

Communion Sunday

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

1. History.

2. Participatory.

3. Calorie.

- John 6:51-58

4. Mystery.

5. Celebratory.

- 1 Corinthians 11:20-22; 10:16

6. Anticipatory.

- 1 Corinthians 11:26

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Communion Sunday

I can't think of a better way for us to begin the New Year than by sharing together in communion. We need this time to gather around the table together, to look each other in the eye and share what binds us together before we go out from this place to carry out our mission, which is to "Introduce People to Jesus Christ, Equip People with a Faith that Works, and Live as People with Purpose." And as we accomplish that mission, here's what it will look like: we will be a church that is multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and multi-site. Along with that, we are in our second of three years of "Here for Good" – our generosity effort to eliminate our debt – (which we did!), so we can invest more dollars in ministry, and to renovate some of the older parts of our facility, like this Worship Center and the foyer restrooms, so that we can continue to be effective in the generations to come – to be Here For Good. So sharing together in communion is a great way to come together and renew our commitment to Christ, to each other, and to our mission. Together...because we can not experience true communion outside of the context of community. For the *individual*, communion is *with God in Christ*, in the context of the *church family*, where communion is a celebration of our unity and shared purpose as found in Christ.

So before we share in communion together, I want to take a few moments to remind us of the significance of what we are about to do. I'd like to read for us a passage from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth that is talking about Communion – what it is and why we do it. Would you stand with me please as I read it to us?

For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, nlt)

This is what is going to speak to us today. You can be seated.

There are six qualities or characteristics of what we are about to do together that I want us to take a quick look at, so take out your WVC journals or open your app so you can take notes as we get started.

Now let's start by looking at the...

1. ***History***

Paul's letter was written only a little over 20 years after Jesus had first shared the "last supper" meal with his disciples. So when Paul says to the church in Corinth, "What I

received I passed on to you” he’s talking about what had happened barely two decades before— what the eyewitnesses—the disciples who were there with Jesus, along with Jesus Himself—had revealed to Paul. It’s important to see that the history of what Paul is talking about was very short—only 20 years earlier. That speaks to how accurate the Lord’s Supper was—the act of communion, the experience, was true to what Jesus had instructed.

But at the same time, the history of communion was actually quite long—its roots go all the way back to the time of the Exodus, when God used Moses to set the Jews free from their slavery to Egypt. Luke’s Gospel records that Jesus instituted communion as he was celebrating *the Old Testament Passover meal* with the disciples. By Jesus’ time, the *Passover meal* had been held annually by devout Jews for over 1500 years, always the same way. Maybe you remember that the Passover meal commemorated the Exodus event—when the blood of a lamb was painted over the doorposts of every Jewish home. That blood allowed the angel of death to pass over their home, killing only the first-born sons of the Egyptians. And that was the last plague that God brought against the Egyptians; it was the straw that broke the Egyptians’ backs so that Pharaoh finally let God’s people go free. But the Israelites had to leave so quickly that they didn’t have time to wait for the yeast in the bread to rise, so they made bread without yeast, or unleavened bread. Yeast represents sin, and unleavened bread represents life without sin. So the lamb’s blood and the bread without yeast foreshadowed Christ’s sinless blood and body. Passover suddenly had new meaning in the New Testament as it celebrated the blood of Jesus and his sinless body that was sacrificed for us. So by Paul’s time, communion had a long, rich history.

When *we* take part in communion today, we are repeating history from that very first Passover. Communion has taken place regularly since that very night that Jesus shared it and that Paul reminded the church in Corinth about. It has a rich and very accurate history.

But I also want you to recognize the...

2. ***Participatory***

...characteristic of communion. As I said earlier, communion is something that has its roots in *community*. We are participating in it *together*. When Jesus shared this meal with his disciples, he didn’t give them the bread and wine and send them to a chair off by themselves to eat it. He didn’t go to each of them one by one. He shared it with all of them, and they did it together. By the time Paul wrote this letter, communion was a part of a feast or a full meal that everyone shared together.

Jesus gave us two rituals, two sacraments. Do you know what they are? Baptism and Communion. Now, some Nazarenes might say there is a third sacrament: the potluck. Potlucks are *not* a sacrament, but by the time Paul wrote this to the church in Corinth, churches were already practicing potlucks, and communion was a part of them. Let me say the obvious: you can’t have a potluck all by yourself! It takes more than one person to potluck, and the more the merrier! Paul uses the word “**koinonia**,” which is a Greek word for “**fellowship**” or “**united community**.” So from Jesus’ time until Paul’s letter to Corinth until our time, communion has been something that believers participate in together.

