

Share this Feast Sermon on Communion

Sisters and brothers,
for most Christians at all times, gathering to celebrate communion has been the centre of worship. Whether held frequently or not often, the service which includes sharing bread and cup is regarded as a feast. A special experience of Christ's presence in the community.
Celebrating communion, which we are once more doing today, is one of the most important ways to learn, what it means to be a Christian – we learn through being nourished and fed.

In the Gospels we are told how Jesus shared an intimate last supper with his friends before his arrest and crucifixion. He took bread and wine, blessed them, and gave them out, saying “This is my body, this is my blood...” and reminding people to continue doing this in remembrance of him. Communion services ever since recall this occasion, when Jesus explained the meaning of his life and death through a meal.

The church teaches that holy communion is a sacrament. It is an act of worship in which we share ordinary material, everyday things. And through God's love and grace they become something extraordinary that can change us and change the world. God's presence in bread and grape juice, God's presence in the community makes all the difference.

Holy communion has many layers of meanings. Some of them I'd like to share with you today: one of its most important aspects is life in unity. Others are thanksgiving, remembering, sacrifice, presence of God, the work of the spirit, a foretaste of the kingdom of God, and our mission as God's people in the world. I'd like to reflect about them with you, and discover what communion can mean to us in this church today.

We – at Peace Church – with all our differences and diversities seem to be just the right place to reflect about unity. Celebrating communion is always about participating in community. We come together with other Christians in the name of God whose very nature is love. (Love is all you need...)

Communion is never ever something we could celebrate alone. It always takes place in a community.

Communion is not something that we make, it is something God offers and invites us to. We take our place alongside other people we know, whom we love or maybe struggle with, - and in company with all followers of Christ who celebrate across the world at present, in the past, and in the future.

The unity we share in coming to communion is our unity in Christ. It is not the kind of unity that comes from getting together with “people like us”, it is not “our own meal”, as the apostle Paul says, it is the meal of God. And we may find ourselves eating and drinking with a strange bunch of people whom not we but God has called together.

Today, although we come together to celebrate “life in unity”, we are all aware of painful, continuing divisions between Christians. We live in a world where the

gap between rich and poor, within our society and between different parts of the world, is getting ever wider. Conflict, mutual fear and distrust are all around. When we come to confess our personal sins, we acknowledge together our part in all that divides people, our world and our church.

There is no blame in this. We are simply facing reality, regretting that this is the way it is, and trying to work for the better.

At the beginning of communion we pray & confess:

**Eternal God, maker of the skies above, lowly Christ,
born amidst the growing earth,
Spirit of life, wind over the flowing waters,
in earth, sea and sky, you are there.
O hidden mystery, sun behind all suns, soul behind all souls,
in everything we touch, in everyone we meet,
your presence is around us, and we give you thanks.
But when we have not touched but trampled you in creation,
when we have not met but missed you in one another,
when we have not received but rejected you in the poor,
forgive us and hear us ask for mercy.**

At the end of it, we pray for change and the power and courage to bring about this change:

**In gratitude, in deep gratitude for this moment, this meal,
these people we give ourselves to you.
Take us out to live as changed people
because we have shared the living bread and cannot remain the same.
Ask much of us, expect much from us,
enable much by us, encourage many through us.
So, Lord, may we live to your glory,
both as inhabitants of earth and citizens of heaven.**

Another name for communion is “Eucharist”, which means “thanksgiving”. We are told that Jesus gave thanks and blessed bread and wine. He took the everyday elements of a meal and linked them with God’s story with his people. When we give thanks in communion we are doing both: retelling and putting ourselves inside the story of salvation, praising God for being the kind of God he is, - a giver of life and freedom throughout the history of the people believing in him, trusting him and worshipping him.

And sometimes, when we compare God’s goodness and forgiveness with that of the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, it is as if we ourselves are the returning child. God comes with open arms to meet us and bring us home.

In our world and our personal lives, it often feels difficult to give thanks, especially when times are hard. In communion we are given the chance to see that we stand within a larger story than just our own place and time. Our immediate sufferings are put into a wider perspective. As many did before us and many will after us, in communion we give our dreams, thanks, fears and struggles to God, so that they may be transformed and used to God’s glory.

From creation on, from the slavery in Egypt and the Exodus into the promised land, all the way through the times of the kings and prophets into New

Testament times and the life of Jesus, in the Bible, human beings are always sustained through being held in the powerful all-embracing memory of God. People then and now are invited to celebrate the fact that God is at work in all things. God has not forgotten anyone of us, and we remember his love and grace by remembering his son. Jesus, image of the unseen God, invites us to his table and shows us how to live.

Take, eat, remember...

