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# Keeping the Feast: The Socializing Dynamics of the Eucharist, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, and Enabling Boundaries for Individuals with Disabilities<sup>#</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Faithfully participating in the Eucharist has been a struggle for the body of Christ since the formation of the Church (1 Cor 11:17-34). According to Paul, the Eucharist, as a cruciform meal was intended to perform socializing dynamics that pushed against rather than reinforced social fragmentation and marginalization within the Corinthian body (Gerd Theissen and Mark T. Finney). The meal offered the church in Corinth a way to enable boundaries by giving the church a cruciform location for its identity recognition, moral formation, and missional vocation (Yung Suk Kim, Matthew Meyer Boulton, and Joseph H. Hellerman). Like the church in Corinth, the late modern church continues to struggle with faithfully “keeping the feast.” One example of this struggle that this paper explores is the tension that exists between many church’s practices of the Eucharist and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. The late modern church’s struggle with ableism has ancient roots. Some argue (Saul M. Olyan) that it is present even within the biblical data itself, while others (Amos Yong) argue that ableism is caused by misinterpretations of the biblical data from “normative perspectives” which exclude disability as normal and therefore give way to the stigmatization and marginalization of individuals with disabilities in the church. I argue that when Scripture is read as a whole it offers a more hopeful picture for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, particularly when it is read in light of the cruciform arc of the redemptive story which is symbolized in the Eucharist meal (Nancy Eiesland, Grant Macaskill, and Edward Foley). 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, with its cruciform picture of the Eucharist feast, offers the late modern church a heuristic model for how to read the biblical data to enable boundaries for individuals with disabilities.

## KEYWORDS

boundaries; Corinth;  
cruciform; disability;  
Eucharist; stigmatization

## Introduction

From the Apostolic period to the present day, followers of Christ have wrestled with faithfully practicing the Eucharist meal. Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 of the conflicting social dynamics within the church

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in Corinth illustrates this point. The first half of this article will explore how the sacrifice of Christ, remembered by the church in the Eucharist feast, creates a socializing dynamic that expands communal margins allowing the church to live as a more inclusive, hospitable community that embraces diversity (Kim, 2014, pp. 23–32). This communal expansion was needed in Corinth, as Gerd Theissen argued. Theissen documented the ways the social and economic stratifications of the Hellenistic city of Corinth challenged how the body of Christ participated in the Eucharist (Theissen, 1982, pp. 69–174). With Theissen, this article claims that the Eucharist as a cruciform meal re-socialized the Corinthian body, pushing against rather than reinforcing the social fragmentation and marginalization brought about by the honor and shame culture of the Ancient Mediterranean world (Theissen, 1982, pp. 145–174). The Eucharist offered the church in Corinth a way to enable a new set of social boundaries by giving the community a cruciform location for its identity recognition. With Christ as Host, all who come through him are welcome at the feast as guests of honor. The power dynamics of old exclusionary social barriers were moved by a new center, enabling access without the social or economic stigma attached to an individual's value.

The second half of this article, using a contextual reading of Scripture from a disability theology perspective, will argue that the church in late modernity continues to wrestle with faithfully “keeping the feast.” The struggle is demonstrated not merely in ongoing economic divisions within the church but in the presence of social stratifications that marginalize individuals based upon, among other things, the presence of ableism. Disability theologian Amos Yong offers us a working definition of ableism in comparison to racism.

So, just as racism is a set of cultural attitudes and sociopolitical structures which privilege the dominant race over ethnic minorities, and just as sexism is a similar set of cultural presuppositions and sociopolitical structures that perpetuate male domination over women, so *ableism* names the discriminatory attitudes, negative stereotypes, and sociopolitical and economic structures and institutions that together function to exclude people with disabilities from full participation in society (Yong, 2011, p. 11).

