

"A TIME OF TESTING"

RAISED

INTRODUCTION

Several months ago following one of our communion services, one of our own people ~~put~~ this question to me: "How ought I to feel when I take communion?" Perhaps the question was due in part to the fact that the Lord's Supper did not mean as much to this person as she thought it ought to mean. She may have felt that her own mood had something to do with this. This may be a question that has come into your mind, too. "How ought I to feel when I take communion?" I've forgotten what I told the person, but I'm sure that whatever I said was unsatisfactory. I wonder if a straight-forward and satisfactory answer can be given. I don't think that there is a special set of feelings, a mood, which one can put on like a cloak.

But on the other hand, one ought never to approach this service of holy communion "cold" - that is, one ought never to come carelessly, casually, and hapazardly. We are dealing here with symbols that represent holy things; these symbols have nourished the lives of countless numbers across twenty centuries. The great Apostle, Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian Church, offered this rule for the individual's preparation of himself for communion:

"Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup....."

Suppose we think about his words here for a few moments before we share in the Sacrament.

DEVELOPMENT

To begin with, I think we must be very careful not to misinterpret what Paul is suggesting. He is not telling his friends at Corinth that before they are allowed to present themselves at the Lord's Table they must be able, after stringent self-examination, to declare themselves spiritually excellent and without moral blemish. I touch upon this because occasionally there are people who feel they ought not to take communion....they feel unworthy.....they feel they aren't "good enough" to receive it.....that it would be hypocritical for them to come forward. ~~Perhaps there have been times when you have felt this way.~~ Such feelings of unworthiness generally come, I think, from genuine spiritual sensitivity. But often it is a distorted sensitivity, and this feeling that one is not "good enough" to take communion can easily lead to a serious misunderstanding. May I remind you that the church was never meant to be a museum for saints so much as it was meant to be a hospital for sinners. And we misinterpret the church, we misinterpret the sacrament if we see it in some way as a symbol of man's goodness, with participation in it reserved for those who have achieved "honors" in the Christian way of life. If we insist on a standard of high excellence or of near perfection, who among us, really, is good enough to take Communion.

WHEN PAUL SAYS

When Paul declares: "Let a man examine himself" he is not demanding the kind of examination for which marks are given, but rather he is demanding the kind of examination which reveals the nature of that which it tests. He is not calling his reader to perfection, so much as he is calling them to confession. Confession, Paul declares, must

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

It is the custom of this church to observe the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of each month. We would invite all of you to receive the Sacrament here this hour, and trust that the occasion for you may be a time of spiritual rededication and reconsecration.

Both members and visiting friends alike are invited to the coffee hour that will be held following the service on Fellowship Hall. We are delighted to welcome those of you who are visitors, and would encourage you to introduce yourself to us and to leave with us a record of your visit by signing one of the Guest Books.

The announcements are listed for you in the bulletin. There is one announcement that fails to appear there and it has to do with the Colonial Dinner sponsored by the WSCS to be held on Friday evening February 15th. Tickets are on sale and we hope that many of you will plan to purchase yours today during the coffee hour.

Jesus said: IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVEN THAN IT IS TO RECEIVE.....