We are asked not only to remember in an abstract way, but with our bodies. We break bread, receive, eat, drink, taste... What happens in communion is not just a mental act, but a physical, bodily experience that goes far deeper than words could ever do.

When Jesus commands us to remember him, he also asks us to act. He asks us to feed the hungry, to be his hands and feet in the world... to realize God's commands about justice and peace. This requires strength which we are offered in coming together as a community of God sharing the elements that connect us more with Jesus' life and death than anything else could.

Recalling the death of Jesus as well as his loving and living and sharing expresses that communion is also a sign to us that as Jesus' followers we have not been promised life in a rose garden... all nice and easy without hardship and harm. As Christians we have made the commitment "I am no longer mine but yours, God". We are invited to sacrifice putting ourselves at the centre of our life's meaning, and to surrender to the will of God – which can lead through pathways of pain, as well as offering an enormous amount of freedom and joy. It is both.

No one is forced to eat and drink, but if we do, we are risking participation in both: the life and death of Christ. And we soon discover that the closeness to Christ expressed in communion exposes us to the suffering of the broken world for which Christ died.

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?

Many people feel a sense of hesitation in approaching holy communion. Some feel even unworthy to be present and to receive the elements. And many texts in our communion liturgies acknowledge this. We do express that we are not coming to the Lord's table "trusting in our own righteousness". We declare that we alone are not "worthy"... but are invited to believe and trust that however we come to God, we will never be rejected but will receive healing, transformation and never-ending unconditional love!

None of us should hold back. Never.

It is so true for all of us – no matter who we are – that we are never through our own goodness going to "earn" what God offers to us.

The bread of life is offered to us where we are, as nourishment for the journey, as satisfaction for our deep hunger for life – a hunger that nothing else but God alone can satisfy.

Do you remember the story of the foot washing?

Peter initially resisted having his feet washed by his Lord. It is not always easy to accept the respect that God in Jesus offers to us as honoured guests at his table, because we know ourselves so well. We see deep inside ourselves. We know

all the shortcomings and failures, the weaknesses and limitations..., but we may also know: God holds open his arms lovingly to meet us where we are and help us to carry on!

Throughout the gospels, Jesus is shown sharing meals with all sorts of different people.

In the ancient world, to share food with someone was an important gesture of intimacy, a powerful bond between people.

Scandalously Jesus is seen sharing hospitality with a wide range of people: his closest friends, his religious opponents, corrupt tax collectors and many other men and women with a rather doubtful reputation.

It is during mealtime conversations that much of Jesus' teaching is given. And one of the classic images of the kingdom of God is a feast where the respectable are invited, but send their apologies. And in the end, the feast (or the party or the worship service?) is attended by those who never expected to be on anyone's guest-list: the poor, the sick, the outcast.

We are on God's guest list!

We are invited to the feast, and asked to hold out our hands and receive the bread of life. As Christians we will always see both: our need to receive and our ability to change and grow – through the love of God – and sometimes through the love and friendship of our fellow Christians.

Bread and wine are not sacred in themselves.

They become elements that hold God's presence by being blessed and shared in the community of believers.

Here we also ask to be transformed in the image of God. We are called to become more truly who we are meant to be. We are called to show Christ like fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

And this is why we exchange the Peace with each other. We express our faith and our longing that in a broken and divided world, the handshake or embrace we give each other declares that God will bring true reconciliation and peace. And that in holy communion we are given and giving a foretaste of this heavenly kingdom.

Before I come to an end, let me share one last aspect of communion with you...

Communion worship is always heading towards being sent out to share this feast. The nourishment that we receive is not for us alone. It empowers us to go out into the world, find out what God is doing there, and join in!

Caught up in the love of God we cannot hold back what we are given.

John's story of the feeding of the 5000 has encouraged Christians throughout the ages to recognize that what we have to offer, however big or small it is, can be taken and used to the unexpected works of God's grace.

So the end of a communion service is always the beginning of what we are asked to do next!

May we all be touched by maybe only one aspect of this whole selection of communion thoughts I have offered you today, and take it out into the world. That would be perfectly fine.

Not every aspect of communion must be equally important to each of us. At one point it may be the aspect of unity, at another the aspect of thanksgiving, and at yet another the aspect of remembering...or any of the others...

Just bear in mind, please that we all belong together, which we express in the blessing we share after having taken bread & wine:

**Many grains were gathered together to make this bread,
many grapes were mixed to make this wine.**

**So we who are many, and come from many places,
are one in Christ:**

May the peace of Christ be with you.

And by being the body of Christ, we can all work together & with our individual understandings of what is most important in communion will bring about wholeness and healing.

Amen.