

International Baptist Theological Seminary-Prague

Spreading the practices of the Love Feast

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Introduction

A few years ago I read the book 'Take this bread' by Sara Miles.¹ I was intrigued by her personal story of how she came to faith when she, just on her morning walk, went through the doors of a church and was invited to the Table. This radically changed her life and was the beginning of her pilgrimage with God. As a journalist and former cook, living in a poor area in San Francisco, her calling became clear: feeding people, so she started a food pantry in the church. It is exciting to see how this food pantry arise from and is connected to the Eucharist. In this way the practices of the Lord's Supper literally became 'practices of the Christian Community before the watching world' as Yoder states.²

In this essay I want to explore the practices³ of the Love Feast or agape meal, as described by Stutzman and Kreider, in practices for the church today, primarily focused on Dutch Baptist Churches.⁴ I will built further on an essay I wrote earlier on 'the Love Feast- the church's self expression'⁵ in which I also looked at 'a Form for Christ's Supper' from Hubmaier.⁶ As the story of Miles and the quotation from Yoder learns us, I also want to work these practices out in practices of the church for the world today. The essential question is how could the Love Feast⁷ practices as described by Stutzman and Kreider be embodied in practices of Baptist Churches?

1. Seven Love Feast practices

Recovering the Love Feast⁸ is Stutzman's main issue in his book with the same title. He worked out five Love Feast practices which are lived out in the New Testament and early Christianity, and explores the way the Supper became over spiritualized during the ages.⁹ He wants to bring back the Love Feast to the real practices of the church.¹⁰ Stutzman worked this out in practices with underlying virtues:¹¹

1. footwashing: submission¹²
2. fellowship meal: love¹³
3. preparation for communion: confession¹⁴

¹ Sara Miles, *Take This Bread: a Radical Conversion* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007).

² John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).

³ I follow MacIntyre and Kallenberg in their definition of practices and virtues. Briefly, practices are regular complex collective actions which demonstrate internal goods and have standards of distinction. Virtues are character-based internal goods and give meaning to the practices. A hockey game is a practice. Hitting the ball is not. Brad J. Kallenberg in Nancey C Murphy, Brad J Kallenberg, and Mark Nation, *Virtues & practices in the Christian tradition : Christian ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 21.

⁴ Further simply called Baptist Churches.

⁵ John D Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: a Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Waterloo, Ont.: Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 87. Ingeborg Janssen-te Loo, *The Love Feast: The Church's Self Expression.*, non-published essay (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

⁶ Balthasar Hubmaier, H. Wayne Pipkin, and John Howard Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 392-408.

⁷ Already in this introduction I have used different words. On the one hand: Table, Communion, Eucharist and the Lord's Supper. By these words I mean the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a ritual meal as most Baptist Churches celebrate it. On the other hand: Love Feast, agape meal and love meal. By these words I refer to the broader setting of a whole tasty meal, which is in connection with the Lord's Supper. In both cases I use the words of the authors or I use the word 'Supper' as an abbreviation from 'the Lord's Supper' and Love Feast.

⁸ Paul Fike Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast: Broadening Our Eucharistic Celebrations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

⁹ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 74. Also Witherington goes deeper on this theme in: Ben Witherington III, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 99.

¹⁰ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 110-137, 161.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹² *Ibid.*, 55-67, Stutzman uses the word footwashing instead of foot washing. I choose to follow Stutzman.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34-44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67-70.

4. kiss: reconciliation¹⁵
5. communion: thanksgiving.¹⁶

Also Kreider¹⁷ provides a fresh look at communion and names five essential themes: thanksgiving,¹⁸ remembering Jesus,¹⁹ feasting in the Kingdom,²⁰ sharing in the Lord²¹ and reconciling and peacemaking.²² Together, with the overlap in themes, I come to seven Love Feast practices with their underlying virtues:

1. Footwashing as a way of submission.
2. Fellowship meal as a way of love.
3. Preparation for communion as a way of confession.
4. The kiss as an expression of reconciliation.
5. Communion as a way of thanksgiving.
6. Remembering Jesus as a way to recall and follow.
7. Feasting in the Kingdom as an expression of living “then is now”.²³

