

We Bear the Name of Christ

A communion meditation based on Mark 9:38-41

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There is a striking development within the New Testament, in that the fledgling group that began with no name, referred to simply as people of “the Way” (Acts 9:2), with no explicit reference to Jesus, nevertheless had an immense respect for the power of Jesus’ name. In our Gospel reading, for example, there is reference to “casting out demons in (Jesus’) name (Mark 9:38); there is reference to “deeds of power” done in Jesus’ “name” (9:39); and there is reference to “bear(ing) the name of Christ,” something Mark associates closely with sharing “a cup of water” with those who thirst! (9:41)

There are, of course, other New Testament reference to the name of Jesus. It is in his name that we are baptized! And our sins forgiven! (Acts 2:38) It is in his name that people were transformed from ill health to good health! (Acts 3:6; 4:10) It was in his name that the good news was proclaimed! And church growth welcomed! (Acts of the Apostles 8:12) It was in Jesus’ name that seemingly intractable people’s differences were reconciled! (1 Corinthians 1:10) It was in his name that surly hearts became grateful, and not just once a year, on Thanksgiving! (Ephesians 5:20)

Among this no-name group the name of Christ became associated with salvation, with reconciliation, with joy, with goodness, with peace, with honesty, with generosity, with commitment. Those who followed Jesus would make incredible sacrifices simply because they bore the name of Christ. (1 Peter 4:14)

Names have some importance in our day as well. The official airline for the Olympic Games is Ansett, which gives them the right to use the name of the Olympics. However, according to Ansett, another airline (Qantas) was marketing itself in ways that illegally used the Olympics image. It wasn’t openly using the name, but, according to documents filed in court by Ansett, it designed its ads in ways that suggested the Olympics and thereby linked its name with the Olympics name! With the eyes of the whole world on the Olympic Games, the stakes were high!

The stakes are also high for the worldwide Church. Those who bear the name of Christ are spread throughout the world. The one whose name we bear told us to go out into the world and “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), which we did! Consequently, when we now celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we celebrate it with Christians in Bolivia, Cambodia, Ecuador, Burkina Faso, Congo, Brazil, France, Uganda, Poland and the Ukraine, to mention just a few places where the Body of Christ is resident.

We are a worldwide body of scattered Presbyterians, Catholics, Mennonites, African Independent Churches, Baptists, Orthodox, and others. When I celebrate the Lord’s Supper I think of fellow Christians with whom I’ve had fellowshipmembers of the Horse Lake Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan; the Albright United Methodist Church in Elkhart, Indiana; the Mountain Road Apostolic Church of Zion, in Kobojango, Botswana; the United Mennonite Church in Thompson, Manitoba; the Sonnenberg Church in Switzerland; the London Mennonite Centre in Highgate; and the St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Church in Ames, Iowa.

When we invoke the presence of Christ at our commemoration of the Lord's Supper, we do so in English, in Portuguese, in Russian, French, Swahili, Setswana; Spanish, Chinese, German, and a host of other tongues.

If you put all the Christians together in one gargantuan building, a visiting Martian might be excused for thinking, "What in the cosmos do these creatures have in common?" What we have in common is that we all bear the name of Christ. And though our languages are different, our styles of worship are different, and our places of worship come in a wide variety of shapes and configurations, we all observe the Lord's Supper. I know of very, very few Christians who do not keep his memory alive through the breaking of bread.

The stakes are high for the worldwide Body of Christ, however, for having become a worldwide body, if we do not act like a body, a single organism, we bring discredit to the name of Christ. Sometimes Christians are more suspicious and less tolerant of other Christians than they are of non-Christians. Sometimes rich Christians want little to do with poor Christians. Sometimes left-wing Christians don't want to talk to right-wing Christians. Sometimes Christians in the North want little contact with Christians in the South. Sometimes Christians living in freedom don't want to hear about Christians living under intense persecution.

Thank God that these impulses are kept in check by the impulses that draw us together to share the meal that bears Christ's name. It's a radical meal, for though we may live our lives based on a whole multitude of distinctions and comfortable separations, at Christ's table there are no distinctions. All who bear the name of Christ are welcome.

Today, Christians gather around this global table to proclaim Christ's death, celebrate Christ's resurrection and await Christ's return. When Worldwide Communion was described to a group of 4th graders, one of them pointed out that the Worldwide communion table must be a very long one! (Kathleen Musser) Another pointed out that, with all the time changes around the world, this communion meal is a continuous one throughout the day! This communion meal began in Australia and Russia some fifteen to sixteen hours ago, continued in China some fourteen hours ago; then began in France some six to seven hours later; then in England, the Maritimes, the Americas; and after our own service is over it will continue sweeping across the time zones, as all who bear the name of Christ break bread in his name. A worldwide, 24-hour Body of Christ!

Prayers for the Worldwide Body of Christ

(adapted from World Council of Churches materials)

On this Worldwide Communion Sunday we remember the global Christian fellowship, and pray especially for our own members serving abroad ...

We remember also the dispossessed of the earth, knowing that our Lord's body was broken so that the hungry might be nourished, the oppressed set free, and those without hope replenished with the bread of new hope and new life.

We pray today with our fellow believers in Peru, when they pray, "Lord of mystery, let us feel Your presence at the very heart of life, and seek to find You in the depths of everyday things."

We pray today with our fellow believers in Cambodia, when they pray, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ protect us, and may God's love fill our lives with a peace that extends its hand to others in true reconciliation and friendship."

We pray today with our fellow believers in Indonesia, and pray for peace and reconciliation between Christians, Muslims, and other ethnic and religious groups. We think especially of our Christian brothers and sisters who suffer severe persecution on Indonesia's island of Ambon, where in the last few days nine people were killed, and in the last twenty months 4,000 Christians have been killed.

We pray today with our fellow believers in Djibouti, when they pray, "In the hot winds that parch the painful throat and sear the flesh, may God, in compassion, let you find the great-boughed tree that will protect and shade."

We pray today with our fellow believers in Colombia, who are gravely concerned with the aid from the north that is 90 per cent military. When one part of the body of Christ suffers death and devastation, we all suffer.

We pray today with our fellow believers in Uganda, when they pray, "Help us, Sovereign Lord, when crises and panics arise. Help us to know that though You do not always remove troubles from us, You always accompany us through them."

We pray with our sisters and brothers in Argentina, when they pray, "O God, to those who have hunger, give bread; and to us who have bread, give the hunger for justice."

We pray for our sisters and brothers in every country and region around the world, but remember especially the region in which You came among us. Our fellow believers in the Middle East ask us to pray, "...not for Arab or Jew, for Palestinian or Israeli, but rather for ourselves, that we may not divide them in our prayers, but that we might keep them together in our hearts."

All these things we pray in the name of him who died and rose again, and now lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

All quotations of Scripture, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version.