



Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

*–1 Corinthians 11: 27-29 (KJV)**

Over spring break, all of us Coopers drove down to Georgia to visit Compton's family. We arrived late on a Saturday evening and then spent the next day attending worship with his parents. His mother attends an Episcopal church that was established in 1750. The building itself has been rebuilt and restored numerous times over the centuries, but still has some original pieces brought from England. It is old and beautiful and very wealthy. They have enough clergy, acolytes, and worship assistants to offer communion both in a continuous line on the main floor and kneeling around the rail at the raised altar. Whichever way people receive the meal, they then return to their pew and kneel in prayer until all have partaken. Everything is orderly and serious.

On Sunday evening, we attended a Pentecostal church with Compton's father, Wayne. Wayne's wife grew up in the church. Her great-grandparents helped start the church in 1948. It is small, but vibrant. That particular night that we were there, they were doing a communion service. I wasn't aware that Pentecostals ever did communion and, in fact, this particular congregation only does communion a few times in a year. We hit the jackpot!

The pastor pulled out his King James Version of the bible (they don't have a specific liturgy or language for sacraments). He read the story of the Last Supper from the gospel of Matthew. He spoke for a few minutes about the importance of participating in the supper that Jesus instituted. He then invited everyone to come forward and gather around a table set up with trays full of cups of wine (I was, honestly, surprised they used wine, because they are similar to Baptists in generally forbidding alcohol) and teeny tiny crackers – smaller than oyster crackers.

The pastor, again, turned to scripture. This time he read from 1 Corinthians 11. We also use this same passage for our communion liturgy, but he read farther than we do in our service. After Paul quotes Jesus's words, he goes on to talk about worthiness in accepting the meal. *After reading these verses, the pastor looked up at all of us and asked, "Who of us is worthy? Raise your hand if you believe you are worthy." No one did. Then he got a big smile on his face and said, "Jesus, himself,

makes us worthy. Amen?” There was a cacophony of voices responding and big grins and waving of hands.

All of us moved forward in a mess of movement to collect one of the small cups and tiny crackers. Once we were all settled, the pastor read Paul’s quoting of Jesus, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, ‘Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.’” Then everyone ate the cracker.

The Pastor continued, “After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying. ‘This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.’” Everyone drank the little cups of wine, and then wow! The whole congregation started cheering, clapping, and jumping up and down in sheer joy. Those who were so inclined, spoke in tongues. Others were saying Hallelujah loudly. The pastor walked around the stage with tear-filled face lifted heavenward and hands raised. This joyful exuberance went on for several minutes.

As the celebration started to die down, the pastor came back to the podium and said, “You all have received Jesus through this meal. If you feel Jesus’s presence, hug one another, because Jesus is in your neighbor.” Then we all moved around the room hugging one another for a while before finally collecting our stuff to leave.

The Church is so much bigger and more diverse than any of us can wrap our head around. And while the Episcopal church is much closer to my own theology and worship practice, that evening service at the Pentecostal church was, by far, the best experience of communion that I have ever had. They felt Christ’s presence and *responded to it* appropriately and thoroughly. Both churches welcomed us to share in the Lord’s supper with them. No one checked our bona fides or tested our knowledge.

Jesus is for everyone. Churches that guard the table from those they aren’t sure are worthy are going against the way of Christ. Opening ourselves up to different people and practices helps us to grow as individuals and community. We can learn from one another, when we remember that we are ALL made worthy by the work of Jesus Christ and not by our own scholarship, theology, or piety.