Hubmaier and the Love Feast practices

In a former essay,²⁴ I looked at Hubmaier’s theology on the Supper from these seven practices and discovered that in ‘a Form for Christ’s Supper’²⁵, especially in the ‘Pledge of love’²⁶, he integrates most of the seven practices in a renewed way.²⁷ Hubmaier shaped these practices in the context of his time. He used a very specific liturgy as was common during that time in the Roman Catholic Church. With original reasoning he brought the Supper back to a love meal in which love of God, each other and the neighbour is the central theme. Still the Supper was practiced as a symbolic meal, the kiss was not practiced, the footwashing was done only one time.²⁸ Is it possible, to embody the practices of the Love Feast in a way actualized to our time?

2. The Lord’s Supper today

In most Dutch Baptist Churches the Lord’s Supper is celebrated on every first Sunday of the month. In a common service the Supper is celebrated. After a brief introduction of the Supper, people are invited to join. The pastor, most times, reads a part of 1 Corinthians 11 and takes the bread. One of the elders give thanks for the bread in a prayer, the bread is broken and shared with the people. When everybody has a piece of bread, the bread is eaten together. For the cup a similar way of celebrating is done.²⁹ There is almost no connection between this celebration and a Love Feast,

¹⁵ Ibid., 52-55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 44-51.

¹⁷ Eleanor Kreider, *Given for You: a Fresh Look at Communion* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Ibid., 90-1.

¹⁹ Ibid., 91-2.

²⁰ Ibid., 92-5.

²¹ Ibid., 38, 89-98.

²² Ibid., 97-8.

²³ James W. McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 30-1.

²⁴ Janssen-te Loo, *The Love Feast*.

²⁵ Balthasar Hubmaier, H. Wayne Pipkin, and John Howard Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 392-406.

²⁶ Ibid., 403.

²⁷ Janssen-te Loo, *The Love Feast*, 6-9. The only thing he did not address was feasting the Kingdom.

²⁸ Henry Clay Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905), 122.

²⁹ This is the way it is practiced in many Baptist churches.

although most churches share meals during the year.³⁰ In the early beginnings of Dutch Baptism several churches celebrated the love meal.³¹ That fact from our past is especially exciting because it means that somewhere in our DNA love meals are present.

3. Centripetal and centrifugal power of the Love Feast

Before exploring how Love Feast practices could be practiced in the church of today, I will expand the direction of the practices by a few remarks from Koenig. Many times, he says, we are '*getting through* our eucharistic ceremonies as opposed to *entering through* them into the very presence of God, with our body, mind and spirit'.³² In this last way the Love Feast will be a transformative power, it shapes a way to come into the nearness of our God, it directs us towards Him. Koenig speaks of the centripetal and centrifugal power of the Supper. By the centripetal power people are drawn to the Supper and bonded together with each other to God. By the centrifugal power people are sent to shape other meals and practices in the same way.³³ Gutierrez articulates this a little differently in the following way 'The breaking of the bread is at once the point of departure and the point of arrival of the Christian community.'³⁴ In this way the Love Feast 'will become a network for the *Missio Dei* rather than just an expression of our congregational family system'.³⁵ So, looking at the various practices of the Love Feast I will also look at the centripetal and centrifugal power of these practices.

4. The Love Feast practices

The practices of the Love Feast are in a rich way the self expression of the church,³⁶ or as McClendon calls it '*the practice of establishing and maintaining Christian community*'.³⁷ How could we shape the Love Feast with all her different practices in a way that is faithful to discerning 'this is my body'³⁸ as a gathered community in our time and place? In the next section I will dive deeper in the various practices and explore how they could be practiced in our churches today.

Feetwashing as a way of submission.