Ableism creates tensions for many Christian traditions between their practice of the Eucharist and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, as documented by Nancy L. Eiesland (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 107–120) and Edward Foley (Foley, 1994, pp. 73–130). Contributing to these tensions is the way individual voices within the biblical data, at times, “stigmatize and...marginalize disabled persons through their representations, thereby contributing to social differentiation and inequality” (Olyan, 2008, p. 119). The categories of disability and ableism are modern categories that cannot

find perfect correspondence within the ancient near eastern context of Scripture. Therefore, they require care when applied to ancient texts. I will argue in agreement with Saul M. Olyan that the problem of ableism does nevertheless affect certain portions of the biblical data and that individuals with disabilities do inhabit the world of Scripture. Disability and ableism are not merely eisegetical ideas inserted by modern readers but are observable in the “othering” categories present in the ancient dyads employed by the writers of Scripture. I will also argue that the individual voices of the writers of Scripture are not the *only* or *primary* relationship the Bible has with disability, nor should they be the way we assess Scripture’s response to the problem of ableism. A careful reading of Scripture acknowledges the presence of constructive voices that affirm disability, alongside the divine Voice of the Bible that speaks across the canon on the matter of disability. The Bible’s witness to disability has recently been explored book-by-book across the canon of Scripture (Melcher et al., 2017, pp. 13–14). When reading the Bible as a singular narrative with a diversity of voices within that have a symphonic quality, the Bible offers a constructive treatment of disability and a response to ableism. The cruciform arc of that larger narrative recasts human liminality and weakness. Furthermore, a comparative philological reading of the Bible’s handling of individuals with disabilities presents them in a more positive light than their depiction in other Ancient Near Eastern texts of the period (Olyan, 2008, p. 120). Finally, at the close of this article, I will argue that I Corinthians 11:17-34 offers a heuristic model for how the biblical data enables boundaries for individuals with disabilities so that all the body of Christ can keep the feast.

### **The “Body of Christ” in Corinth, Socializing Dynamics, and the Eucharist**

Christ’s death upon the cross has shaped the two central sacramental rituals of the early Christian movement (baptism and the Eucharist). Paul encouraged the use of baptism and the Eucharist as a way for the people of God to remember, ritually reenact, and liturgically retell the story of Christ (Roozeboom, 2014, web article no page numbers). Baptism and the Eucharist accomplish three things for Paul. First, the sacraments reminded the early followers of Christ of how they became one with Christ and his body. Second, the sacraments helped the early followers of Christ participate in their union with Christ and his body. Their union was attested to not only in the cognitive agreements they shared about the nature of God’s righteousness in Christ present in their verbal confession of faith but in the bodily practices of the sacraments they performed together. Third, their corporate performance of the sacramental rituals publicly announced that

at the heart of their early movement was the death and resurrection of Christ (Jeremias, 1935, pp. 15–25; Witherington, 1994, p. 307).

An example of this is present in the church of Corinth. The Corinthian community, as a social expression of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12–31, vs. 27, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ), participated in a cultic retelling of the story of Christ's death and resurrection as they partook of the Eucharist meal. In that meal, they imitated the story of Christ's death and resurrection in the social relationships they performed. Yung-Suk Kim has argued that Paul viewed the Corinthians' imitation of Christ "not [as] a mere copy of his life but [as] a participation in his life" (Kim, 2013, p. 27). As they performed the Eucharist meal, they participated in a *paideia* rooted in the story of how Christ's death leads into his resurrection. A *paideia*, according to Matthew Myer Boulton, is a "“formative education,” a sanctifying disciplinary, recuperative path, and in that sense a humble and humbling return...to full humanity in Christ's image" (Boulton, 2011, p. 4). When the body of Christ faithfully keeps the feast, they participate in a *paideia* that signifies how Christ makes all things new by making one out of many bodies.

At the time of Paul's writing, the Corinthian body struggled with dying to their self-glory and private interests in how they participated in the meal. The wealthier members of society engorged themselves, arriving early and consumed the better parts of the meal as an act of self-glory, while the poorer members were left emaciated. Their meal practice was a non-cruciform *paideia*, evident in the retention of social hierarchies that created communal margins rather than hospitable centers. In the Second Temple Period, communal meals were more about social status than the nourishment of the body. As Joel B. Green has argued, "In the dynamics of the ancient Mediterranean world, mealtime was a social event whose significance far outdistanced the need to satisfy one's hunger" (Green, 1995, p. 87). The church's unfaithfulness in Corinth was not merely the result of theological confusion over the nature of the Eucharist, but the result of social values that were creating conflicts within the church embodied in how the meal was shared.

