

# ***Communion Meditations***

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Isaiah 65:17–25; Colossians 3:9–17

## ***Pastoral Prayer***

Gracious God, these are divisive times.

We are divided into political factions; families are not of one mind or heart regarding how our government should function. Strangers argue with strangers; friends argue with friends. Politics bruises us, batters us and separates us.

We are divided into Christian factions. We differ in beliefs, in inclusiveness, in types of music and worship styles. We share communion with some but not with others. We share the grace and love of God with some and not with others. Have mercy on us all.

We are divided into religious factions. For some ecumenism is no more than a way of watering down what one believes. For some ecumenism is the hope of the future where the entrance to the Kingdom of God is a constantly open door.

We are divided into haves and have-nots, each group sometimes believing the other group is responsible for the division. God, help us share our stories, our hearts, our lives and our resources.

We are divided, yet I am convinced we want to be one. Our hands hang down at our sides when we would really prefer they be joined and raised in unison. We feel alone and long to be in community.

Help us realize and accept that in your love there are no divisions, no haves and have-nots, no political machinations or religious quarrels. In you there is the unity and peace that comes from knowing all of your children are loved.

Accept our prayer offered as a community who longs to be one as you and Christ are one and as Jesus encouraged us to be one.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy Name.  
Thy Kingdom come.  
Thy will be done on earth,  
As it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
And the power, and the glory forever.  
Amen.*

Early tomorrow morning I will make my way to Arlington National Cemetery to watch a friend be laid to rest. When I look across the rolling grounds I'll see grave markers constantly standing at attention while those beneath them perpetually lie at rest. There's a great host of men and women resting there, some buried shoulder to shoulder beneath the earth and some row upon row, column upon column in granite columbarium's. When we offer this final loving tribute to our family and friends we most often do so as a community placing their remains within a community, too. Grave markers and funeral processions are seldom solitary.

When Mr. James is laid to rest on Thursday his body will be placed beside his wife's. Even in death we don't want the ones we love to be alone.

Yet sometimes in life we live alone, or if not alone with a focus on self far more than on community. I don't know exactly when the emphasis on the individual occurred, or how long it is been a virulent virus that continues to infect us and rob us of emotional health. I suppose toddlers have always been possessive, thought whatever they desired rightly belonged to them and saw no need to share. Apparently *mine* is more easily pronounced and understood than *ours*. Sharing is a learned behavior and doesn't come naturally. Possession isn't nine-tenths of the law; to some it is the law.

It doesn't take long to see how most all of us are infected with *myopia*. There's a car illegally parked at the yellow curb in front of the grocery store because the driver only has to run in to get a few things. There's the driver who needs to merge but sees no need to wait his or her turn so he or she pushes to the front bypassing others who impatiently wait in line. There's the person who always speaks out because whatever he or she says is more important than what others might offer. There's the politician who puts reelection ahead of what is good and right for the nation, one for one and none for all.

I suspect there have been times when I wore arrogance for so long I was convinced it looked good on me. I imagine there have been times I wore a coat of many colors convinced God tailored it for me. A parishioner once gave me a sign for my desk that read: *Jesus loves you, but I'm his favorite*. There have been times I lived in community and thought myself above it, a bit better than others, singular in my standing. When one is without peer, one is surely alone.

In a perverse way my religious upbringing fostered a kind of individualism. Ever since the Great Awakening, the revival movement that swept across our nation many years ago, much of Baptist life has been focused on individuals making the decision to walk the aisle so that they never have to walk alone again. Over and over I heard I needed to come to Jesus; I rarely heard what I ought to do once I got there besides be baptized and join the church. Each Sunday was an altar call without the accompanying invitation to be involved in broader social issues. I was encouraged to join the church, the community of believers, but I wasn't encouraged to venture beyond that very much unless it was to win souls for Jesus. I knew I was to follow Jesus, but I don't remember anyone asking whether we also ought to follow Martin Luther King, Jr. as he walked for freedom for all.

In recent years the Colossian passage has reminded me of community. Each article of clothing we are encouraged to wear reminds us we live in community where we put the

needs of others ahead of our own. When we put on compassion we decide to be moved by the needs of others. When we wear kindness we determine to treat others as we want to be treated. Humility is noticing the coat another holds is more attractive than one's own; humility is helping the other into that coat. The Apostle Paul encourages us to be content with second place. Whenever we have to win we lose. Most of all Paul reminds us to put on love, which is the recognition others are of inestimable worth. To love another is to lose one's self, to forfeit some individuality for the sake of community. We put on these clothes, which implies we can take them off, too. Wearing them is a choice.

That clothing is not often selected today, is not in fashion at present. We don whatever is best for me rather than what is best for us. My sister and her husband own a beachfront condominium in Alabama. At a recent home owner's meeting it was announced there would be a sizeable assessment each of the next three years to replace the sliding doors in the units since they no longer met hurricane standards and many of them presently leaked and others soon would. One resident said she didn't think it fair she had to pay the assessment since her doors didn't leak. Another resident pointed out she lived in a condominium **community**. When she decided to live there she decided to do what was best for all not just for self.

I suggest when we live, truly live, live as Christ calls us to live, we will do what is best for us all rather than what's best for self.