In Jesus time servants washed the dirty feet of the guests joining a banquet. Jesus took this servant task on Himself as expressed in the Johannine version of the Last Supper. By doing this, Jesus showed that He came down to earth as a servant.³⁹ During meals Jesus told stories⁴⁰ about the first and the last, about submission and humility. Hubmaier worked submission out in the second part of *the Pledge*: 'love your neighbour ... lay down and shed for him your life and blood, be obedient to father, mother and all authorities according to the will of God...'⁴¹

³⁰ 85% of the Baptist Churches in the northern part of the Netherlands have one or more meals in church, such as meals from an Alpha course, Christmas or Easter meal, or meals in small groups. One of the 28 churches from the research mentioned a love meal. Jur Kruizinga, *Geef Gij Hun Te Eten - De Maaltijd in de Gemeente*, non-published bachelor thesis (Leeuwarden: NHI Hogeschool, 2012), 22-3. The Alpha course is an interactive course about Christianity, every meeting starts with a meal. <http://www.alpha.org/>

³¹ Ibid., 11-2, 23. It is beyond this essay to investigate why the love meals disappeared.

³² John Koenig, *Soul Banquets: How Meals Become Mission in the Local Congregation* (New York: London: Continuum, 2007), 88.

³³ Ibid., 88-90.

³⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We drink from our own wells: the spiritual journey of a people* (London: SCM Press, 2005), Kindle Electronic Edition, ch. 10, loc. 2913.

³⁵ Koenig, *Soul Banquets*, 90.

³⁶ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 87.

³⁷ McClendon, *Ethics*, 220.

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:26, Ibid., 220.

³⁹ John 13-17.

⁴⁰ Luke 14:1-24, 22:24-27, John 13:1-20,

⁴¹ Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 403.

How do we practice submission to God and each other?

I remember Maundy Thursday services in which footwashing was practiced, only a small group of people joined the invitation to wash the feet of each other.

Why did so few people join the footwashing? Many reasons are possible, here I name three. First, it is not a common practice in daily life. The Dutch do not take off their shoes at their host's home. Second, submission or being a humble servant, is in sharp contrast with the reign of the self and anti-authoritarianism in our time.⁴² Dutch try to be egalitarian, but certainly do not want to submit them to others. Third, Dutch do not want to be dependent, they believe in autonomy of the self,⁴³ having one's own feet washed could give the feeling of dependency. Stutzman gave an example of a baby who is not capable of cleaning herself.⁴⁴ This image of dependency could be so humiliating for us, that it looks as if it were easier for us to wipe out our spiritual chaos ourselves than to ask God to do this, or to ask support of brothers and sisters.

Footwashing also helps us to remember our Baptism in which the start of our new cleansed life in Christ, following Him, was marked.⁴⁵ Baptism unites us in the Body of Christ, with our brothers and sisters.⁴⁶ So in one way footwashing could be part of Baptism renewal.⁴⁷ In another way footwashing focuses on unity in Christ and submission to and dependency on Him and the community of believers. In both ways it is still a relevant practice in our time. The Brethren gave us a beautiful example of a footwashing practice.

People were seated in small groups. One of them washed the feet of a neighbor, after this, those two people hugged each other. Then the neighbour washed the feet of her neighbour. This continued until the feet of the first person were washed by the last person. In this way everyone participated in footwashing and it flowed around in a way of receiving and giving.⁴⁸

Footwashing reminds us of submission to Christ and each other. Doing this with a certain regularity and attention can be a reminder that in all the daily moments we are confronted with the question: "will I humble myself to the other with whom I am arguing?" Sometimes people say: "the door is open for the other to come, I am waiting." Footwashing reminds us to lift our feet and take the first steps to restore community.

⁴² Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 169-70. Groen describes this for the Dutch situation. One of the influences of individualization is self-consciousness and autonomy of the self. Eduard Groen, *Geloofwaardige gemeente: uitgangspunten van een baptisten gemeenteopbouw* (Barneveld: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, 2011).

⁴³ Groen, *Geloofwaardige gemeente*, 33-4.

⁴⁴ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 173-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 175-7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 182-3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 167-77.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 180-1.

Fellowship meal as a way of love.