Biblical scholars and theologians have explored the question of the nature of the meal thoroughly. From the mid-1970s to the early-1980s, Gerd Theissen (Theissen, 1974; Theissen, 1982) popularized interpreting the ecclesial conflicts in the Corinth body through the use of socio-rhetorical criticism. His reflections culminated in his book, *Essays on Corinth: The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*. Theissen's reading became the dominant way the conflicts over the Eucharist in I Corinthians were interpreted. James D. G. Dunn offers us a summarization of Theissen's reading.

The problem was not so much theological as social, the problems of a socially stratified community. The conflict was basically between rich and poor Christians, between those who had enough food and those who had nothing (11:22). The rich were going ahead with their meal before the poor arrived (11:33). Presumably, the common meals were hosted by affluent Christian patrons in their homes. Following the practice of the time, those of higher social status likely kept the best food for their social peers and provided poorer quality food for their social inferiors and clients (Dunn, 1997, pp. 77–78).

Theissen's interpretation of the Eucharist conflicts in the Corinthian community remained largely unchallenged until 1998 when J.J. Meggitt's (1998) work, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, adopted a different understanding of the type of meal the church was sharing. According to Meggitt, contra Theissen the church in Corinth was not hosting a formal banquet meal but was instead practicing something closer to how the sacramental elements are presented within many modern Christian worship services. As smaller symbolic elements within a formal worship service.

Meggitt's criticisms of Theissen do not appear to have moved the more significant body of scholarship away from reading the tensions in the Eucharist as conflicts due to social differentiation issues between rich and poor at a social feast (Horrell, 1996, p. 154). His criticisms did influence a variety of qualifications to the finer points of Theissen's thesis. Andrew McGowan's words of caution regarding the ability of scholarship to define those finer details of the Eucharist ritual performance too rigidly in late antiquity are an expression of that (McGowan, 1999). McGowan says, "There may have been a plurality of forms of the celebration of the Eucharist within the early Christ-movement" (Finney, 2012, p. 172, fn140). Peter Oakes has convincingly argued that this "plurality of forms of the celebration of the Eucharist" was due, at least in part, to the different types of domestic spaces the ritual was performed within (Horrell & Still, 2009, p. 35).

This article will follow Mark T. Finney's interpretation of the social conflicts in the Corinthian body. Finney outlines the conflict in the following manner,

Although some food may have been provided for the poor this was probably very little, and certainly of lower quality, and the result was that as one member went hungry another had the opportunity of becoming drunk (11.21). Herein lay the *σχίσματα*: although the believers eat together in the same space they are yet separated into antagonistical social groups demarcated by cultural concepts of appropriating honour. So, too, as the groups of wealthier enjoy their feast in the presence of the hungry poor, their arrogant display of [indifference]...serves to shame and humiliate (*καταισχύνειν*, 11.22) those who have nothing...their disdain for the poor is, at the same time, a visible demonstration of contempt for the body of Christ (Finney, 2012, p. 174).

The social factors present in the Eucharist conflicts in Corinth were allowed to go unchallenged by the narrative of Christ because the Corinthian church, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, had chosen to locate their identity in the honor and shame narratives of the Ancient Mediterranean world. Those narratives, in turn, left the Corinthian body with a non-cruciform communal ethic instead of the story of Christ circumscribing all human attempts at normalization (Macaskill, 2017, p. 6). The cruciform identity of the gathering became obscured by social fragmentations sustained by social commodification's formed according to the flesh.

What the church in Corinth needed, according to Yung-Suk Kim, was "A new conception of community...[that reimagines] anew the Pauline "body of Christ" as a social site for realizing the ethical, holistic, and life-giving potentialities of Christ's life and death" (Kim, 2013, p. 31). To grasp the *paideia* of "a new conception of community," the church in Corinth needed to perform the death of Christ sacramentally as a ritual that formed them into a "cruciform community" with a new center and more gracious boundaries. Rather than look at the Eucharist meal as a "private dinner" with all the expected socio-economic division's residents within Corinth were accustomed to, Paul called the Corinthian church to receive the meal as the "Lord's Dinner" open and free to all (Winter, 2001, pp. 154–158). Performing the Eucharist meal as an open meal nullified the social hierarchies of Corinth's residents. In the "Lord's Dinner" no one was known as slave or free, rather all were one new creation in Christ (Galatians 3:28, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος...πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἓστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The social boundaries that had been economically "disabling" were in the Eucharist enabled so the community could enjoy a life of mutual honor, for Christ had taken upon himself their shame and humiliation upon the cross so that they could be clothed with his honor and glory.