There’s a third characteristic, and that’s the...

3. *Calorie*

...characteristic of communion. After the holidays we are all conscious of the calories we just consumed, with all the sweet treats and goodies that we ate. So with the New Year, we want to find all kinds of ways to cut calories. Maybe you heard about the businessman who was overweight and decided it was time to shed some excess pounds. He took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning, though, he arrived at work carrying a gigantic box filled with Krispy Kreme donuts. Everyone questioned what in the world he was doing with donuts when he was supposed to be on a diet. But he said, "These are very special donuts. I accidentally drove by the donut shop this morning and I could see in the window the conveyor belts with all the glisteningly glazed donuts on them. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, 'Lord, if you want me to have those delicious donuts, let me have a parking place directly in front of the bakery.' "And sure enough," he said, "the eighth time around the block, there it was!"

Unfortunately we all have to think about calories, but what in the world does that have to do with communion? Here's the point: when you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are taking *real elements*—real food—into your body. The blood that was shed for you, the body that was broken for you, is *just as real*. And in a very real way, you are partaking of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. When Jesus handed the bread and the wine to his disciples, he didn't say, "take and eat, this is *like* my body," or "drink of this, this *symbolizes* my blood." He said, "This **IS** my body, and this **IS** my blood." (Matthew 26:26-28) That little word for "is" that Jesus used means, "to be," or "being." In fact, Jesus used somewhat explicit terms in trying to make this point when he said:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.'" (John 6:51-58, niv)

I'm not suggesting that this bread and juice magically turns into Christ's body and blood; but I *am* saying that it is a *spiritual* reality that the bread *is* his body, and the cup is his blood, whenever we receive it in faith. What happens in you spiritually is just as real as the calories you are consuming. I don't want to get mystical about this, because this *is* a sacrament of memory: Jesus said, "do this and remember me. . ." But Jesus was saying that, ***in communion the memory turns into an experience which turns into an encounter.*** Jesus is not more present in the bread and cup than he is any other time or place; Jesus is *always* present with us. But everything we do in communion is designed to make *us* more aware of His presence. *Jesus is not present in a special way; we are more especially aware*

that he is present. “The sacrament is a place where the memory, the realization, and the appropriation ends in encounter.”¹

I know it’s hard to understand, and people way smarter than me have tried to figure it out for centuries. But that’s the...

4. ***Mystery***

...of communion. Historically, the presence of God has been defined as a mystery. That’s a sacrament, or a “sacred moment.” The Christian word “sacrament” contain elements of meaning from both the Latin and the Greek languages. The Greek word “mysterion”, where we get “mystery” from, is translated into the Latin language as “**sacramentum**,” which we get the word “sacrament” from. Now, here’s where it gets interesting. In original Latin, “Sacramentum” was ***the oath of allegiance taken by a Roman soldier as he promised to serve and defend the empire.*** So when we participate in the *mystery* and *sacrament* of communion, we are making a soldier’s oath of allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom! No *other* king, no *other* kingdom.

Paul uses the word “mysterion” or “sacramentum” to describe the indescribable ways of God. The point is, how can we, as finite humans, understand completely the ways of God? How can the created expect to understand the Creator? We *can* understand to some degree, but we will never understand it all. Paul also used the same word to describe how God has chosen to reveal his intentions to us, especially through Christ, in the Gospel, through the church, and through believers.

The bottom line is, when we share in communion, we are making an oath of allegiance to something that is greater than we are, something we will never fully understand, but something that has been made available to us in Christ. I hope that will make some sense, but just know there will always be mystery involved! I tell you what—it’s a mystery to me why God would love and care about me, let alone send His only Son to die in my place. I’ll never understand that. But I’ll gladly accept it! So I will celebrate the mystery of communion.

And celebrate is what we do: it is to be...

5. ***Celebratory***

Somehow, because communion is sacred, we’ve gotten the idea that it’s supposed to be somber and quiet and stoic. Maybe we get that from Paul’s warnings to not eat communion without first examining ourselves, because if we don’t approach it by realizing that it is sacred, we are setting ourselves up for trouble with a holy God who has paid a costly price. That *is* true. But listen: just because it’s sacred doesn’t mean it’s a funeral. Yes, we are remembering Christ’s death on the cross—Paul makes that clear. But it’s what Christ did for us that gives us reason to celebrate. When Paul described the meal, it was called the *love feast*! The problem with the church in Corinth was that they were celebrating *too*