When Jesus taught us to pray he subtly reminded us our prayers are always offered in community. **Our** Father he taught us; not **my Father**. We are encouraged to live and pray wearing the clothes God laid out for us. If we live that way our lives can be living prayers.

### ***A Living Prayer***

In This World We Walk Alone  
With No Place To Call Our Home  
But There's One Who Holds Our Hands  
On The Rugged Road Through Barren Lands

The Way Is Dark, The Road Is Steep  
But He's Become Our Eyes To See  
Strength To Climb, Our Grievs To Bear  
The Savior Lives Inside Us There

In Your Love We Find Release  
A Haven From Our Unbelief  
Take Our Lives And Let Us Be  
Living Prayers, Our God To Thee

Through These Trials Of Life We Find  
Another Voice Inside Our Minds  
It Comforts Us And Bids Us Live  
Inside The Love The Father Gives

In Your Love We Find Release  
A Haven From Our Unbelief  
Take Our Lives And Let Us Be  
Living Prayers, Our God To Thee

Take Our Lives And Let Us Be  
Living Prayers, Our God To Thee

This supper is for all of us. We first invite our children to come forward and take a cheddar fish or two reminding them and us they belong to us and to God.

Now it is our turn at God's table. It is our tradition to receive the bread, wait until all have been served and then eat the bread in unison. In like manner we will receive and share the cup.

We do this is remembrance of the One who lived and died so we might know how to live and die and live again as God's children.

#### Observing the Supper

At our best we are a community placing the needs of others ahead of self, loving others as we want to be loved, opening our arms to receive all who seek a place to belong.

Together we are more than we are apart. Sarah has a beautiful voice; Chuck is a gifted violinist; Russell is an inspiring pianist. Separately they make beautiful music but together I think their songs are more powerful.

We have a number of opportunities to join our hearts and lives to reach out to involve and include others as we recognize each person as a child of God. Katie and Michael lead a meeting after church to talk about how we might reach out to others so we can become a part of their community and include them in ours. Contributing canned goods and other foodstuffs for ACCA is a way of including others. We can do our best to make sure each person who enters these doors is made welcome and included. After all there are no strangers, no outcasts, no orphans of God.

Not even orphan preachers. When I retired seven years ago from serving alongside people I greatly loved and stepped away from that congregation I wondered if I would ever find another place where I felt I belonged. When Susan and I walked through these doors you made us feel welcome and convinced us we belong here. We do belong, thanks to you and the grace and love of God you have shared.

My meditation concludes with a song sung by our gifted trio, a momentary community within this community. You raise me up still has a bit of self in its title. However, I have always thought *you* was not second person singular, but second person plural. **You** is God and all of God's children who do all they can to recognize the dignity and worth of all of God's children. *You* is the person on your left and on your right, the person in front and behind. *You* are the people who decide their everyday clothing will be kindness, compassion, mercy, humility and love. *You* are the people who share in the unfolding kingdom of God Isaiah described where none will be victims or perpetrators of indifference or violence. If the wolf and lamb can graze together in the community on God's Holy Mountain I am convinced politics, religion and gender issues need not

separate. Those whom God has joined together and raised up let us not tear asunder. From those lofty heights, from the shoulders of God and God's children, we might catch a glimpse of eternity. Amen.

### ***You Raise Me Up***

When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary;  
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;  
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence  
Until you come and sit awhile with me

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up' To more than I can be

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up' To more than I can be

There is no life ' no life without its hunger;  
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly;  
But when you come and I am filled with wonder  
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up' To more than I can be

You raise me up' To more than I can be

### **Postscript**

Many of you have been here far longer than I. I have only experienced the ministry of Steve Hyde, and then of Steve and Leah Grundset Davis. Steve certainly cultivated community here; so did Steve and Leah, and so will Leah.

We start a new chapter with her next week. Let us raise her up as she raises us up as God raises us all up so we might catch a glimpse of eternity.

Gracious God, we give thanks for a community where there are no walls - only open arms. Amen.

## **Isaiah 65:17-25**

"Pay close attention now:

*I'm creating new heavens and a new earth.*

*All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain  
are things of the past, to be forgotten.*

*Look ahead with joy.*

*Anticipate what I'm creating:*

*I'll create Jerusalem as sheer joy,  
create my people as pure delight.*

*I'll take joy in Jerusalem,  
take delight in my people:*

*No more sounds of weeping in the city,  
no cries of anguish;*

*No more babies dying in the cradle,  
or old people who don't enjoy a full lifetime;*

*One-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal—  
anything less will seem like a cheat.*

*They'll build houses  
and move in.*

*They'll plant fields  
and eat what they grow.*

*No more building a house  
that some outsider takes over,*

*No more planting fields  
that some enemy confiscates,*

*For my people will be as long-lived as trees,  
my chosen ones will have satisfaction in their work.*

*They won't work and have nothing come of it,  
they won't have children snatched out from under them.*

*For they themselves are plantings blessed by God,  
with their children and grandchildren likewise God-blessed.*

*Before they call out, I'll answer.*

*Before they've finished speaking, I'll have heard.*

*Wolf and lamb will graze the same meadow,  
lion and ox eat straw from the same trough,  
but snakes—they'll get a diet of dirt!*

*Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill  
anywhere on my Holy Mountain," says God.*

## **Colossians 3:9-17**

*Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.*

*So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

*Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.*