It is important to note that while the faithful performance of the Eucharist was economically inclusive, it was cultically exclusive as individuals could only be admitted to the table through Jesus as Christ. Participating in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus as the Messiah who was crucified and resurrected meant that the Eucharistic meal ritual created important cultic boundaries for the early Christian movement. As Wayne A. Meeks has argued, "Thus, Paul uses the symbolism of the Supper ritual not only to enhance the internal coherence, unity, and equality of the Christian group, but also to protect its boundaries vis-à-vis other kinds of cultic association" (Meeks, 1983, p. 160). Acknowledging this should cause us to pause when we speak of the Eucharist as a ritual that enables boundaries or provides a model for inclusion. While the Eucharist certainly

does achieve that, the meaning of “enabled boundaries” and “inclusion” should be carefully defined. Inclusion is, after all, not an ancient term but a modern one fraught with philosophical underpinnings. As Brian Brock has pointed out, “the language of inclusion is not originally biblical, nor is it found in traditional Christian theology, but originated within late-modern secular liberal political and educational philosophies” (Brock, 2011, p. 351). The Eucharist for Paul performed both roles, that of *social inclusion* and that of *cultic exclusion*. With Brock’s caution in mind, now that we have explored the honor and shame dyads of the Ancient Mediterranean world, we can examine dyads that often go unnamed and unacknowledged within the late modern western world. Dyads like abled and disabled. These modern dyads form part of the challenge that any proposal which seeks to enable social boundaries for individuals with disabilities must address.

### **“Keeping the Feast,” Enabling Boundaries, and Disability**

The question of how to “keep the feast” faithfully continues to challenge the church in late modernity. That struggle is demonstrated in the ongoing economic hierarchies within the church symbolized in who presides over the Eucharist feast and in the continuing presence of social stratifications that marginalize individuals based upon, among other things, the presence of ableism (Fulkerson & Shoop, 2015, pp. 1–20). The church in late modernity has not fully read Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in light of his contribution to disability concerns, though some are marking out what such a reading looks like (Brock & Wannewetsch, 2018, pp. 27–127). What would such a reading offer? It has been argued by some disability theologians, like Amos Yong, that Paul offers the late modern church a *disability-friendly* ecclesiology. Sadly, the church’s reception of that ecclesiology is another matter (Yong, 2011, pp. 90–96). As Yong argues, “Thus it is the responsibility of the whole body to end the stigmatization and marginalization of people with disabilities” (Yong, 2011, p. 95). The church can do the work of hearing Paul well in how the church practices the Eucharist.

Some disability theologians have remarked that social exclusions have persisted because they are rooted in unobserved sacramental ableist practices that challenge the faithful performance of the Eucharist meal (Stiff, 2019, pp. 140–144). As Nancy Eiesland argued, “In the church, the body practices are the physical discourse of inclusion and exclusion. These practices reveal the hidden “membership rolls,” those whose bodies matter in the shaping of liturgies and services” (Eiesland, 1994, p. 112). What allows ableism to go uncontested in the church today? According to



Eiesland, the answer lies at least in part in the biblical data regarding disability.

The biblical data has not always been interpreted in life-giving ways for individuals with disabilities. As has already been noted, certain voices within biblical texts “stigmatize and...marginalize disabled persons through their representations, thereby contributing to social differentiation and inequality” (Olyan, 2008, p. 119). According to Saul M. Olyan, this occurs in the biblical data in several ways. First, writers can at times represent individuals with disabilities, or particular forms of human disability, through the use of dual dative oppositions such as defective/whole, clean/unclean, and holy/common. Leviticus 21:16-23 is perhaps the most notable cultic example of this in its exclusion of individuals with “defects” from priestly service in the temple.

Say to Aaron: ‘For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God.<sup>18</sup>No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; <sup>19</sup>no man with a crippled foot or hand, <sup>20</sup>or who is a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. <sup>21</sup>No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the food offerings to the Lord. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. <sup>22</sup>He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; <sup>23</sup>yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the Lord, who makes them holy (NIV).

