

“Do You Have a Favorite Table?”

John 12:27-33

Communion Devotion by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

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Do you have a favorite table? I have three, and the first two are from my childhood.

The metal table and chairs that sat in the kitchen in the farm house I grew up in is very special to me. Around this table is where I first experienced community in the form of a loving family. Every morning and evening the six of us, my mom and dad and my three brothers and I, would gather at this table to nourish our bodies and spirits.

My grandparents' more formal dining room table did for my extended family what that metal table did for my immediate family. This table was a prominent part of Sunday dinners and holidays, even though the kids sat at a nearby card table or the kitchen table.

Jackie and I purchased a small oak table soon after we married that sat in our kitchen during our children's earliest years. It was the first table all three kids sat around as we began building community with them. That table has been handed down to several young family members and is still in the family.

I am confident you have some favorite tables, too, which hold special memories for you. Would you include the communion table on your list? I would. The communion table has always been special to me in every church I have served.

The beautiful table which sits at our altar was given to the church by Alice Horn and her family in memory of Alice's husband, William Murray Horn. It was dedicated on October 27, 2002, months after Bill died. The carpenter who designed and built it was present in that service.

Each week, our children begin our service by bringing in symbols of our faith--a lighted candle, a cross and the Bible—and placing them on this sacred table. Today, this white walnut table holds two more symbols of our faith, the bread and the cup.

Why are we so drawn to this table? What is the attraction for us?

While every communion table tells a story and has a special place in the hearts of many members, what sits on this table is what draws us to it. The trays filled with pieces of bread and the cups holding the juice tell a story of their own. They speak to us about the life, death and resurrection of our Lord.

What stands out most in this story? For John, it was Jesus' compassion and courage. This good man walked the dusty Palestinian roads listening to the stories of the forgotten and ignored, responding to their plight with words of encouragement and deeds of mercy.

In addition, he openly spoke truth to power on behalf of the people he met going from village to village. Eventually, he was arrested and crucified because he continued to speak out against injustice and speak up for those who had no voice at the table where decisions were made.

Yes, Jesus was a man of deep compassion and great courage, two traits that always attract our attention. This is what led Jesus to declare around the temple days before he died, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (John 12:32).

Jesus was right, wasn't he? Two thousand years later, we are still drawn to this courageous and compassionate man. His story has been passed down from generation to generation, as it will continue to be.

The first Sunday of each month, we gather around this table to recall that story and remember his life, death and resurrection. Each time we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we highlight his compassion and courage, and we remember the impact his sacrifice has had upon us.

As we gather today, I encourage you to express gratitude to God for sending His son our way. Let God know how Jesus' life has changed yours.

There is something else I want you to do this morning as you approach this table. **Thank God for the compassionate and courageous people around you who have followed in Jesus' footsteps and inspired you.**

Who would that be for you? Who are the selfless people that have touched your life by their compassion and courage?

Who reached out to you during one of the most critical times of your life? Who took a chance on you when others had given up? Who put their life on the line to save yours?

I know you haven't forgotten them. We never forget people who show up when we need them most. Thank God for them, too, when you take the bread and cup today.

There is something else I want you to do as we gather around this special table. **Think about who needs your help right now.**

What family member or friend is going through a tough time and needs you to stand by their side? What can you do this week to lift their spirit and help them through this ordeal? Ask God to help you do it as you hold the bread and cup you will be served in a few minutes.

