

Proclaiming the Lord's humanity (Maundy Thursday) (1 Corinthians 11:23-36)

Paul offers a meantime ethic, a witness of the death Jesus still endures until death disappears in his return.

by [Wes D. Avram](#)

March 29, 2021

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

Paul's account of the Last Supper is read on Maundy Thursday. It's remembered in other communion liturgies, too.

The last sentence of the account has always intrigued me. Paul confidently declares that as often as the Corinthians (and so we too) eat of the bread and drink of the cup they (we) "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

I grew up an Episcopalian acolyte, tending to ritual doings in our formal Eucharistic prayer. I wondered what we were proclaiming. When I experienced the even more solemn old Presbyterian celebration of the memorial meal, I wondered all the more.

We experience, for sure. But do we proclaim, shout, or herald? Those words bring rooftops to my mind, but not so much our liturgies.

But here and there I've sensed it, the Eucharist a rejoicing feast of thanksgiving with music and color, smiles and rejoicing, as a welcoming meal for all, with no one asking who's in and who's out. There was some proclaiming going on in those services! They felt more like it!

But are even those enough to follow Paul's lead? In those grander Eucharistic theologies, we are indeed enjoying a foretaste of a meal imagined as a metaphor for God's future promise of reconciled welcome, with plenty for all and true community. But for Paul, we're not just proclaiming something in the future, when "he comes." We're proclaiming his *death*, and we're doing it *until* he comes.

There's a meantime ethic here, a witness to each other and to the world of the death Jesus once endured (unimaginable without his resurrection) and still endures (in his resurrection) now, until death disappears in his return. The proclamation is of a truth that is for now, in between, *until*.

And the word for death, *thanatos*, has overtones of *humanity* as well. It's mortality. It's the human as the one who dies, by which we mean the one who *knows* she dies. So shouting, announcing, and heralding Jesus' death is also a way of proclaiming what he shares with us in his humanity, his living-knowing-death.

The Eucharist is a remembering of the meal Jesus shared with his disciples. It is a meal of communion we share with each other. It is a little foretaste of what God wants for all humanity in the future God has promised. And it is also a way we urgently proclaim, energetically embody, enthusiastically describe in action God's intimacy with us, God's humanity.

Hunger, making, sharing. Ordering, gathering, telling. Enjoying, praying, fumbling with the steps. Speaking of bodies and blood and breaking and pouring. Eating and drinking to life. Wondering who's not here and going out to find them. Being left wanting more. Enjoying Christ's humanity until he comes in glory.