Olyan gets to the heart of the problem when he argues, “When deployed by the writers of our texts, these oppositional discourses function to create unequal categories of persons. For example, those whose bodies are understood by the text as lacking “defects” (*mûmîm*) are privileged in any number of ways over those whose bodies are cast as “defective”” (Olyan, 2008 p. 5). This is akin to Jeremy Schipper’s observation that when Leviticus speaks of skin anomalies in chapters 13 and 14, the writer excluded certain people from cultic service based upon physical differences. The concern of the priestly code of Leviticus was not merely designed to protect public health by sequestering off individuals with skin anomalies. It was concerned with how skin anomalies made a sacred space ritually impure because of a visible bodily defect (Schipper, 2011, p. 40). Second, voices within Scripture at times group individuals with disabilities alongside other marginal groups like the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and the alien as objects of “charity” (see for example in the Hebrew Bible Job 29:12-16 and Psalm 146:5-9; and in the New Testament Luke 14:12-24) (Olyan, 2008, p. 6). Charity is a difficult biblical concept. When charity is offered from God, it is often a matter of righting social injustices, but charity has been marked by a history of abuse when provided by the

community of faith. Of the three examples provided by Olyan, this is the weakest. Third, and finally, many of these associated categories create further stigmatizations by occasionally (though not always, see for example John 9:1-12) treating the presence of disabilities in biblical characters' as the consequence of a divine curse upon personal sin; or at times by describing the worthlessness of idols as gods who are disabled, in comparison to YHWH who is characterized as not partaking in the false gods "bodily impairments" (Psalm 115:5-8).

Olyan's arguments offer a clear depiction of the problem of ableism in certain voices within the biblical data. However, the negative voices present in individual authors should not be read in isolation but canonically within the larger redemptive-historical narrative of the Bible with its cruciform arc. Doing so will allow for a more hopeful witness to disability in the Bible. My approach is different than Amos Yong's. Yong interprets the "proposed" negative voices as deriving from misinterpretations of Scripture. He says these misinterpretations are due to a "normate perspective, an understanding of God as the One who is without blemish, and an associated understanding of all blemishes and diseases, as well as the people who have them, as being unholy, imperfect, and ultimately symbolic of human disobedience against God's law" (Yong, 2011, p. 24). For Yong, one can address ableism by finding alternative models of reading the Hebrew Bible. These models allow the reader to become more aware of how a normate perspective from outside may affect the reader's interpretation of biblical characters with disabilities (Yong, 2011, p. 29). While I find Yong's approach helpful to a degree, cultural prejudices do affect a reader's interpretation of Scripture; I believe Olyan offers a more faithful reading of the biblical data. The presence of ableist-like othering categories in the biblical data cannot be read away because their presence does not merely derive from outside the Bible in cultural prejudices of readers. Instead, othering categories come from within, in the biblical writer's perceptions recorded in the data. Therefore, the reader of Scripture must look beyond the authorial intent of individual voices within Scripture to larger narrative dynamics across the canon for a counter testimony to the negative dyads present in the values of biblical authors.

Great care must be given to the benefits and challenges the biblical data offers for the work of liberatory readings of Scripture for individuals with disabilities. In some ways, the hermeneutical work of those who now study disability in Scripture is comparable to that of early nineteenth-century American Christian abolitionists. Christian abolitionists had to engage the "traditional readings" of the New Testament's teaching on slavery popular in their era to counter anti-abolitionist readings of Scripture regularly offered in support of slavery (Harrill, 2000, p. 149). As Christian

abolitionists responded to pro-slavery biblical arguments, they discovered that some of the voices within the biblical data were not as abolitionist-friendly as they had hoped (Barclay, 1997, pp. 14–15; Haynes, 2002, pp. 65–104; Glancy, 2006, pp. 39–129). A broader reading of Scripture was required rather than an authorial-intent approach. I contend that like these early nineteenth-century American Christian abolitionists, many disability theologians have come to a similar conclusion. What is required is to embrace a reading Scripture with a broader lens, a redemptive-historical hermeneutic that has Christ as its center with pneumatic participation in Christ's death and resurrection as its goal (Macaskill, 2017, p. 7).

