scattered over the hills [as grain] and, have been gathered together, became one; in like fashion may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. Because yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever (*Did* 9.1-4 in Milavec 2003).

In the following chapter, the sacred meal concludes with prayers, thanksgivings, and petitions:

> We give you thanks, Holy Father, for your holy name which you tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge of faith and immortality which you revealed to us through your servant Jesus. To you [is] the glory forever. You, almighty Master, created all things for the sake of your name, both food and drink you have given to people for enjoyment in order that they might give thanks; to us, on the other hand, you have graciously bestowed Spirit-sent food and drink for life forever through your servant [Jesus]. Before all [these] things, we give you thanks because you are powerful [on our behalf]. To you is the glory forever. Remember, Lord, your church, to save [her] from every evil and to perfect [her] in your love and to gather [her] together from the four winds [as] the sanctified into your kingdom which you have prepared for her, because yours if the power and the glory forever. Come, grace [of the kingdom]! And pass away, [Oh] this world! Hosanna to the God of David! If anyone is holy, come! If anyone is not, convert! Come Lord [maran atha]! Amen! (*Did* 10.1-6 in Milavec 2003).

From these prayers and the *Didache*'s presentation of the Eucharist, a number of observations can be made. First, the most resounding theme is that the Eucharist is about giving thanks. Though this should seem obvious since *eucharisteo* means giving thanks, the *Didache* authors still repeat this action five times between the two rather brief prayers. Second, alluding to John 6:25-59 ("I am the Bread of Life"), the *Didache* identifies the loaf as Christ who has been sent by the Father. Third, the bread—a single loaf—represents unity in the body of Christ. Though believers ("grains") may be scattered around the world, they gather as one around the Lord's Table (O'Loughlin 2010, 95-99). Fourth, the Lord's Table is reserved only for baptized believers: "let no one eat or drink from your Eucharist except those baptized in the name of [the] Lord"

(*Did* 9.5). These believers should also come to the table with sins confessed and conflicts with others resolved (*Did* 14.1-2). Finally, though the bread and wine are ordinary elements, in this worship environment they become "Spirit-sent food," nourishing worshippers because of the presence of Christ.

Justin Martyr

During the middle of the second century, philosopher Justin Martyr (d. 165) crafted a defense of the Christian faith in response to claims that Christians were atheists who practiced immorality and cannibalism. While the latter charge may seem ridiculous to the modern reader, second-century Romans had heard that Christians were eating flesh and drinking blood in their worship gatherings. Among the many explanations Justin gave in his *First Apology*, he clarified the meaning of the Eucharist in Christian worship:

> Then bread and a cup of water and mixed wine are brought to the president of the brethren and he, taking them, sends up praise and glory to the Father of the universe through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . . This food we call Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us. For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God's word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus. For the apostles in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, thus handed down what was commanded them: that Jesus, taking bread and having given thanks, said, "Do this for my memorial, this is my body"; and likewise taking the cup and giving thanks he said, "This is my blood"; and gave it to them alone (Justin, *1 Apol* 65-66 in Richardson).

Similar to the *Didache*'s teaching, Justin asserts that the Eucharist is about giving thanks, that it was a regular part of Christian gatherings, and that only baptized Christians were permitted at the Lord's Table. The bread and wine were also more than common food because of the nourishing spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper. Finally, Justin's community based their Eucharist practices on the Gospel accounts about the Last Supper.

Essential Elements of the Eucharist

By the second century the Eucharist was no longer connected to regular fellowship meals though it continued to be a normal part of weekly liturgical assemblies (Marshall 2006, 108-111, 145). Building on these biblical and early Christian writings, we now summarize some essential elements of the Eucharist in the context of Christian worship. Our discussion of the Eucharist will not be exhaustive but will be limited by the focus of this study—God's hospitality in mission.

