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The date: July 1941

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The place: Auschwitz concentration camp, Poland

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The event: A prisoner is missing. As a result, the Deputy Commander of Auschwitz ordered 10 men to be chosen to be starved to death in an underground bunker. When one of the selected men, the Polish Sergeant Francis Gajowniczek (Gay-ov-nichek) heard he was selected, he cried out "My wife! My children!" At this point, a 47-year-old Catholic priest named Maximilian Kolbe, who was in the camp for sheltering Jews in his monastery, stepped forward and volunteered to take his place.

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The Nazi commander replied, "What does this Polish pig want?"

Father Kolbe pointed with his hand to the condemned man and repeated: "I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place because he has a wife and children." Rather surprised, the commander accepted Kolbe in place of Gay-ov-nichek, and the 10 men were led off to starve to death. About three weeks later, on August 14, 1941, Maximilian Kolbe was one of four prisoners still alive. His impatient captors executed him by means of a lethal injection of carbolic acid, or phenol, and burned his body in the crematorium.

So what happened to the man who was saved by Maximilian Kolbe? You will have to wait until the end of this sermon to find out.

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Our message today is part of our summer series on the Church, and today we are learning about the Lord's Supper. This is also known in various churches as the Lord's table, the Breaking of Bread, Communion, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist, and in Catholic churches it is part of a service called the Mass. The key teaching on this service is found in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 11 and verses 23-32

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1 Cor 11:23-32

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

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27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. 32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

NIV

Slide (prayer)

There is much to say about this passage, but our time is limited, so I want to focus on a few aspects only of Paul's teaching.

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1. The Lord's Supper involves a physical act

It involves the very physical actions of eating and drinking, the two actions that along with breathing are essential to our physical lives, and that were denied to Maximilian Kolbe and his fellow sufferers. So, you may well say, what is important about that? I think in part it is to remind us that our faith as Christ followers is

rooted in actual historical fact. Just as the bread and wine that we share is real, so was Jesus' death and resurrection real. As Peter reminded his readers:

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2 Peter 1:16-17 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

The Lord's Supper is a visible and touchable and tastable reminder that we are dealing with real events and real facts, not cleverly invented stories.

But I think there is a second reason why this remembrance involves the physical act of eating and drinking, which is to remind us that it is only through Jesus that we can have real life. In John 6:35 Jesus says

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John 6:35-36 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

The Lord's Supper reminds us of our need to feed on Jesus, to trust him and obey him, for our spiritual health. In some churches the bread and wine are administered personally, and are given with words like these "May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul to eternal life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving."

And this leads to our next thought, which is

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2. The Lord's Supper is an act of remembrance

As Paul reminds us in 1 Cor. 11:23-25

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The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this **in remembrance of me.**" 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, **in remembrance of me.**"

This passage, and the similar passage in Luke 22:19, tell us why we celebrate the Lord's Supper: it is in remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross for us. These words were spoken on the night when Jesus was betrayed, the day before he died a cruel death by crucifixion on the cross.

So we remember that Jesus died on the cross, but is that all? No, not at all! The big question is why did he die? Was it some miscalculation on his part? No, a thousand times no! We are told repeatedly in the Bible that Christ died **for us.**

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2 Cor 5:20-21 God made him who had no sin **to be sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Did you catch the weight of these simple words? Jesus Christ, the sinless and perfect Lamb of God who had no sin of his own, became sin for us. In those six awful hours on the cross Jesus became the sin of Adolf Hitler, condemning millions of innocent Jews to the gas ovens of Auschwitz and other death camps. He became the sin of Vladimir Putin, of Barack Obama and of Donald Trump, of Pontius Pilate, of David Kingstone, and of you.

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Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love **for us** in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. This is the heart of the gospel; the good news that Jesus took our place in dying on the cross. By right we should be condemned to eternal banishment from God's presence; to eternal death for our sins of omission (not doing what we know to be right) and commission (doing what we know to be wrong). As Paul writes in Romans 3

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Rom 3:10-12

"There is no one righteous, not even one;

11 there is no one who understands,

no one who seeks God.

12 All have turned away,

they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."

So Jesus, the son of God who had no sin, willingly paid the price that we could never pay. In a real sense Jesus took my place and your place on the cross, just as Father Kolbe took Francis Gay-ov-nichek's place in that death cell at Auschwitz.

So in sharing in the Lord's Supper we remember *our great sin* and *God's great love*. We remember that we were under God's judgment, and that Jesus Christ died for us.

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3. The Lord's Supper is a commanded act

The passage we just read in 1 Cor. 11:23-25 says

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The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; **do this** in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; **do this**, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

In other words, this service is not an optional extra for Christ followers. Jesus did not say "do this if fits your schedule" or "do this if you are feeling especially holy", or "do this if you want to impress others with your spirituality". He just told his disciples "do this in remembrance of me".

This of course brings up the question of the frequency with which we are called to remember our Lord's death. In one sense we cannot do this often enough, and this is why all Christ followers need to spend daily time in Bible study and thanksgiving and prayer.

But how about celebrating the Lord's Supper? What does the Bible say? It turns out that there are some clues as to how the early church did this, but no specific commands.