### **Paul, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, and Disability**

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul preceded the church in late modernity in the hermeneutical move he offered in his reflections on the feast of the Eucharist by treating it as a meal anticipated by the Passover feast. In I Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul offers a heuristic model for how a biblical text that uses sacrificial imagery can enable boundaries, not just for the economically marginalized but for individuals with disabilities. Through his teaching on the Eucharist, Paul challenged how an individual's social worth should be evaluated. He did this by confronting the social differentiations made in his day sustained by the honor and shame values of Greco-Roman culture. Those social differentiations had been defined apart from the cross. According to Paul, one's honor is found in Christ and Christ alone. Christ freely dishonored and emptied himself, which expressed that he was the full image of God, all for our sake, that we might find our honor in him. Christ embraced the shame of the cross for the sake of making his body, the church, glorious in God's presence (Philippians 2:6-11). This "Master story," this cruciform arc has made all things new by offering the early followers of Christ a different place to locate their identity recognition, a different picture of the good life to create a set of virtues for their moral formation (Gorman, 2007, pp. 147–169).

Paul expanded upon this argument in 1 Corinthians 12:1-13, reminding the church in Corinth that diversities within the body have been given by God's Spirit as a gift for the health of the whole body, literally for the common good (vs. 7, πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον) (Garland, 2003, p. 303; Hays, 2011, p. 211). The implication for such an understanding of the "gifts" on the question of social differentiation within the body of Christ is, as Grant Macaskill has argued, that "each individual, with their capacities and their burdens, their strengths and their deficits, is "owned" by the community within an economy of gift" (Macaskill, 2017, p. 10).

Through an appreciation of how the story of Christ's death and resurrection reworks honor and shame categories, and through Paul's understanding of gift, boundaries for a variety of socially marginalized individuals are re-normalized around Christ and enabled to be life-giving in a community that has a cruciform shape. There is a "Christological fitted-ness" for those marginalized by society to participate in the Eucharist meal. As David J. Downs has put the matter,

[Paul] encourages the Corinthians to recognize that unless the community embodies a concern for others, particularly the poor, modeled on the self-giving love of Jesus Christ, it cannot rightly proclaim the Lord's death [in its performance of the Eucharist meal]. This community should order its dining practices in light of the economy of God – an economy that welcomes the poor to share in the abundance of the table of the Lord (Longenecker & Liebengood, 2009, p. 151).

In a cruciform community, "the only standard of normality that matters" is found in Christ (Macaskill, 2017, p. 13). The normality of Christ has left an indelible mark upon how to practice the Eucharist meal.

### **Enabling Boundaries for Individuals with Physical Disabilities**

What does all of this mean for how the Eucharist meal enables boundaries for individuals with disabilities? To answer this question, we must first distinguish between individuals with physical disabilities and individuals with intellectual disabilities while acknowledging that some individuals may have both. At a surface level, it may appear that participating in or leading the Eucharist in churches today poses few insurmountable challenges for individuals with physical disabilities. However, such is not the case. First, there are accessibility questions concerning how worship spaces are designed with a presumed sense of normalized motility. For example, in the church of Scotland parish I worshiped within during my post-graduate studies at the University of Aberdeen, the congregation had to install a lift so a previous minister who had paraplegia could lead in the words of institution and invitation from the alter. Second, there are questions of auditory and visual practices embraced by congregations in how they practice the Eucharist meal that can prevent fuller participation of all present. Specific disabilities may remove or impair physical access to parts of the sacramental ritual. For example, an individual with blindness will not be moved by the visual symbolism used within the sacred articles and vestment. Still, this same individual may have heightened phenomenological access to a dimension of the meal through a more acute use of hearing and smell. Contra John M. Hull, the separation of image and desire does not always have to entail loss (Hull, 1997, pp. 43–44). Third, there are questions concerning the foods used within the meal itself. Specifically,

are the communion elements friendly toward and prepared in such a way that individuals with food-related disabilities can participate in the Eucharist meal without experiencing bodily harm.

Individuals with food-related disabilities are individuals who experience life-threatening anaphylactic allergic reactions to several foods. These individuals often have chronic autoimmune illnesses with restrictive diets. Some of those chronic autoimmune illnesses include Celiac, Crohn, and Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EE). Julia Brandini offers readers a history of how life-threatening allergies have been treated as food-related disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (Brandini, 2015, pp. 1577–1581). As the notion of food-related disabilities is new to many readers, it is worth listening to a personal account of an individual with a food-related disability, Sandra Beasley (2011, pp. 27–30).