Gathering, Welcoming, Giving Thanks

Paul begins his teaching about the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:18 with the assuming phrase: "when you come together as a church." There can be no Lord's Supper—no communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—unless there is a physical gathering of believers. Believers gather for the liturgy *(leitorgia)*, literally the *work* of worshipping God. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann insists that an organic unity exists between the church, the physical assembly of believers, and the Eucharist (Schmemann 2003, 11-16).

When the church gathers for the Eucharist, a spirit of welcome and hospitality prevails. During the first three centuries of the church in the Roman Empire, most Christian communities met in homes for worship. Over time, these spaces were modified to accommodate baptisms and other worship practices and became known as church houses *(domus ecclesiae)* (Gehring 2004, 18-19). The welcoming space of a private home contributed to the hospitable nature of the Eucharist.

In a number of liturgical traditions (i.e., Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican) when the priest enters the worship space at the beginning of worship, a mutual welcome is shared between the priest and congregation. The eastern church father John Chrysostom (349-407) declared to his congregation: "the church is a house common to us all, and you are awaiting us as we enter . . . That is why immediately afterward we greet you by giving the peace" (in Schmemann 2003, 15). While the minister and congregation welcome one another, Christ welcomes his body to worship and to enter into the sweet fellowship already in progress between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the Eucharist, the church assembles to give thanks to the Father. Following the model of Christ who gave thanks before feeding the multitudes and before breaking the bread and sharing the cup at the Last Supper, we join with the early Christian

communities captured in the *Didache* who gave thanks to the Father. While the symbols of bread and wine focus on the saving work of Christ, the broader Eucharist is about giving thanks (Marshall 2006, 15; O'Loughlin 2015, 2, 28-30).

The Bread

During the Lord's Supper, actual bread is broken and consumed to commemorate the body of Christ on the cross. His body was broken to pay for the sins of the whole world (Jipp 2017, 87). As part of his bread of life discourse (John 6:25-59), Jesus teaches that his broken body will be a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (Jn 6:40, 51). In Eucharistic liturgies across traditions, after breaking the bread and before distributing it to worshippers, the minister will repeat John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world" (BCP 2019, 136).

In addition to remembering the sacrifice of Christ, the broken bread at the Lord's Table spiritually nourishes worshippers. In John 6, Jesus reminds his hearers that unlike the manna in the wilderness that only temporarily satisfied the hunger of the Israelites who eventually died, his flesh provides sustaining spiritual food: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty . . . So the one who feeds on me will live because of me" (Jn 6:35, 57). Before distributing the bread, Anglican ministers declare: "The gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you and *feed on him in your hearts by faith*, with thanksgiving" (emphasis mine, BCP 2019, 136).

This hunger for spiritual nourishment from Christ the Bread of Life also provides a context for the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "give us today our daily bread" (Matt 6:11; Lk 11:3). Though this petition certainly relates to having our daily material needs met, it is first a prayer for the Bread of Life to satisfy our spiritual longings with His presence. Connecting the Lord's Prayer, the bread at the Eucharist, and Christ's nourishing presence, Wesley Hill writes: "In the Eucharist, Jesus puts himself in our hands so we know exactly where to find him" (Hill 2019, 55; also Jipp 2017, 86-92).

The bread at the Lord's Table also reminds us that the people of God are one body. While the *Didache* authors imagined scattered grains gathered from around the world

and baked into one loaf, Bradley Nassif adds that it is "the bread [that] creates the body" (Nassif 2018, 99). Since Christ is whole and undivided and has unity with His body, the body of Christ—the church—should also be united (Campbell 2012, 271).

The Wine

Jesus' first recorded miracle in the Gospels occurred at a wedding where he famously turned water into good wine (John 2:1-12). Aside from prolonging this wedding party for a grateful host, his miracle offered a taste of God's glory when Christ would be glorified at the cross (Jipp 2017, 87).

Jesus also taught that there was life in his blood: "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them" (John 6:53-56). Reflecting on life in Christ's blood, David Fagerberg contends, "In Christ, life was returned as sacrament and communion to a material creation that Adam's sin had rendered lifeless" (Fagerberg 2012, 86).

