



**A Lenten message from
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Two of the most frequent questions that I am asked in membership class's deals with our view of communion as United Methodists.

What is the frequency and what is the availability of communion?

How often do you do it and who can receive it?

To both of these questions we United Methodist swing the door open wider than most any other church. Our Open Table means it is available to all who have repentant hearts and desire more of God's Grace in Christ, and we put no limits on frequency.

Our tradition has a bias toward making the Lord's Supper as accessible as possible. (It is interesting to me as a Pastor that the only point where we Methodist seem to restrict this liberal accessibility to Communion is in our internal debates on who can bless it, but I'll leave that important debate to for another time).

Let me share two paragraphs from John Wesley's sermon to his Oxford students titled "The Duty of Constant Communion"

Wesley writes this:

"It is strange that it (communion) should be neglected by any that do fear God, and desire to save their souls; And yet nothing is more common. One reason why many neglect it is, they are so much afraid of "eating and drinking unworthily," that they never think how much greater the danger is when they do not eat or drink it at all.....I will Show that it is the duty of every Christian to receive the Lord's Supper as often as he can...."

God offers you a pardon for all your sins. You are unworthy of it, it is sure, and he knows it; but since he is pleased to offer it nevertheless, will not you accept of it?.....What can God himself do for us farther, if we refuse his mercy because we are unworthy of it?

Wesley said: Do it as often as you can....and , "If you don't feel worthy of it, it's all the more reason you ought to be running to receive it."

What is at the Heart of Wesley's easy access to communion?

And the answer to that is that At the heart of the Lord's Supper is our understanding of Jesus establishing the New Covenant with His Church. It is a Covenant meal that is more than just a symbolic ritual to remember some past event, but it is a Sacred moment where I invite Jesus to perform a new work of grace inside me now. It sets my identity and reminds me of my resources available as a child of God..

For me, one of the purest descriptions of the Covenant meal in the New Testament is the story of the Prodigal Son.

The Prodigal knows that he doesn't deserve to be welcomed back as a child in the Father's house. He has disgraced this father, and damaged their family name, and wasted his Father's resources. He comes home without a nickel in his pocket, with nothing to offer for restitution. He is broke. But the Father does not hesitate. He doesn't make him a

slave to repay the debt, he welcomes him back, places the robe on his body (the sign of family identity). He prepares a meal (a covenant meal sealing their relationship), because the father is not interested in making his child a slave to his past behavior, but restoring you as His Child and heir. The Father reestablishes covenant with his child by covering the cost of his son's foolish rebellion. All the son had to offer in this relationship was to come home.

Two years ago I received a check in the mail.. I was a check that was the balance of My cousin Dennis' estate who had recently died. I was never made the official executor, but I was the executor by default because I was the only relative who had any relationship with him. My cousin had run off almost every person in his life. Alcohol had controlled him for most of his life, and I would get phone calls in the middle of the night when he was drunk that were mean and vulgar.

In the last years his lifestyle had withered his body so he looked like an 80 year old man even though he was just a few years older than me. His liver was shot, his lungs were destroyed, he was in and out of treatment centers and hospitals. And I would ask him where he was at with the Lord, and Dennis would tell me that he believed in Jesus and he knew Jesus loved him and he would weep when he would tell me.

From the worlds perspective Dennis had wasted his life. He had squandered the years God had given him. And if we were to evaluate his worth most people would ask, how much was the check that represented all the money he had left at the end of his life. What do you suppose this check says Dennis was "Worth"? The check says \$3.85.

I have kept that check. I have it in my desk at my office. I have saved it because when I looked at that check, something inside me shuddered, because I realized that I have some of the Elder Son inside me. My Midwestern work ethic quickly bleeds over into my spiritual life so quickly. I want to evaluate people by what they are worth. How productive their life has been. How much they have produced for my Father. I can so easily be like that elder son looking down on this good for nothing younger brother shows up at my dad's doorstep after squandering all of his dad's hard earned inheritance and even some of

what I consider mine, and actually hope that my Father would shame him, punish him, turn your back on him and at least make him grovel in the dirt, but Dad, loves the \$3.85 cent cousin as much as he loves the million dollar saint.

And that is why we open the doors as wide as we can to the banquet table God has prepared. The cross reminds me that someday I will lool in my own pocket and I won't even have \$3.85 to present to God.

As the Apostle Paul's says in Galatians:

"So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2: 20 b

Any of you feel unworthy of communion this Lenten season? When it is offered, come running....and do it as often as you can.