Given my spectrum of issues – a variety of allergens, a capacity for anaphylaxis, and an ability to develop new sensitivities upon repeated exposure – my allergies constitute a disability. I am protected under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Beasley, 2011, p. 27).

Beasley explores the social model dimensions of her disability, particularly the stigmatizing effects she encounters in public restaurants and university dining services. Her testimony helps readers observe how the invisible character of her disability affects her social relations (Beasley, 2011, pp. 30–44). Many public restaurants and university dining services now require reflective practices of food-accommodations for individuals with food-related disabilities. The church in America whose advocacy has kept ADA rights outside must rethink its food-accommodations in light of other public places institutions. Individuals with food-related disabilities regularly encounter exclusive barriers as they seek to participate in shared meals within the church, particularly the Eucharist. This author contends that many of the church's sacramental practices in late modernity are in danger of treating individuals with physical disabilities in a similar manner to how the Corinthian body stigmatized individuals based upon social and economic status by “allowing them” to only be present as “lesser dinner guests.”

### **Enabling Boundaries for Individuals with Intellectual disabilities**

There are also boundaries and barriers that individuals with intellectual disabilities face in participating in the Eucharist. For many Christian traditions, catechetical instructions precede admission to the table. These instructions presume a level of memory retention and linear thinking and the ability to offer verbal or written responses to questions that form part of the catechetical journey. The practice of catechesis ought to be

performed with mindfulness toward the particular gift individuals with intellectual disabilities are for the body of Christ. At the foundation of all catechetical instruction is the catechist's relationship with the individual who is in consideration for admittance to the table. That relationship can empower the enabling of boundaries if the catechist is discerning the disabled body of Christ as the true image of God. When the catechist does this, a more life-giving journey is experienced, enabling the process of catechetical preparation for individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, even catechetical relationships are open to struggle, neglect, abuse, and even violence. The power of relationships for disability-inclusion rests in the practice of genuine friendship that can unmask "subtle exclusions" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 244–252).

An example of the importance of relationship for communion preparation can be observed within a series of guidelines created by the Archdiocese of Chicago for sacramental access for individuals with developmental disabilities. Those guidelines state that "The context of sacramental initiation for developmentally disabled persons is the quality of their relationships...A true relationship understands beyond words or sounds, communicates beyond definitions, and frees persons to be at their best beyond simple behavioral control" (Foley, 1994, pp. 144–145). Others have suggested that not only are relationships meaningful in catechetical preparation but many of the instructions employ signs and symbols that can be grasped in tactile ways through bodily rituals available to those with and without intellectual disabilities. As Mark R. Francis has argued, "Since liturgy is primarily symbolic communication, it is very possible that someone unable to put the experience of faith celebrated in a sacrament into words and logical categories might nonetheless be very well prepared for its reception, perhaps even better prepared than those of us without developmental disabilities" (Foley, 1994, p. 91). When image and symbol have been eclipsed by words within Protestant Christianity, the symbolic language of the Eucharist meal can help the church in fresh ways represent God's reign. After all, symbolic language is a testament to the real presence of Christ, which is often only intellectually grasped after his presence is physically attended to (Mitchell, 2006, pp. 149–188).

## Conclusion

As the church in the late modernity sets the table in preparation for the Eucharist meal, does it imagine bodies with different intellectual capacities, with different motilities, with various visual or auditory capacities, with different dietary needs; or does it imagine – without recognizing it is doing so – that all bodies are "just like mine"? Grasping Paul's cruciform vision

of the community and the meal can “enable” the church to rightly imagine the “Lord’s Dinner” as a feast for everyone touched by all manner of liminalities. To embrace the practice of “keeping the feast” as vital to its missional vocation. In a culture where capitalist consumer interests often define individual’s self-worth based upon their skill-based qualities (qualities defined under ableist categories), the church must remember that it is not enough to advocate that individuals with disabilities are included in the Eucharist meal. Instead, the church must remember that those individuals are already present in that communal ritual as “gift,” abled, and called not only to consume but to lead that sacred feast (Carter, 2007, p. 83)!

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