As shown, when Christ takes the cup and declares that the wine is his blood poured out for the sins of many, he is inaugurating a New Covenant (Exod 24:8; Jer 31:31-34; Marshall 2006, 91-93). At the table when the minister says, "The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation," believers are reminded that they have new life because of Christ's blood, which cleanses them from all sin. This is further captured in the "Prayer of Humble Access," prayed just before taking the bread and wine: "Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to east of the flesh and your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen" (BCP 2019, 135).

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Worship at the Lord's Table is an act of remembrance. Through bread and wine, believers remember salvation history and God's faithfulness to his people—in the garden where God covered Adam and Eve's shame through animal skins from a sacrifice; the Passover meal where blood covered the homes of the faithful; the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness; the high priest's annual sacrifice of an

unblemished lamb for the nation of Israel; and Christ the Bread of Life whose body was broken and blood poured out. Given by Jesus as a required worship practice, the Lord's Supper is foundational to Christian memory (O'Loughlin 2015, 17-21).

The Eucharist is also eschatological. At the table, believers look forward in hope to the Messianic Banquet (Is 25:6-9; Rev 19:7-9) and eternal fellowship with the Lord. Todd Billings writes: "The Lord's Supper, as a foretaste of the wedding banquet of the lamb and his bride, gives us a taste of God's new world" (Billings 2018, 12). Worship at the Lord's Table offers an authentic future hope, allowing believers to persevere as the people of God and to participate in the mission of God in a fallen world (Billings 2018, 179).

An Exclusive Gathering

As the *Didache* and Justin Martyr's *First Apology* indicate, participation in the Lord's Supper was limited to baptized Christians. By the fourth century, though the non-baptized could take part in most parts of a worship gathering, they were dismissed before the Eucharist and not allowed to participate or even look upon the Eucharistic offerings, also called the sacred mysteries.

Explaining the value of a closed communion table, Amos Yong writes: "the Eucharist meal reenacts the consummatory act of bonding between the bridegroom, who is Christ, and the bride, who is the church of Christ. When understood this way, there is a sacredness, privacy, and intimacy around the Eucharist that clearly demarcates where 'insiders' belong and where 'outsiders' remain" (Yong 2008, 135).

Though Schmemann affirms that the Eucharist should be limited to believers, he argues that this separation prepares believers to engage the world with the gospel. The end of the Eucharist is mission:

> If "assembling as the church" presupposes separation from the world . . . this exodus from the world is accomplished in the name of the world, for the sake of its salvation . . . We separate ourselves from the world in order to bring it, in order to lift it up to the kingdom, to make it once again the way to God and participation in his eternal kingdom . . . For this [the church] was left in the world, as part of it, as a symbol of its salvation. And this symbol we fulfil, we "make real" in the Eucharist (Schmemann 2003, 52).

Jesus as Host

During Jesus' meal encounters recorded in the Gospels, at times he was a guest who became the spiritual host because of his ministry. At other times—during the feeding of the 5000 and 4000, and at the Last Supper—he was both the physical and spiritual host (Jipp 2017, 27). While on the road to Emmaus, the resurrected Lord met Cleopas and his companion and "he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Lk 24:27). However, the men did not grasp the meaning of Jesus' words until he "took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them." Luke adds, "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Lk 24:30-31) (Levering 2018, 159).

In the Eucharist, the ascended Lord becomes the spiritual host at the table. Billings writes, "the King of the kingdom invites us as host to a banquet . . . Christ takes the bread and cup, gives thanks and shares them as one who displays the self-offering love of the triune God" (Billings 2018, 138). Cherith Fee-Nordling adds that the ascended Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father, offers the hospitality of a priest-king (Fee-Nordling 2018, 91).

