



COME TO THE TABLE
Senior Pastor Keith Stewart
May 28, 2023

This is a very special message about communion or as it's called in other traditions, the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist. We're going to explore its origins, meaning and practice. Best of all, as a church family, we're going to participate in this holy meal together which binds us to Christ and one another. This is your invitation. Come to the table.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in, whoever and wherever they may be, to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way." - Buzz Aldrin

"In the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.'" - Buzz Aldrin

1. THE ORIGIN OF COMMUNION

❑ The Institution of Passover

If you try to sanitize the Passover story, you lose the meaning of the cross.

...without the shedding of blood, there is no remission (or cleansing) of sins. Leviticus 17.11, Hebrews 9.22

❑ How Passover reveals Christ

• The Lamb of God

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'). Matthew 27.46

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 1 Corinthians 5.7b

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 1 Peter 1.18-19



❑ The Bread of Life

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." John 12.23-24

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15.20

This is My body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of Me. Luke 22.19

❑ The Cup of Salvation

Four "I wills" of God (Exodus 6.6-7):

- I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.
- I will free you from being slaves to them...
- I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.
- I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

1st cup = The cup of sanctification

2nd cup = The cup of plagues

3rd cup = The cup of redemption

4th cup = The cup of ingathering

Drink from it, all of you. This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26.27-28



2. THE SIMPLICITY OF A MEAL

In the Middle East, there were three ways to repair a ruptured relationship:

- Salt covenant
- Threshold covenant
- Meal covenant

"His life passes over into ours." - John Calvin

❑ The Lord's Supper is not a private, contemplative act.

Because there is one loaf, our many-ness becomes one-ness... Christ doesn't become fragmented in us. Rather we become unified in Him. We don't reduce Christ to what we are; He raises us to what He is. 1 Corinthians 10.17 (Message)

Even the words "company" and "companion" come from the same Latin root that means "those who share bread."

❑ The Lord's Supper is a way of practicing our faith.

The evening meal was in progress... John 13.2



3. BEFORE THE INK WAS DRY ON THE COVENANT...BETRAYAL

Chiastic Structure

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11.27 (KJV)

"I don't partake because I'm a good Catholic, holy and pious and sleek. I partake because I'm a bad Catholic, riddled by doubt and anxiety and anger; fainting from severe hypoglycemia of the soul." - Nancy Mairs

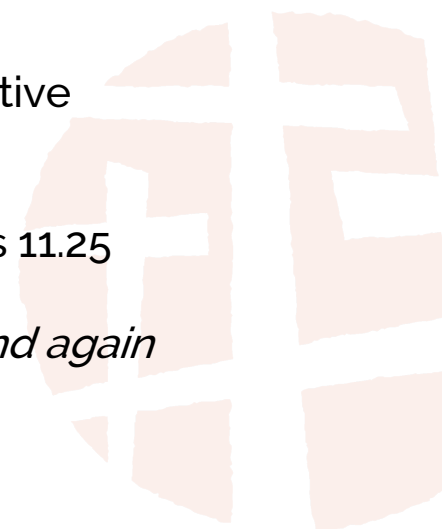
"Come to this service, not because you must, but because you may; come to testify not that you are righteous but that you sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ and desire to be His true disciples. Come, not because you are strong, but because you are weak; not because you have any claim on heaven's rewards, but because in your frailty and sin you stand in constant need of heaven's mercy."

4. HOW COMMUNION IS TO BE OBSERVED

❑ It's not a passive, cerebral event, but an active participation.

...do this in remembrance of me. 1 Corinthians 11.25

...you will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let



familiarity breed contempt. 1 Corinthians 11.26
(Message)

❑ We're not attending a funeral. It's a victory supper.