In the fellowship meal the *koinonia* (community) as body of Christ is discernible.⁴⁹ For Hubmaier this was the actual meaning of the Supper. His whole Pledge focuses on the community as the body of Christ in which loving God, loving each other and loving your neighbour are fundamental.⁵⁰ This heart of the Love Feast has consequences for the way we share the meal. First of all it starts with God's love for us.⁵¹ Normally the magnificent love of God is expressed in a liturgy with only a small piece of bread and small nip of wine. Jones called this a "'donut liturgy" with a hole in the middle'.⁵² Does this "donut liturgy" really express the unending love of God? Does it express the love God asks us to share with our brothers and sisters? The abundance of love celebrated in a real Love Feast with a real meal⁵³ could be an expression of the abundance of love. A meal of receiving and giving.

Last June we had a day of encouragement in the Baptist Church of Arnhem-Centrum (BGAC). We sang, had a moment of Lectio Divina⁵⁴ and a few people testified about what God was doing in their life. Bread and wine stood on small coffee tables, so people could celebrate the Supper in small groups. Some groups were hesitant in breaking, praying and sharing the bread and wine; other groups enjoyed it very much. Right after a moment of prayer in the small groups the meal went on, a potluck meal stood ready on the Communion table in the coffee corner, there was time to talk together.

More examples could be made of the fellowship meal in a missional way. Miles tells about the way they prepare for the food pantry in their church.

Food shared by the food pantry is stored on and around the Communion table. When all the preparations are finished, the volunteers began to share the Eucharist together and after a moment of prayer the doors of the church or food pantry are opened to receive the guests.⁵⁵

In contrast to closed group invitations for the Greco Roman symposia,⁵⁶ Christ teaches us to invite all, especially people who are different than we are.⁵⁷ Jones called this a 'porous table worship',⁵⁸ in which all who want to focus on Jesus and 'be drawn into that deeper community of intention'⁵⁹ could partake in the meal. There are several ways of doing this. The praxis now is that the Supper and other meal practices are not connected.⁶⁰ In organizing a meal by the church the first question could be: "How could this meal be related to the Supper?" Partaking in the Supper asks this question of us:

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38, Kreider, *Given for You*, 95-6.

⁵⁰ Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 74.

⁵¹ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 187-9, 1 John 4:19

⁵² Keith G. Jones, "Gathering Worship: Some Tentative Proposals for Reshaping Worship in Our European Baptist Churches Today," *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 13, no. 1 (September 2012), 22.

⁵³ Also Jesus shared meals with lots of people, for example the feeding of the thousands in Luke 9:10-17.

⁵⁴ Lectio Divina: a time of chewing and rechewing the Word of God and letting it speak to you. It has different steps: lectio or listening to the text, meditation or reflection on the text, oratio or prayer and contemplation or obeying. Richard J Foster and Kathryn A Helmers, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 62-72.

⁵⁵ Sara Miles, *Take This Bread*, 155-7.

⁵⁶ Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World : Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3-33.

⁵⁷ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community & Mission Around the Table*. (Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition, chapter 4, location 1107 off 2071, Jones, "Gathering Worship, 20-1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 22-4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁰ Jur Kruizinga, *Geef Gij Hun Te Eten*, 22-3.

“How could we share from what we receive?” In this way the Supper can be connected with the meals we have in the coming week, by receiving guests for lunch or dinner after the Supper. Yoder went further and challenges us by stating:

‘Bread eaten together *is* economic sharing. Not merely symbolically, but also in fact, eating together extends to a wider circle the economic solidarity normally obtained in the family. ... In short, the Eucharist is an economic act. To do rightly the practice of breaking bread together is a matter of economic ethics’.⁶¹

Kreider calls this ‘making justice’.⁶² My hope is that the praxis of sharing meals could lead to sharing food and goods.

Preparation for communion as a way of confession.

Confession in the New Testament means first and above all confessing that Christ is Lord.⁶³ Hubmaier confessed this in the first Pledge: ‘if you will to love God before, in, and above all things, in the power of his holy and living Word, serve him alone.’⁶⁴ Confessing “Christ is Lord” is also an expression of standing in the tradition of the ages and being connected with other Christian communities around the world. In many Baptist Churches this is expressed in asking guests who want to share in the Supper to give their testimony and tell which church they belong to. Focussing on local Baptist Churches this means confessing Christ with other local churches and Baptist churches around the country. This is expressed in a unique way in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper during the General Meeting of the Baptist Churches every spring. Stutzman refers to the confession that Christ is Lord in particular aspects of our life. In this economic crises, it means that we are not lead by our economic situation, but that Christ is Lord.⁶⁵ Practicing this confession could mean sharing space, time or money with others.