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In Acts 2:42 we read that the early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

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Acts 20:6-7

6 But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days. 7. On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.

So it appears that the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper at least weekly.

Here at BCF we also celebrate it weekly, in a separate service at 9:00 am in the chapel, and the elders invite all Christ-followers to join with other believers at this time as often as you are able to do so.

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4. The Lord's Supper is corporate act of witness

Paul was addressing the whole church at Corinth when he wrote

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1 Cor 11:26 For whenever you (plural) eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

What does this mean? It means that as often as we come to the Table as a church, we proclaim the Lord's death. Who do we proclaim it to? To ourselves, to each other, and to any not yet believers who might be present.

When we share together in the Lord's Supper, we are saying to ourselves and to each other "Jesus died for me, and I am taking this bread and this cup to remind myself and to acknowledge this to everyone in this room and to let everyone know that I am a Christ follower, a Christian." In doing so, we encourage each other by our unspoken but real witness for the Lord.

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5. The Lord's Supper is a temporary act

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1 Cor 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death **until he comes**.

One of the great things about the Lord's Supper is that it also points forward to Christ's return. Paul tells us that by sharing in the remembrance we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." So the Lord's table is like a great bridge, spanning the entire interval of the Church's history on earth. One end of it rests on the shame of the cross and also on the fact of the resurrection; the other is planted in the glory of the kingdom, and as we share it together we can look with eager anticipation to that day when the trumpet will sound and the Lord will return and establish his kingdom of righteousness and justice and love.

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6. The Lord's Supper is a call to self-examination

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1 Cor 11:27-28 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Wow! These are strong words! The Bible says that we are in big trouble if we do not examine ourselves before taking part in the Lord's Supper, and do not recognize the body of the Lord. But what does this mean? It seems to me that there are two meanings here. The first one is that the bread represents the body of Christ, so to take part without appreciating this or without believing that his body was broken for our salvation is to sin against the Lord.

The second meaning is that we must recognize that we are part of the church, the body of Christ, and we need to be in relationships of love and trust with our fellow believers. A big problem in the church at Corinth was that their celebrations of the Lord's Supper seem to have been preceded by a meal to which each person brought their own food and did not share it with others. So you had rich people bringing steak dinners and getting drunk, and poor people bringing bread or just going hungry. Paul condemned them for their lack of love and lack of concern for the poor.

So in practice this means that there are two groups of people who should not take part in this celebration: First, any Christians who are conscious of unconfessed and unforgiven sin. We all need to examine ourselves before we share in the bread and the wine, confessing any known sins to the Lord and seeking His forgiveness. There are no perfect saints at the Lord's table. We are all debtors to grace. Forgiveness is our only hope of acceptance.

Second, anyone who is not yet a believer in Jesus Christ. If you are not yet a believer in our Lord Jesus, we are glad that you are here and we invite you to stay to the end of the service, but we ask that you do not take the bread and the wine when they are passed. Even better, I invite you to commit your life to Jesus today; you can do it in the quietness of your heart when we pray in a few minutes, and then you can share in the Lord's table with your fellow believers.

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7. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of God's love for us

Ultimately this celebration reminds us that it is only through God's love for us and through Christ's death for us that we can be forgiven and restored and adopted into God's family. A few minutes ago we sang "How Deep the Father's Love For Us" as an reminder of this truth. And the bread and the cup are another reminder of this truth. So when the bread and the cup are passed, hear God saying to you "I love you; take this bread" "I love you; take this cup". And as you take the bread and take the cup, give thanks in your heart to your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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8. The Lord's Supper is for our blessing

Ex 20:24 Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.

God promises a blessing to those who honor His name, and that is what we do when we remember His gift to us of His Son.

And what happened to the man who was saved by Maximilian Kolbe? It turns out that thanks to Father Kolbe's sacrifice, Francis Gay-ov-nichek survived Auschwitz and went on to live another 53 years, dying on 13th March

1995 at the age of 95. And he remembered his deliverer. Every year on August 14, the day of Father Kolbe's death, he went back to Auschwitz. He spent the next five decades paying homage to Father Kolbe, remembering and honoring the man who died on his behalf. Can we do any less?

The Lord's Supper

Let us hear again the words of our Lord:

1 Cor 11:23-29

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

After we have prayed for the bread, the servers will bring the bread to you where you are seated. We invite you to take a piece of bread and to hold it until everyone has been served, and we will then eat together to symbolize our unity as members of Christ's body. And if you are not yet a believer in our Lord Jesus, please just pass the plate without taking the bread.

Prayer of thanks for the bread: Most loving and merciful Father, we thank you for sending your Son Jesus to give his life as a sacrifice for our sins. We pray that we will receive this bread as your gift of love to us. Amen

Pass plates

Serve the servers

Jesus said "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." Let us eat with joy in grateful remembrance of His death for us.

As we pass the cup, please take a cup from the tray, drink it in remembrance of Christ's blood that was shed for you, and then return the cup to the tray before passing it to your neighbor.

Prayer (Ward or Dan)

Pass trays

Serve the servers

Close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for this remembrance of the death of your son and of your great love for us. Go with us now, we pray, that we may show worthily forth his death to the hurting world around us. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.