

## The Lord's Table

Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2010

Communion is a hugely important thing for all Christians.

It is one of two 'ceremonies' Jesus told us to do – the other being baptism, and it is celebrated in almost all churches and denominations around the world

(the only exception I can think of is the Salvation Army, who don't have communion because historically were reaching so many alcoholics that they didn't want the wine to be a stumbling block)

- It was offered to prisoners before their executions
- It is part of the Coronation Ceremony
- It is open to rich people in the wealthiest cathedrals and it is celebrated in the smallest churches among the poorest people
- And it was the first food ever to be eaten on the moon – by Buzz Aldrin

It is called lots of different things:

**Communion** = literally "Com" – together "Union" - One

**Eucharist** = "Thanksgiving"

**Mass** = from "Missa" – Latin for "sent."

**The Lord's Supper**

**Breaking Bread**

**The Lord's Table** (1 Corinthians 10:21) – less used name, but a description that everyone would have understood

And for the simplest of ceremonies; sharing some bread and wine together; it is full of meaning.

1. **It comes from, and borrows the idea of Passover** – where God judged the Egyptians and rescued His People; where they had to kill a lamb and put its blood on their doorposts so that when God's judgement came, it 'passed over' the houses marked with the blood of the lamb.

2. **Jesus – broken for us.**

It reminds us that as the bread is broken, so Jesus – the Bread of Life was broken for us –

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)

**3. It points to the New Covenant:**

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:20)

4. **This points to the fulfillment of the Old Covenant** where animals (sheep and goats) would be killed; and also to the cost of the New Covenant – the Blood of Jesus. Jesus is The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And it reminds us of this agreement and unbreakable Promise of God to deal with our guilt and shame and sin and to bring us as adopted children – to have peace with God.

**5. It is to do with remembering what Jesus has done for us:**

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:25)

**6. And it is to do with looking forward:**

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

One day we will share this meal with Him – not as an act of remembrance, but as a wedding feast – when we will never need to take communion again because it is obsolete – the remembrance being replaced with seeing Him face to face, knowing Him fully – even as we are fully known.

It will be as unnecessary as a photograph of your loved one when you finally meet them at the airport.

**7. And it is a time of remembering God's Provision for us and for confessing our need for Jesus:**

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:32-35)

All of this celebrates our communion with God – Once we were separated and under judgement – now we have been brought near, forgiven and reconciled.

And that is a main part of communion.

### **8. It's about unity with each other.**

But there is another part. As well as remembering our communion with God; we are also celebrating and remembering and acting out our communion with each other as Christians - all brought together and made one under the Lordship of Jesus.

It points to our "oneness" with God and it points to our "oneness" with each other:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

In other words, because we are all sharing a meal together (even if it's just bread and wine) we are equal and united.

I think that lots of people find communion a little bit 'scary' because of this warning that Paul gives to the Corinthians, which is basically "some of you are sick and some of you have died because you didn't take communion right!"

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 11:27-30)

As a young Christian, I was secretly really bothered by this, and used to desperately try to think the right thoughts and be 'good enough' to take communion.

→ "Taking it in an unworthy manner" → I feel unworthy!

→ "Examine yourself" → well, if I look closely, I definitely don't deserve it!

And I guess that this is part of the reason why communion can be a 'religious' part of the meeting – where there has been free, un-self-conscious worship, And then someone says it's time for communion, and people go quiet and a bit awkward.

Quiet and reflective isn't bad, but if we get "religious" and start trying to please God by thinking more holy thoughts and hope it's enough so God won't notice the bad week we've just had, then that's missing the point completely and ends up just being futile human effort.

Remember that the Israelites weren't saved because they were better than the Egyptians – they were saved from judgement by the lamb's blood on the doorposts!

If there's anything to remind us that it doesn't depend on us, then surely communion is the thing!

So what does it mean to examine ourselves and take communion in a worthy manner?

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the **body and blood** of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the **body** of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Some people have commented on this that the "Body and blood" we must not sin against means that we remember what Jesus has done for us;

But the second reference is "the Body" (and doesn't mention the Blood)

This means Jesus' Body – the Church.

In other words, because of what Jesus has done for us, we better get our attitudes right towards His Body. Communion holds us to account on that.