Though the risen and ascended Christ is unseen by believers on earth, the Lord ministers through his real presence (Marshall 1978, 898; Levering 2018, 161). The Lord's Table becomes an authentic and regular meeting place for the baptized believer and the Lord (O'Loughlin 2015, 39). Although God is omnipresent, God meets us at the table. Faberberg notes, "The presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper is distinct . . . here God is present-for-us uniquely" (Fagerberg 2012, 49). Faberberg adds that spiritual nourishment happens because "the heavenly Christ is present in love to manifest the kingdom to his church" (Fagerberg 2012, 207-208). In addition to this loving presence, John Calvin wrote that "Christ is the only food for our soul . . . our Heavenly Father invites us to Christ . . . that we may repeatedly gather strength" (Calvin Institutes IV.17.1 in Billings 2018, 26). In short, when we encounter the ascended Lord at his table as redeemed believing guests, the Lord Jesus is both "the host and the meal" (Gavrilyuk 2018, 176).

The Eucharist as Mission

Proclaiming the Gospel

In the context of the gathered church community and with Christ presiding as host, the mission of God is accomplished at the Lord's Table. The Eucharist is mission because the Gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ—is preached. Paul's

admonition to the Corinthians was "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *proclaim* the Lord's death until he comes" (emphasis mine, 1 Cor 11:26; McGowan 2014, 33; Marshall 2006, 148). Since Jesus' blood is "poured out for *many* for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28), it is a call for all peoples to believe (Marshall 2006, 149). In the sermon that accompanies the Eucharistic liturgy, Fagerberg urges that it "should not be a sermon about the gospel, but a preaching of the gospel" (Fagerberg 2012, 195; Schemann 2003, 77). While the preacher proclaims the good news, the public reading of Scripture in the liturgy also announces the gospel.

A Dramatic Retelling of the Gospel

Anchored by the material forms of bread and wine, the Lord's Supper is missional because it dramatically and visually retells the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Following Calvin, Todd Billings argues that the Lord's Supper is an "'icon' of the gospel" (Billings 2018, 18). While the Eucharist calls to mind the complete story of salvation history, it particularly focuses on Christ's saving work at the cross. O'Loughlin asserts: "the Eucharist becomes some sort of revival of the past, a re-enactment . . . which ironically claims to be the most historical of moments: the moment of the Last Supper or the 'un-repeatable' moment of the cross" (O'Loughlin 2015, 17).

When the gospel is narrated visually through the Eucharist, it naturally brings to mind and exposes sin. Schmemann asserts that "every word [and] every action of the Eucharist exposes precisely this normalization of sin" (Schmemman 2003, 186). Because one of the roots of sin and the fall is failing to be grateful—not giving thanks—Schmemann adds, "the church convicts sin through her *thanksgiving*" (Schmemman 2003, 187).

Evangelism at the Table

We have argued that only baptized believers should be invited to participate in the Lord's Supper. That said, historically, during the Eucharist, prayers have been prayed for newly baptized believers and also for catechumens—those seeking baptism (Schmemman 2003, 87).

During the post-Eucharist prayer in the *Didache*, the church leaders petitioned: "If anyone is holy, come! If anyone is not, convert!" (*Did* 10.6). Throughout the history of the church, believers celebrating at the Lord's Table have also been thinking about non-believers—those not yet at the table. Offering perhaps the strongest admonition for a missional Eucharist, Orthodox priest Edward Rommen argues: "the liturgy and the

Eucharist are being celebrated not only for the benefit of the faithful but as a bridge to the non-believing world" (Rommen 2016, 76).

What does evangelism at the Lord's Table look like? Amos Yong points to the model of eighteenth-century Anglican evangelist John Wesley who viewed the Lord's Supper as a "converting ordinance" (Yong 2008, 136). Deliberately including a Eucharist service during his preaching campaigns around England, Wesley allowed non-believers access to the table in hopes that they would encounter Christ and believe the gospel. Because of this legacy, some Wesleyan churches maintain an open communion table for visitors and seekers. Building on Wesley's strategy, Yong suggests that in contexts of interfaith engagement that "the 'open table' be a bridge through which Christians can practice a form of liturgical hospitality in their encounters with those of other faiths" (Yong 2008, 136).

