

## At the Table of the Lord

*In the house of God there is always the table of the Lord.  
~ Alexander Campbell*

In the spring of 1809 Campbell was a student in Glasgow, Scotland, waiting to join his father in America. The Presbyterian sect, to which the Campbells belonged, was about to observe the yearly rite of communion. In the days before the event, church elders customarily paid a visit to every member of the congregation to determine their worthiness to receive communion. Those found deserving were given a small silver token to be presented at the table, allowing them to partake of communion. Campbell felt strongly that this was wrong. He was convinced that no one had the right to determine another person's worthiness to share in the Lord's Table. On the day of communion, he waited until everyone else had redeemed their tokens before stepping forward. Facing the elders, he placed his token on the table, then turned and walked out. If the table belongs to Christ, he reasoned, then no man has a right to judge who is worthy to partake and who is not?

The Table of the Lord stands at the very heart of Christian worship. ***It is the place where we meet Jesus.*** Campbell envisioned the Lord's Supper as a time of great joy “when disciples are honored with a seat at the King's table,” where they “eat in his presence and in honor of his love.” Jesus is the host of this table. It is he who invites us to share the meal. In his presence we experience the joy of *knowing* that he is alive!

We remember his sacrifice on the cross, but at the Table, we celebrate his triumph over death and his continuing presence with us. At the table we are renewed in hope and the assurance of the coming fullness of his kingdom. At the table we worshipfully draw near to Jesus and seek to become like him. Division and strife fall away as he gathers us near and lovingly shapes us into the family of God—a family where every member has a place of honor—a family where brothers and sisters esteem each other more than themselves—a family where no one is excluded and God's abundance is shared by all.

On the night of his betrayal and arrest, Jesus prayed for this very unity. In that most anguished of moments, he prayed for us and for our oneness. He asked God to bless “all those who will believe in me... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me... may they be one as we are one... that they may be brought to complete unity” (John 17:20-23). Surely, this fervent plea of our Lord should resonate within us in all that we do and say. Paul reminds us that it was for this purpose that Christ suffered and died on the cross -- to break down the barriers of division, to put to death enmity and strife, to bring peace, and to reconcile all people in one body (Ephesians 2:13-18). Jesus himself holds us together as a people by his mighty love.

In *Come to the Table*, John Mark Hicks writes that the table is “the place where the church testifies to the world how it transcends all worldly distinctions. In the church men and women sit at the table together. In the church nations sit at the table together. In the church rich and poor sit at the table together. The oneness of the body, with all it's... diversity is given visible expression when in the church, people who are divided in the world, sit at one table and eat from one bread.”

Thomas Campbell described it beautifully when he called the Lord's Supper “***that great ordinance of unity and love.***” Tonight as we celebrate the Great Communion with Christian brothers and sisters from the other streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement, we give voice to the belief that the Table of the Lord is greater than any one group of people; it is, perhaps, “as wide as the gates of heaven itself.”