



THE **LAST** SACRAMENT CUP

By Catherine Arveseth

It was just before the new year, and we were visiting a ward in St. George, Utah, with our five little children—a ward that had no Primary or youth program because it was composed mostly of retired couples. No 12-year-old deacons bumped elbows on the front row; it was the high priests who were preparing to bless and pass the sacrament.

Normally, the ward would have gently filled the padded seats of the chapel, but on this holiday weekend the overflow divider was pushed wide, and we, with a number of other families, were nestled onto metal folding chairs that stretched to the back of the cultural hall.

The meeting progressed as usual, and I watched as a dozen older gentlemen carried trays of bread, then water, through the bursting rows. They were making great effort to manage the unusually large crowd. Their faces were kind.

Some had rounded shoulders and bent spines. They whispered directions to each other. One wore cowboy boots. One winked at a little girl in front of us.

My daughters and I took the last cups of water from our tray and handed it to my husband, Doug, who passed the empty tray to the brother standing at the end of our row.

The bishop stood at the pulpit to assess the situation. When he asked who had not received the water, a few pockets of people, including Doug, raised their hands. So the brethren returned to the sacrament table, offered a second prayer on the new water, and delivered it to the waiting members.

Our row was last to receive the water this time, and I noticed that Doug offered the couple next to him the two remaining cups. The tray was empty, and it appeared to me that Doug was the only one in the congregation who hadn't



had the water. I wondered what he would do. Would he let it go? not worry about it this week?

Assuming that everyone had now received the water, those who were passing the sacrament partook of the water themselves, using all the remaining cups. But the bishop asked one more time if anyone had not received the water, and Doug raised his hand. He was, as I suspected, the only one. He looked at me and we smiled, conscious of the craned necks and curious eyes.

The brethren returned to the table for a third prayer on the water. And suddenly, as I heard that phrase “to bless and sanctify this water to the souls of all those who drink of it” (D&C 20:79), a realization crept into my heart—an understanding so keen it pried me clear open and God’s Spirit swept in. It was a reverence I hadn’t felt in too long.

They were praying over one cup. For one person. One soul.

The sacrament mattered. Even for one. Just as the Atonement mattered. For one.

For everyone.

Hundreds of members waited for the “amen.” Dozens watched as the last cup was delivered to my husband, and he put it to his lips, and drank.

I had to look away, my eyes were so wet.

I looked up in time to see these sweet men in suits cover the trays with white linen. Just as Christ’s body, broken for us, was covered. Just as His Atonement covers us. All of us.

You and I are indisputably tied to Christ’s suffering. All our sins, grief, hurts, and losses are held in the drops of His blood. He said He has “graven [us] upon the palms of [His] hands” (Isaiah 49:16).

The emotion of watching Doug take the last sacrament cup changed me, changed my understanding of the Atonement.

Our Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel, broke not just bread, but body and soul. For me. For you. As if we were the only ones who mattered. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.