Another possibility is to keep the Eucharist reserved for baptized believers but to invite non-believers to "come and see" the Lord's Supper and observe believers worshipping at the Lord's Table. Rommen argues: "The . . . invitation is . . . given by Christ himself who, when lifted up, draws all people to himself . . . Jesus is referring to his being lifted up on the cross, and that is exactly what is being actualized during the Eucharist" (Rommen 2013, 49; also Rommen 2016, 77).

In addition to non-believers seeing the Eucharist, Christians (ministers and lay people alike) ought to take time to explain what is happening at the table both during and after the service. In my own journey of friendships with Muslims, I have enjoyed taking them to church to observe baptisms and the Lord's Supper. We simply sat on the back row where I quietly narrated the meaning of all that was going on, allowing these worship forms to powerfully witness. I have also observed church leaders pause to explain the meaning of the Lord's Table and invite non-believers to put their faith in Christ at the conclusion of the Eucharist. Finally, others suggest that space be made within the liturgy to pray for those seeking truth that they would believe the gospel (Jipp 2017, 95; Billings 2018, 159).

Peacemaking and Reconciliation

Often, very diverse people gather for worship at the Lord's Table—people from different ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds who may not share an affinity or natural connection (Pohl 1999, 157). Sometimes members of a culturally dominant or oppressive group occupy the same worship space with their oppressed

counterparts. In some international cities, believers from warring nations might also meet at the Lord's Table.

In the Eucharist, we have the opportunity to pursue a vital aspect of mission—peacemaking and reconciliation. In the earliest versions of the Eucharistic liturgy, worshippers greeted one another with a kiss of peace. In modern worship we offer a verbal word of peace and declare our unity in Christ. Such expressions of peace, which prayerfully translate to peaceful and reconciled living in society, are only possible because of God's love. Christian believers have a model for unity and self-giving love in the godhead—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Schmemann 2003, 140). When we encounter this trinitarian love in worship, we begin to love others. We love others because God has first loved us and reconciled himself to us. Schmemann writes: "Christianity is not only the commandment but the *revelation* and *gift* of love . . . God himself who is love—manifested and granted to human beings" (Schmemann 2003, 136). He adds: "Is this not the joy of communion, that I receive this love of Christ from the 'stranger' standing across from me, and he from me?" (Schmemann 2003, 139).

In Ephesians 2:13-16, Paul taught that the sacrifice of Christ as the cross removed barriers between Jews and Gentiles:

> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Reflecting on these verses, Paul Gavrilyuk offers a grand vision of reconciliation between diverse peoples that comes on account of shared worship at the Lord's Table: "As an eschatological sign, the Eucharist has the potential to relativize all forms of existing human alienation; it is a purification of the fallen forms of unity (tribal, national, racial, political, and so on) that go against the believers' new life in Christ" (Gavrilyuk 2018, 176-177). While peacemaking and reconciliation are important values within the church and among believers, worship at the Lord's Table also equips believers to become peacemakers among non-believers, including those involved in conflicts on regional and international levels.

Mission from the Lord's Table

The post-communion prayer in the Anglican Eucharistic liturgy reads: "And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord" (BCP 2019, 137). While the work believers do varies—some are nurses, IT specialists, teachers, homemakers, and cross-cultural missionaries—all of God's people have a call to witness unto Christ while pursuing their vocations. The church is called and sent to mission from the Lord's Table.

In one sense, mission is the reason for the liturgy and the Eucharist. The word *mass* means sending *(missa)*. We gather so we can be sent. Simon Chan writes: "The liturgy of Word and sacrament is sent within two essential acts: the gathering for worship and the sending forth into the world" (Chan 2006, 63). Speaking more specifically about the Lord's Table, Chan argues that the Eucharist shapes the body of believers for witness:

> The Eucharist is mission. It is mission in that it is making the church, the embodied Christ, available to the world. In its eucharistic worship the church is reformed to "go forth into the world to love and serve the Lord." The world does not know of any other Christ except the Christ that is embodied in the church. Thus, to be the church is the greatest mission to the world (Chan 2006, 40).

