

*The Life in You*

The sun shone brightly upon the field. There was a chaotic beauty of people gathered. The annual event had not been this vibrant in anyone's recent memory. The beauty, the balance of human life's mysterious glory and darkness, beamed.

For fifty years, men, women, and children had gathered to celebrate the community of a small-town college lacrosse team. The sport, beloved by all, was merely a vessel to human community and joy. On this particular day all gathered once again to seek refreshment of mind, body and soul. There was a profound paradox to this year's gathering. A beloved friend, spouse, and member had died. The people had come together to grieve, to remember, and celebrate the joy they had always shared. A joy they passed from generation to generation, from long time members to fresh new faces. There was little thought of the bizarreness of healing, renewal, and joy that came from a gathering acknowledging the pain and mystery of humanity. It all seemed natural.

The younger players and their families had never met Linda. This was inconsequential as the veteran's love and stories of her brought her presence to reality. They spoke of her kindness, patience, and hospitality. They proclaimed the power she had shared with the world and those who knew her. Brief reflections and passing descriptions of the now lost love revived her grace, and immediately gave each listener the fullness of her spirit. Like all good in the world there was a physical incarnation of this shared experience. The revelation came in orange slices.

Linda, the spouse of a player and coach, had long supplied the team and the annual reunion with orange slices to refresh body and morale. No matter how painful it was to discover that playing and living at the age of 50 does not feel like the age of 20, the sweetness of Linda's oranges brought peace and assurance. A center point of the community's celebration, grief and remembrance were the oranges. Like a sacrament we passed them amongst ourselves allowing the fruits juicy sweetness to comfort the bitter sadness of human loss. The slices filled us with the joy we sought and found in our time together, in the story sharing, the hugs, and in our communal hope for eternal renewal amidst the revelation of human frailty.

This is what Paul speaks of and the power we find in holy communion. Paul proclaims the power of God as revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The central point of Paul's message is how God's glory is revealed in human weakness. The apt metaphor is clay jars carrying the Divine treasure of eternal life and love. Corinth, the location of the letter, mass produced these jars. They were the equivalent to cheap solo cups we might find at a summer BBQ. These jars were discarded frequently. Paul compares himself and humanity to such jars. Fragile, weak, and susceptible to failure. We all know too well the decaying nature of our lives.

The paradoxical hope of God shown to us in Jesus is the Divine power of such vessels. It is us, the broken, the grieving, the lost, the confused, the aging, who God has chosen to bring the revelation of life and love to the world. God is not a super hero nor does God choose superheroes or those who we call the powerful. God chooses those who walk humbly. Those

who admit their pain, their failure, and their challenges. God, as through Jesus, uses those who express anger and uncertainty.

Jesus was angry and sad. Jesus cried out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” It was Jesus who wept at the death of a friend and begged with fear and grief in his final hours. It was this person, this human, who God choose to show the world that death does not have the final word. Pain is fleeting. Joy, love, and life are everlasting.

Our celebration of communion is the singing of our shared human struggle in the frustrating mystery we call life. It is praise and nourishment for the power God has given to us to love in spite of all the struggles, anguish, and loss. It is a humble meal of broken bread and spilt drink. It is for us the overwhelming sweet nourishment of unexplainable, enduring love that overcomes the witness of unthinkable bitter pain.

There we were a wild bunch of ages, races, and experiences. The diversity was heard as hip hop mingled with 60s blues on the loud speaker. Politics, spiritual and religious views, regional diversity and other differences were joyously unified in the healing power of orange slices. Unceremoniously delivered in a large zip lock bag and distributed with a plastic mixing bowl they brought forth the full power of human love. They brought to life the enduring Spirit that knows pain and balances the bitterness. The Spirit that forever nourishes.