

Experiencing Eucharist

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I grew up attending Bible and Baptist churches; now I generally identify with the emerging church. So I've had quite a learning curve at the Episcopal seminary where I'm studying. Between balancing prayer books and hymnals and crash courses in chanting, I've frequently felt like a stranger in a strange land.

I am open to learning this new rhythm of worship, however foreign it feels at times. But I am discovering that I struggle with the observance of the Eucharist. My issue isn't theology but method: as I pray the same words each time I partake, I feel constrained and long for something more. I'm not bored or looking to be entertained, I just feel the need for our remembrance of Christ's sacrifice to reflect the infinite diversity of the body of Christ.

I didn't grow up with diversity in eucharistic practice. On the first Sunday of the month we were instructed to search our hearts, confess our sins and then grab an oyster cracker and a plastic

shot glass full of juice (always juice). Only in the last few years has the act of taking the bread and cup moved me to accept the call to live eucharistically in the world. This happened only when I saw the Eucharist set free from its traditional rituals.

In the house church I helped lead for a time, we closed with the Eucharist every week. In that small setting, the way we transitioned into sharing the bread and juice (yes, still juice) depended on the day's lesson. If we had explored the stories of Jesus' healings, our breaking of the bread would point us to how we could share our resources to help heal the body of Christ. In weeks where we talked about community, we would sit at a table and together mix the dough to bake our own bread.

We were the body of Christ, and the act of Eucharist became the vehicle through which we understood our role in that body. Breaking the bread and sharing the cup changed week to week--it assumed the role of shaping us into who we were called to be.

The church I attend now similarly re-imagines what it means to take and eat in remembrance of Jesus. In discussing Jesus' encounter with the disciples on the beach before the ascension, we partook of a communion of fish tacos--pushing us to reflect on the disciples' experience. In a recent new leaders' meeting, we were charged to humbly accept our call to serve the church through an invitation to partake in a humble communion of pretzel snack packs and juice boxes.

A recent worship gathering focused on us all being members of the body who have something to give. We were invited to an empty table. There the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 was told, with the interpretation that the miracle was that after seeing the boy's gift of bread and fish, the people shared what they had brought until they all had resources in abundance. So we were asked to share whatever we had with us--gum, granola bars, soft drinks, Goldfish, Altoids. The table overflowed with abundance, which we served to each other.

Eucharist pulls me into these moments of remembering what it means to be a disciple. It is ever evolving as it speaks to a church that is always advancing the kingdom of God. I know the stories I've told here may be offensive to some, and I respect the traditions that find

meaning in engaging Eucharist in one set way. But I've seen a world of meaning open up when the Eucharist is allowed to be as dynamic and diverse as our creative and infinite God--the God I respond to in remembrance when I take and eat.