When Eastern Orthodox theologians conceive of mission from the Lord's Table, they call it the "liturgy after the liturgy" (Rommen 2016, 69; Bosch 1991, 210). When believers love and serve their neighbors, they are worshipping just as much as when they are praying the Lord's Prayer or taking the bread and wine. Fagerberg argues that the purpose of liturgy is to equip gathered believers "to perform a ministry on behalf of and interest of the whole community" (Fagerberg 2012, 93-94). Schmemann adds that when the Gospel books are physically brought in to the church to be read in worship, this act also symbolizes Christ going out to proclaim good news to the world. Believers are invited and commanded to join the Lord in this mission Schmemann 2003, 71).

The Eucharist also provides the spiritual renewal and fuel for witness. We come and see the gospel at the Lord's Table so we can go and tell the good news in our communities. Rommen argues that Christians who celebrate at the Lord's Table "experience the real presence of Christ and then are dismissed out into the world to invite others to come and see for themselves" (Rommen 2016, 69). For Rommen, "The real missionary potential of the church lies" in the church's faithfulness to meet regularly for the Eucharist (Rommen 2016, 81).

Because of the Lord's hospitality at the table where he is both the host and the meal, the church is compelled to practice biblical hospitality in mission to non-believers. David Kirk refers to hospitality as "being the sacrament of God's love in the world" (Kirk 1981, 112). Because we have been welcomed at the Lord's Table, we also welcome strangers and demonstrate hospitality (Chan 2006, 92; Jipp 2017, 3). Chan asserts that since we have broken bread and given thanks, then we ought to also be moved to share literal bread (food and other tangible needs) with the poor. Reflecting on Paul's admonition to remember Christ in the Eucharist, Amy Peeler concludes: "When we partake of his meal [the Eucharist], he changes us. We are graced to do his good will and feed the hunger of souls and bodies . . . because this is the supper of the self-giving Lord" (Peeler 2018, 23).

The Eucharist exists because of God's mission. Worship at the Lord's Table is the beginning and end of mission (Rommen 2016, 69). For those involved in cross-cultural mission, pastoral ministry, and demonstrating hospitality, it is vital to refuel regularly by worshipping at the Lord's Table. Amid her sacrificial and draining ministry among the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India, Mother Theresa practiced the daily habit of participating in the Eucharist before beginning her day's work—her liturgy after the liturgy.

Summary

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus met people—his disciples, Pharisees, and sinners—around tables. He brought the Kingdom of God into their hearts by meeting them at the table, sometimes as a guest and other times as a host. The night before he went to the cross, the Lord hosted his disciples for a final meal and gave them a worship model—through the bread and wine—to remember his death, burial, and resurrection.

Now the ascended Lord continues to be the spiritual host at the Lord's Supper. Through faithful observance of the Lord's Table—a dramatic retelling of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection—believers remember the gospel. At the table, they are nourished by the ascended Lord's real presence and they "taste and see that Lord is good" (Ps 34:8).

The Lord's Table is a place for mission. Believers remember the gospel, diverse and alienated people have the opportunity to be reconciled, and non-believers are invited to see and hear the gospel. While a hospitable God welcomes believers to his table, from that table he also sends them out to be hospitable and to make disciples of all peoples.

So we must not neglect worship at the Lord's Table. Jesus initiated this meal and commands the church to celebrate it regularly. In my journey, I have worshipped and served in evangelical churches that have done a great job with preaching and worship music; but have not valued worship at the Lord's Table. We have been unfaithful to the Lord's command and we have missed the opportunity to remember the gospel and to witness to non-believing visitors. May our worship and witness be renewed by joining our hospitable Lord at the Table.

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