

**Grace Upon Grace July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016**

**Barbara Stevens**

**Ok everyone, while I take a deep breath and try to calm my nerves, it would be helpful if you would all just smile at me. On a personal note, just thought I would mention that today is Nick and my 29<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. I'm here today speaking because both Jesse and Katy are at camp. Last time I had the courage to stand up here was August 2005. Just so you don't have to do the math that was 11 years ago. I'm certainly not a trained Theologian, so it was suggested I talk about something about which I am passionate. So, I thought what the hey, let's talk about something easy like Communion, or the Eucharist, or the Sacrament or as our founder Campbell like to call it, the Ordination. You can use whichever term you like, they all mean the same.**

**I've been an Elder off and on since 1990. I tried to figure out how many times I've served at this table. With years off, it brings it down to about 20 years actively serving. Being somewhat conservative, I came up with at least 150 times I've been blessed to serve. This is in no way bragging, just giving you an idea of why Communion is so important to me personally. Since 2004 all of my prayers and meditations are on my computer. The other day I read through them and**

the overwhelming theme was God's love for us, his forgiveness, his Grace, and the Joy of believing. Grace upon Grace, Joy upon Joy, Forgiveness upon Forgiveness, Love upon Love, were the opening words in two of my meditations. That was about the only thing that was the same. They took off in totally different directions from there but ended up reinforcing God's abundant love for us.

I've also talked a lot about the fact that Communion is not just between God and ourselves, but includes not only those who are physically present with us, but the church as a whole. As far as my research shows, communion and baptism are the only two ordinances that have been with us since the early church. When we take communion it binds us to others in the church worldwide. I read a quote once that still seems especially relevant in these times, "we live in a broken world. Inside us there beats a heart that has been broken more times than we care to remember. But there is always someone to help us pick up the shattered pieces and begin the process of repair; sometimes with glue, sometimes with love, sometimes with miracles, *but always with God*".

I've shared before that I spent ten years as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or the Mormon Church when married to my second husband. I went from being raised a Disciple to trying to convert to a radically different belief system. I tried, really hard, to be the perfect Mormon. I taught Sunday School, ran the young woman's program and even ran the camp for young women. No matter how hard I tried, I felt like a square peg in a round hole. My stress level was off the charts. There were times I would break out in hives and had other physical problems that were all stress related. Not only did I not fit in, but my boys had a hard time too. Not so much because of the belief system, but because they made decisions that were not in line with church teaching. The year I turned 40 I decided to leave my husband because of extreme marital difficulties. Because we had been married in the Temple in Oakland, the church decided to make an example of me because I worked with the young women, and excommunicated me. That was one of the worst and best things that has ever happened to me. Worse because it made me feel that I was damaged goods, that God didn't love me. Best because it eventually brought me back to Chico First Christian. My hives and other stress related problems stopped soon after.

I certainly do not want to leave you with the impression that there is anything wrong with the Mormon church. They do a lot of things right. It was just wrong for me because of my disciple background. Thank goodness for Wendell Pew and Carolyn Reed. After almost a year of trying to heal, I knew I had to start attending church. I was really missing it. So, I sat down and talked with Wendell. I had two questions. 1. Did the Disciples ever excommunicate people, even if they killed someone. (That was worse thing I could come up with), and 2. Was there ever a time you are not allowed to take communion. Wendell put my mind at ease. He even offered to sign something for me.

The whole reason for me sharing this little snippet from my life is my right to take communion at the Mormon church was taken away from me. It had never dawned on me that this gift from God could be taken away. Mormons, like the Catholics and some other religions believe you have to be a member in good standing to partake. What I love about our Communion Table is that all are invited. *In this church we really mean, "All Means All".*

The first time someone asked me to be an Elder I went home and cried. Firstly, I was finally able to accept that God does

love me. I didn't feel like damaged goods any longer. Secondly after having been rejected by one church, I felt loved and accepted by this church.

For some reason, in my mind, I always think of my mom when I think of the Passover meal. There was nothing she liked better than having friends over for dinner. She was a great hostess, always planning things down to the last detail. Much as Peggy Davidson does today. I think sometimes we forget that Jesus planned this Passover meal. He told Peter and John just how to find this certain home. They were to meet with a man carrying water and follow him. This in itself seems a miracle. Remember, there was no running water. People usually went to a local well to draw water. A lot of people would have been preparing for the Passover meal. I'm sure there was more than one man carrying water back to his master's house. But the two disciples knew which one to follow. Then you have to wonder just how did Jesus know this one home had this large, furnished upper room and would be available for Passover.

Then when all were gathered together he sat with them and said "it is *with fervent desire* that I eat this Passover meal

with you before I suffer; for I say to you I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. Did you hear what He says, it is with fervent or eager desire that he wants to eat this meal with you. Bet you thought you would miss your Greek definition for the day while Katy and Jesse are gone. But I was curious as to its deeper meaning of this passage. The Greek word for Fervent desire is *epithoomeeah*. Katy explained it means a deep longing that involves both heart and soul. I think he still has that deep yearning to meet with him at the Table. In my mind, Jesus is always the third person present at the table. He stands between the two Elders with arms outstretched, saying, come eat, this is my body broken for you; come drink, this is my blood poured out so that every one of your sins is forgiven. Lay your burdens at my table, come eat.

I cannot tell you the peace that hearing or speaking the “words of institution” brings to me. Hearing them is like a salve for my soul. To me they are like a prayer. They acknowledge who presides at the table, the sacrifice made for us.

That is why I am so grateful to be an Elder. At this table we are reminded that Jesus is the host. At his table I can sit

quietly and hear God whispering in my ear. At his table I can be sure of God's abundant love, that we are all worthy to be his children, that this table is open for all.

## Prayers for the People

Read prayer requests

Ask for Joy and concerns from congregation

Let's take a moment and breathe in God Love. Slowly expel your breath and take in a deeper breath remembering God's love for you. Slowly exhale. Let's sit for a minute in quiet prayer centering ourselves.

Loving God, we come to you at this time with a sure knowledge that you are always there. You know what is in our heart sometimes even before we do.

We thank you for being the Friend who will never leave us or forsake us.

We thank you for being our Teacher, showing us the way we should go.

**We thank you for being our Protector, helping us stand firm in You and most of all we thank you for being our Savior.**

**Now, we worship you as we say the Lord's Prayer.**

### **Invitation**

**Believe in the Good News of God's abounding Love in Jesus Christ. If you would like to join a church that will walk with you on your Faith journey, then I would invite you to come forward and make this your church home. We welcome all who would like to worship with us.**

**Introduce song**

### **Benediction**



**Let's join together and drink of the cup of salvation.**

**May God Bless you and Keep you. May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God give you Peace.**