This is what the Corinthians were getting wrong – this is what Paul’s rebuke (and the rest of the letter) is addressing. He doesn’t mention once what thoughts they are secretly thinking.

I spoke before about how another name for communion is “The Lord’s Supper” or “The Lord’s Table”

### **9. We are Jesus’ guests.**

As we share communion we are to remember that we are His guests and He is the Head of the table.

When I was in Tajikistan recently, I went for a meal with a Tajik family – it was a formal meal round a tablecloth called a ‘Dostahon’

This was one of the biggest privileges of my visit and was something that had a real effect on me because I experienced formal hospitality which was probably similar to that Jesus and His Disciples would have recognised.

For me, what I experienced in this meal really summed up how we should approach Communion, so let me talk about this meal, and sum up what Communion is for us.

#### **Greeted & hands washed**

Reminiscent of Jesus washing His Disciples’ feet

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. (John 13:1)

Jesus wrapped a towel around Himself and washed His disciples’ feet. When He came to Peter, Peter said "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet.

"Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." – meaning Judas, who was about to betray Him (John 13:1-10)

In the West, we're not that familiar or comfortable with the idea of foot washing, but in other cultures it makes sense. It's about serving & honouring someone – and it says that this – along with the Last Supper and the Cross, was a demonstration of Jesus' love for us.

Simon felt really uncomfortable with it – the act of receiving, without a way to give back. And, if it has happened to you, you probably felt similar.

Jesus explained to Simon that he wouldn't understand at the time, but would 'get it' later – and looking back maybe Peter understood it.

If you were going for a meal, you would bathe first, and then, when you arrived, someone would wash your feet – the only part that had got dirty on the way.

What Jesus was saying is that the Disciples were clean – forgiven; but they still needed to know ongoing washing, cleaning, know forgiveness from Jesus.

And that's a part of Communion – we are clean – completely forgiven, but it's really good to come back to Jesus, day after day and know Him clean us up again.

### **Hugged**

As I went into the house, I wash hugged and welcomed by the host. Interestingly, I found out that this originates from checking for daggers!

As I said earlier, Communion is about unity – and Jesus warmly welcomes us, but as He embraces us, we need to know that daggers are not allowed – we need to get rid of them!

### **"Sacredness" of the table**

When I went in to the home a table cloth was spread on the floor – this 'table' was really respected by everyone – no-one would step on it or point their feet at it and sitting around it was obviously understood to be different from just sitting around chatting.

It was the symbol of hospitality

And then Naan bread was brought in and again, everyone treated it almost ceremonially, breaking it and sharing it around.

And, in an echo of 1 Corinthians 10:17 there was a sense of unity as we ate together: “And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf”

### **Served & fed overwhelmingly**

And then food came out, and then another course of food, and then another and another.

And all the time the host was saying “eat, eat!”

And when I thought I couldn’t eat any more,

The host insisted anyway – completely overwhelming me with his kindness and generosity.

And I wasn’t allowed to do anything to help – if I had tried to clear away the dishes, he would have pushed me back down. The point was that it was about him giving to me, not me giving to him.

And it struck me that often I’m the centre of my thinking about communion – am I good enough? Am I being solemn enough? Am I doing it right?

But actually Communion reminds us what He has done for us – and however much we might try to help out and try a bit harder to be good and deserving, He says “Sit down and let Me serve you; let Me wash your feet; accept again my free gift – My body freely given to be broken for you; My Blood freely shed.

It’s not got anything to do with being quiet or ‘religious’; it’s to do with enjoying the relationships Jesus has saved us into – with our Father in Heaven and with all of His Children.

It’s not to do with whether we can be reverent enough or good enough to deserve it – we never can!

It’s not about us; it’s about Him!

It’s about God overwhelming us again with His Grace – reminding us of the cost and overwhelming us with His Kindness again – feeding us on it until we

can't eat any more and then showing us that His Grace for us is more than we could ever need – generously and lovingly given.

Meals aren't sombre occasions; they are wonderful celebrations where the host overwhelms us with His Love!

Let's eat!

- Bread
- Wine
- Water jug
- Towel
- Bowl
- Table cloth