Furthermore confession is thanksgiving⁶⁶ and confession of sins. Hubmaier places stress on self-examination in preparation for the Supper.⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 is often referred to in relation to self-examination and discerning the body of Christ. This text is first of all about social and relational issues.⁶⁸ Do we dare to confess to each other that we are hurting each other, that we share only a little from the abundance we receive? Confession in this way is restoring community.⁶⁹ According to Koenig discerning the body also means ‘discovering anew how much one’s personal identity and calling as a believer are knit together with the faith and life of one’s brothers and sisters in Christ.’⁷⁰ By saying it this way, Koenig focuses not on ‘issues’ but on unity in Christ and on interdependency. This is why personal discernment should lead to communal discernment. This is how discernment

⁶¹ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 20-1.

⁶² Kreider, *Given for You*, 125-7

⁶³ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 204-5.

⁶⁴ Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 403.

⁶⁵ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 217.

⁶⁶ Worked out in the practice of thanksgiving.

⁶⁷ Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 395-403.

⁶⁸ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 214-5.

⁷⁰ John Koenig, *The Feast of the World’s Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 111.

could become a confession of the Lordship of Christ and unity in Christ. So, discernment is a vital part of Communion⁷¹ and we have to look for a way to practice this in our communities.

For personal discernment and confession a culture of accountability is needed. BGAC has prayer trios, groups of three people who are praying together on a regular basis. Many times this is a restoring place for personal discernment, accountability and confession.

Communal discernment in a Love Feast setting reminds me of the day we had in BGAC as mentioned earlier. After *Lectio Divina* on Romans 12:1-3, reading Romans 12:9-21 -on how we get along with each other- as preparation for the Supper and Agape meal, we went into small groups to talk about what it meant to be members of one body. In the end we closed in a big circle singing the blessing to each other.

The kiss as an expression of reconciliation.

The practices before lead to the next practice: kissing and greeting, meaning 'the peace of God among us makes us one.'⁷² Either submission, love and confession could lead to reconciliation. Reconciliation starts with God who reconciles Himself to men by Christ. Second, it means people being reconciled with each other.⁷³ In the third part of the Pledge Hubmaier talks about reconciliation, 'reconcile yourselves with all you have offended'.⁷⁴ In the time of Hubmaier the kiss was not a common practice⁷⁵ but reconciliation was an essential practice. During the 20th century the practice of the kiss has been rediscovered.⁷⁶ How could we practice this today?

This summer I was mediating between people talk. In a specific moment the people told me: this talk is not working. Each asked for a confession from the others. Not quite a way of submission, but in the end it provided an opening. After each confessed, one of them stood up spontaneously, went to the others and gave each one a big hug and kiss. This is an example that this bodily contact, this physical touch, really expresses reconciliation.

I remember the celebration of the Supper on Wednesday morning at IBTS in which the hugs touched me deeply. We were asked to do it in a way suitable to our own culture. This was almost impossible because everyone else was from another culture, and with some I was in closer contact than others. But in these moments I experienced reconciliation between cultures and other differences in the way of Galatians 3:28 (ESV): 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

With all the differences between people, people are reconciled with each other in Christ. At the same time, things go wrong and people have conflicts with each other. Matthew 18 talks about the way Jesus demands us to reconcile. In this chapter Yoder talks about binding and loosing. On the one hand discern what is really going on in the situation (binding) and at the same time look for the

⁷¹ Ibid., 111, 134-5, 229-30.

⁷² Eleanor Kreider, "Let the Faithful Greet Each Other: the Kiss of Peace," *Conrad Grebel Review* 5, no. 1 (December 1, 1987), 22.

⁷³ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 222-3.

⁷⁴ Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 403.

