

NOURISHMENT FOR A NEW YEAR
John 1: 1-9
A Communion Meditation by Thomas R. McKibbens
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Having just ended a very difficult year, many in our congregation feel a sense of winter fatigue when winter has only just begun. We may need a little nourishment for the journey ahead. So we begin this year with communion on the first Sunday of 2009.

I

It's not much— that little piece of bread and barely a taste of the juice. It's like someone coming home from a dinner party with a sample of the food that was served. "Try this, we say, "it was really good!" And so we take a little bit of the food and imagine what the whole meal was like, dish after dish, spread out buffet style.

When you take the Lord's Supper on this first Sunday of the New Year, think about this as a small portion of the feast. Savor the aftertaste of the bread on your tongue and the aroma of the grapes as you drink. Imagine partaking of that first Lord's Supper in the upper room, along with the disciples. Think of it this way: while the disciples aren't here to bring home a sample, it's like they saved some for us so we could have a taste

and feel a part of the great fellowship of Christ's table that now circles the world.

Examine yourselves, say the scriptures, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup (I Cor. 11: 28). So we have a great tradition of self-examination before the Supper. There are some things we want to be rid of as the year begins. This is the time for that.

Did you see the news about %Good Riddance Day+in New York just before New Year's Day? They came from near and far, carrying the sorts of things that bring the worst of memories: one woman brought a report of three failed test scores from her disappointing CPA exams; another person brought an annual report from her stock broker outlining her year's losses. The line snaked around the north end of Times Square as people waited to place their bad grades, bad memories, bad financial news, and anything else that was good riddance into an industrial sized shredder.

II

It's not a bad idea to ritualize a kind of cleaning out of our life as the New Year begins. There are some things we need to just leave behind. Do you have old resentments that you need to feed into a spiritual shredder, resentments that keep coming up and interfering with relationships? Are you burdened with guilt over something that has long

since been forgiven, but you have chosen to live out of guilt? Maybe this is the time to learn from that experience, regret that experience, but feed the guilt into a spiritual shredder and move on with life! Do you have prejudices that have kept you from accepting others as loved by God just the way God loves you? Perhaps now is the time to feed those prejudices into a spiritual shredder!

This is a new beginning. We symbolize the new beginning by changing an eight to a nine, and we all concentrate on learning to write a new date on our documents. It is a new beginning.

In the beginning, says the Gospel of John in its very first words. And it is written that way to sound just like the beginning of the book of Genesis, which also starts with the same words. But this gospel continues in a different way: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. The writer of the Gospel of John tied two words together: *beginning* and *God*. The reality is that God preceded us and will succeed us. Our little time is a blip, a moment, a flash in the dark, and for most of us, our hope is that we might make some difference for good in our little moment in time.

III

Just as we need physical nourishment in our moment in time, religious faith provides spiritual nourishment. It, too, is needed. It is no accident that the fundamental symbolic act of Christian worship is a meal. No other symbolic act can more adequately picture our need for spiritual nourishment.

Years ago theologian Martin Buber taught that no one exists in isolation. There is always what he called the I-Thou relationship. We are always in relationship with others- our family, our friends, our loved ones, even if they are not present. The quality of our lives is tied to others.

Communion beautifully symbolizes that reality. We take the bread and wine together; it is a communal act. Yet we are also individuals before God, taking the bread and wine as individual persons in the presence of others. This symbolizes the fact that we are both individual and community.

IV

Years ago, when we were studying in Scotland, we discovered that there are certain groups of Scots Presbyterians who take communion only once a year. And in the far north of Scotland, there are some who take communion only once in a lifetime!

But like most Protestant churches, we share in this meal once a month, reminding ourselves that nourishment is an ongoing need. It is a tiny portion, but it is part of a great feast, a feast that gives us health and wholeness of the spirit. It nourishes us for a new year.