This is a day you are to commemorate for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord. Exodus 12.14

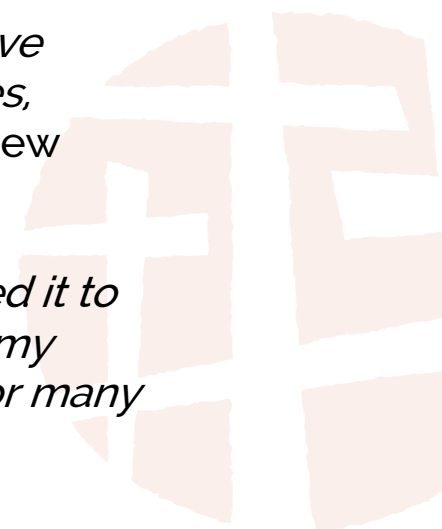
❑ We send our roots deeper into Christ.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. John 6.56

"It is Monday, and I was just sitting down to a dinner of turnips and potatoes when a parcel you sent arrived. Such things give me greater joy than I can say. Although I am utterly convinced that nothing can break the bonds between us, I seem to need some outward token or sign to reassure me, I suppose it is rather like the felt need in our religion for sacraments." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Matthew 26.26

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many



for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Matthew 26.27-29

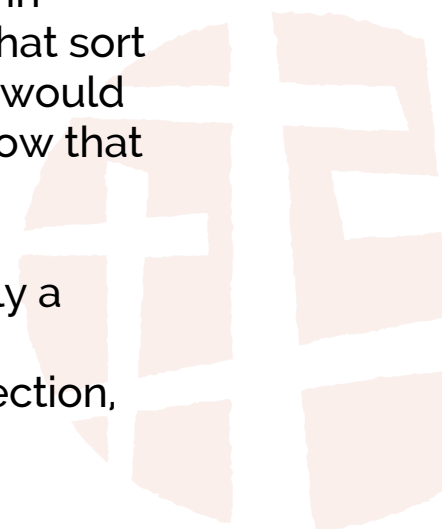
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What has been your experience with communion? How was it observed? What was the experience like for you? What did you learn today that was different or made you see communion in a different light?
2. Early in the message, Pastor Keith pointed out how communion grew out of the Jewish observance of Passover. It's amazing how that ancient celebration connected to their deliverance from Egypt contained all the elements for explaining the gospel story; the Lamb of God, the Bread of Life and Cup of Salvation. Truly all the Old Testament celebrations and observances in some way find their fulfillment in Christ. Can you think of any other Old Testament examples or observances that find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ? If so, what are they and how?
3. The meal covenant was one of the ways people in ancient times mended broken relationships. In many ways, communion represents this same idea that we can now come together with one another and God in a statement that what was once broken between us is now healed and restoration has happened. It's a celebration of our reconciliation with God – that what once stood between us has been removed.

Take some time to share what it means to you personally to be reconciled with God? What barriers have been removed? Are there any barriers that remain? Whether you want to share this part or not, at least take a few moments to consider this meal is also about being reconciled with one another. Ask yourself if there are any barriers that remain between you and others?

4. In some traditions, people have been erroneously taught that one has to be sinless to participate in holy communion. Yet in the very first one, the Gospel of Mark intentionally sandwiches the account of the Lord's Supper between two incidents of betrayal. When you think about those gathered around the first communion, their hearts were anything but pure. Even the verse that has been so misused and misunderstood that declares whoever eats or drinks unworthily consumes their own damnation has been used to say we must be worthy of communion. Which is not the case at all. That verse is not talking about our moral worthiness but the unworthy, exploitive manner the Corinthian church engaged in around the Lord's table that humiliated the poor. Were you ever taught that only the worthy or morally upright and perfect could participate in communion? How did that make you feel? What sort of church were you in that taught that? What would you say to your younger self now that you know that what you were taught is untrue?

5. Communion is not a head trip. It's not merely a mental rehearsal of the facts surrounding the sacrifice of Christ. Communion is about connection,



union with Christ - to experience Him afresh. And it's an active invitation on our part to invite Christ into our present reality to be in, through and for us what we most desperately need. What do you need Jesus to do for you today? Where are you struggling? What are you fearing? Where are you feeling all alone? Now form your need into a prayer to ask Christ to be those things for you today. As you partake in communion, visualize Jesus confronting your fears and hear Him speaking words of hope. If you see yourself as all alone, in your mind's eye, see Jesus walk into your empty space and join you there. What does Jesus say to you? Whatever you're facing or feeling, see Jesus entering into that experience alongside you. This is what happens in communion, we become one with Him and He becomes one with us. Go from this moment in the strength of the Lord.