⁷⁵ Kreider, "Let the Faithful Greet Each Other", 46.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 47

possibilities of reconciliation (loosing).⁷⁷ It is not simple reconcile and forget, it means really addressing what is wrong and working together on reconciliation. Reconciliation is a practice of the church, practised in the kiss during the Love Feast, practiced in the various relationships with brothers and sisters and way further because 'the way God wants believers to live together should be a model as well for other social relationships'.⁷⁸ Christians are people of peace.⁷⁹ This means that the kiss from the Love Feast could call them to mediate in conflicts between churches or local neighbours.⁸⁰

Stutzman focuses strongly on preparation on the Supper and reconciling.⁸¹ I would stress it also in another way. Practicing reconciliation during the kiss or hug in the Love Feast is a marker for practicing reconciliation in particular relationships in the weeks afterwards.

Communion as a way for thanksgiving.

In communion thanksgiving is practiced,⁸² in thanksgiving prayers for bread and cup, but also in the communal prayers afterwards. Hubmaier expressed thanksgiving just after the Pledge 'We praise and thank thee, Lord God, Creator of the heavens and earth, for thy goodness toward us.'⁸³ Thanksgiving starts with thankfulness to God for his love of the world, for His faithfulness throughout the ages until now, for the life, suffering, death and rising of Christ, for the coming of the Spirit⁸⁴ and for the promise of the Kingdom. Kreider states: 'The cup of blessing (1 Cor 10:16) is truly a cup of forgiveness as well as a cup of fellowship (koinonia) because one of its many facets of meaning is the matchless gift of gracious liberation we receive'.⁸⁵ Lifting and drinking the cup together shows also forgiveness practiced in the community; thanking and covenanting⁸⁶ that we are blessed, forgiven and restored people!

We are grateful for Christ giving His life for us and we express this by flabby white bread without crusts, decently cut into small individual pieces. Is there not a richer way to share bread, in which could be expressed the abundance of Christ's love, the fullness of His life, the communal act and the abundance of our thanks? There are many creative ways in the use of bread and wine to show something from the abundance of God's love.⁸⁷

Davies writes: 'Thanksgiving is both a liturgical act and a direction of living',⁸⁸ so from the thanksgiving in the Eucharist, thanksgiving should be visible in the life of people.

⁷⁷ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 2,3. This chapter is on binding and loosing and is reflected in short in Yoder's thinking on this theme.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁹ Kreider, *Given for You*, 97.

⁸⁰ These are a few examples of mediation practices in the Netherlands, the first is a Christian organization, the second a secular in which sometimes Christians participate. <http://www.vredestichters.nl/>; <http://www.buurtbemiddelingarnhem.nl/>

⁸¹ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 231-2.

⁸² Kreider, *Given for You*, 90-1.

⁸³ Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 404.

⁸⁴ Kreider, *Given for You*, 205-6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁷ Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 245-6.

⁸⁸ J. G Davies, *Worship and Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 121.

Voskamp challenges people to ‘take the joy dare’⁸⁹ and to count their daily blessings and gives thanks for them. By a diary or an app⁹⁰ people can write down three moments of thankfulness every day.

I think this simple way can be very stimulating to live a life of thankfulness. A brother in the BGAC ended his testimony this way ‘we don't need more to be thankful for, we just need to be more thankful.’⁹¹

Remembering Jesus as a way to remember and follow.

Stutzman chose to talk about the practice of communion in which communion, remembering and feasting the Kingdom came together.⁹² Kreider addresses remembering and feasting the Kingdom as separate practices.⁹³ These three practices belong close together, remembering is about what God has done, thanksgiving is giving thanks for that, and feasting the Kingdom is looking ahead to what is to come and is in part visible already. Remembering has many dimensions⁹⁴ and could lead us in silent reflection. Kreider stresses remembering the whole life of Jesus, all the parts of His life, not only his suffering and death.⁹⁵ The beauty of remembering and thanksgiving is that they do not have to be in tune with our daily emotions. Remembering what Christ did in history or in the past could help people through what they feel or do not feel to safe anchor places of hope.