¹ William Barclay, [The Lord’s Supper](#)

much—they were gorging themselves on food and getting drunk on the wine, and they were shoving the poor out of the way while they did it. So Paul was saying, “Back off—slow down!” He said, “This is a celebration, but you are going overboard!” Listen to what he says:

When you meet together as a group, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For as you eat, you each go ahead with your own meal, so that some are hungry while others get drunk. Don't you have your own homes in which to eat and drink? Or would you rather despise the church of God and put to shame the people who are in need? What do you expect me to say to you about this? Shall I praise you? Of course I don't! (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, niv)

But I wonder if we've taking Paul's warning to them, and we've gone to the other extreme. I think if Paul were writing this to us, he might say:

“What's this I hear about you? When you come together to celebrate communion, you are treating it as a funeral procession! Don't you know we have much to rejoice over? That we have a reason to celebrate? Why do you eat alone in a crowd? Don't you have homes to have your personal devotions and quiet times in? When you come together, celebrate together what God has done for you in Christ!” (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, MPV) Notice the “MPV”? That means its Mike's Paraphrase Version!)

It's a celebration! At Passover, there were four cups at the Lord's Supper, based on what God promised to do for them in Exodus 6:6-7. They were the cup of sanctification, the cup of judgment, the cup of thanksgiving for redemption and the cup of restoration. The cup that Jesus shared with the disciples to institute communion was the *third* cup in the Passover meal – “The cup of thanksgiving for redemption,” and it was given to celebrate with overflowing thankfulness what God has done to redeem people. That's why the Bible say:

“Isn't the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And isn't the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16, niv)

So, how do you show that you are thankful? Do you do it like this: “well God, thank you so much for your generosity. I don't think I can ever repay you. I'll just sit here quietly and eat and sip this by myself.”? Sometimes we worship like Eeyore! Don't you instead say, “Thank you, God! Thank you so much!” Folks, we've hit the jackpot; we've won the lottery! We ought to act like it! This is the cup of thanksgiving, not the cup of sadness.

And we not only celebrate what Christ *has* done, we celebrate what He *will* do. That's the last point—communion is...

6. ***Anticipatory***

The Bible says:

“Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26, niv)

When was the last time you shared in communion and thought about the fact that Jesus is coming back again? The Bible does *not* say, “every once in awhile try and remember that He’s coming back.” It says, “EVERY time—whenever—you eat the bread and drink the cup you are proclaiming the Lord’s death until he returns.” Jesus specifically instituted communion with a promise—that He would not drink the fruit of the vine again until He drinks it *with us* in Heaven. Communion is anticipatory!

That’s why Jesus told us to remember. The Greek word for “remember” is a good one. The original word translated “remember” is “**anamnesis**.” It comes from two Greek words, “**ana**,” which means “**repeatedly**,” and “**mnesis**” meaning “**calling to mind**” or “**remembering**.” So the word Jesus uses tells us to celebrate communion because it is how we *repeatedly remember* him in all the ways we’ve just talked about. But here’s something interesting. If you take the word “mnesis” which is “remember” and instead of “A-N-A” you add just one letter—“A” in front of it, it makes it a negative. **ANA + mnesis = “always remember”** while **A + mnesis = “never remember”**. For example, an a-theist is someone who does not believe in theos, or God, while an *anatheist* would be someone who always believes in God. So *not* calling to mind, *not* thinking about these things, *not* remembering what Jesus did for us, *that* is a-mnesis, or amnesia. Folks, let’s never forget why we are here!

I wonder if we’re sometimes like the old couple who were having trouble with remembering day to day things. They both decided that they would write down requests that the other had, and that would help them remember. One evening the wife asked if the husband would like anything to eat. He said, “Yes—I’d like a large ice cream sundae with chocolate ice cream, whipped cream, and a cherry on top.” So the wife headed for the kitchen, but the man called after her, “aren’t you going to write that down?” She said, “Don’t be silly—I’m going to fix it right now. I won’t forget.”

She was gone for quite awhile, and when she got back, she had a tray that she set in front of him that had hash browns, eggs, bacon, and a glass of orange juice. He took a look at it and said, “I knew you should have written it down! You forgot the toast!”

That’s exactly what it sounds like to God when we come to communion, and we forget what it’s all about. Many of us are suffering from spiritual amnesia. Instead we need *anamnesia*—we need to *always* remember.

We come to the table today with a rich history, to participate in it, taking in real spiritual calories, knowing it’s a mystery, and yet celebrating what’s been done for us and anticipating that one day, hopefully soon, Jesus will return again.

Let’s pray.

Benediction:

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.²

² <https://anglicancompass.com/after-communion-then-what/>