

The Harvest Samba: 1 Corinthians 11.23-34



For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

It was a great joy to celebrate last Sunday our first 'Family Communion' service since the lockdown began back in March.

We invited our children back into church where they danced the Harvest Samba and one of our favourite songs, 'Our God is a good good God'.

And, as well as that, we once again used an order of service based on a liturgy that the Church of England only authorised in 2008; a service of Holy Communion for use when children are present. This liturgy strips back the language of the eucharistic prayer so that upper primary school children can hear an explanation of why we celebrate Holy Communion.

Loveday was presiding and so she said these words;

Father, on the night before he died,
Jesus shared a meal with his friends.
He took the bread and thanked you.
He broke it, and gave it to them, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this to remember me.

And the children sitting in the choir stalls, so closer to the altar than the rest of the congregation, rang bells that they had been given. (And Kate and I got to ring a bell also).

And then Loveday said;

After the meal, Jesus took the cup of wine.

He thanked you, and gave it to them, saying:

Drink this, all of you.

This is my blood, the new promise of God's unfailing love.

Do this to remember me.

And we rang our bells again.

Reading 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26, I am struck by how faithful to the words of Paul our Eucharistic prayer is, even in the form we used on Sunday that has been edited to make it accessible to children who go to primary school.

Ringling bells at the moment of consecration is a new innovation for our church. We began doing it about two years ago. It has the effect of course of keeping the children involved in what is going on. It also draws their attention and the attention of the whole congregation to the particular significance of that moment of consecration. It helps us to understand that this bit of the service is incredibly important.

Which is what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 11: 27-33. The Eucharist is incredibly important. We are not sharing bread and wine as just another small part of our worship. We are remembering the crucifixion of Christ

until his coming again. The prayer and our concentration upon it have the effect of focussing our whole worship on the crucifixion and what the crucifixion means to the world.

Last year we agreed that we would begin to admit children to Holy Communion. It's another innovation and one that recognises that if we are going to be a church that places the Eucharist and the crucifixion at the centre of our worship, and if we are serious about making disciples of children as they grow up, then we need to invite them to share communion with us as soon as they can understand what it means. Unfortunately, this year, the lockdown meant that we had to shelve our plans to teach the children about the meaning of the Eucharist and admit them formally to Holy Communion. This will probably have to wait now until next year.

When we do come to instruct the children, we will be guided by these words of Paul to the Corinthians. The bread and the cup of the Lord are not to be received in an unworthy manner. They are to be received only by those who truly understand the meaning they convey.

And when the children look to see the manner in which the adult members of our church receive the bread and cup of the Lord, they will be in no doubt that we receive in remembrance of that moment upon which the whole of human history turns; the sacrifice by which the sin of the whole world is forgiven and the endless love of God for all humanity is revealed.

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