Hubmaier has original thoughts about remembering, he focuses on remembering the absence of Jesus⁹⁶ and ‘commemorates the communion of the body of Christ with us’.⁹⁷ Doing this he addresses the church as the body of Christ and the relationship to each other.⁹⁸ This brings us back to practices such as loving each other, submission and reconciliation. “Remember” also means following Jesus’ steps⁹⁹ as stated in ‘The cup that I drink, you will drink’¹⁰⁰ and ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’¹⁰¹

“Remember” also means remembering what God has done in our life. In the Baptist Church of Hengelo-Centrum¹⁰² they have a big old suitcase. Especially during services in which the Supper is celebrated, people are asked to bring something to place in the suitcase. Sometimes a letter, sometimes a painting, or something else. People tell their story about their life with God, where they saw God in the details of their life. In this way the suitcase becomes a gathering place of faith stories and a remembrance of how God is working in lives.

⁸⁹ <http://www.aholyexperience.com/joy-dares/>

⁹⁰ <http://onethousandgifts.com/get-the-app>

⁹¹ Service BGAC, august 4 2013

⁹² Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 44-51.

⁹³ Kreider, *Given for You*, 90-5.

⁹⁴ Much more is to be said about remembering or ‘anamnesis’ from the view of oecumenical theology, but this is beyond this essay. See for different views on anamnesis: Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London: Dacre Press, 1945 , 238-247. In this essay I chose to work from the perspectives of Kreider and Hubmaier.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 91-2.

⁹⁶ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 60, 66, Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 51-2

⁹⁷ Balthasar Hubmaier, *Schriften / Balthasar Hubmaier. Hrsg. von Gunnar Westin U. Torsten Bergsten. [Übers. D. Einl. Vom Schwed. Ins Dt.: Helga Bergsten]* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl.-Haus G. Mohn, 1962), 103.

⁹⁸ Brewer, *Pledge of Love*, 58.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Given for You*, 91-2, 120-1.

¹⁰⁰ Mark 10:39

¹⁰¹ Mark 8:34

¹⁰² Phone call with Remko Ongersma, pastor, dd. 30-09-2013

Feasting in the Kingdom means living “then is now”.

The Love Feast, the Table of the Kingdom, promises us a hopeful glimpse of the Messianic Banquet, the feast of abundance.¹⁰³ Jesus ate with everybody, outcast or not outcast, by doing this He practiced the Kingdom.¹⁰⁴ God’s Kingdom is central in the Lord’s prayer, prayed after the Supper in many Baptist Churches. Praying “Your Kingdom come”¹⁰⁵ means living as hopeful people from the perspective that “then is now”.¹⁰⁶ Broader than the Love Feast, it means for us, living Kingdom practices. The Lima Text says it this way: ‘The very celebration is an instance of the Church’s participation in God’s mission in the world. This participation takes everyday form in the proclamation of the Gospel, service of the neighbour, and faithful presence in the world’.¹⁰⁷ All the practices of the Supper we talked about come together in the feast of the Kingdom. Or the other way around in practicing the feast of the Kingdom we practice love, submission, confession, reconciliation, communion and remembering Jesus in an abundant, though still messy way.¹⁰⁸

5. Conclusion

All seven practices of the Love Feast could be translated to today. Several examples are given. Working through the various practices it becomes clear that the practices belong together. The practices circle around the fellowship meal and the Supper. I would dare Baptist Churches to start to connect the fellowship meal and the Supper, to experience in this way the heart of the Love Feast, the feast of the Kingdom of God. From that connection other practices could be discovered. The Love Feast and practices could take many shapes, depending on the situation of the church and the people the community is connected with. Feetwashing is the most uncommon practice in the Dutch culture. I am very curious what will happen in churches when this first step of submission is set.

¹⁰³ Koenig, *The Feast of the World’s Redemption*, 239-40, Kreider, *Given for You*, 92-5, 226.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 34

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 92-5

¹⁰⁶ McClendon, *Ethics*, 30-1.

¹⁰⁷ “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Faith and Order Paper No. 111, the ‘Lima Text’) — World Council of Churches,” Document, n.d., 13.

¹⁰⁸ Koenig, *The Feast of the World’s Redemption*, 246-7.

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