

Introduction to Communion (or The Lord's Supper)

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Mark 14:22-25

Since the birth of the church nearly two thousand years ago Christians have regularly participated in the ancient sacrament of communion (also known as The Lord's Supper) in obedience to His teaching. To understand it, it is helpful to begin by comparing communion with baptism. The sacrament of baptism is a **one-time act** where Christians publicly proclaim the reality of their participation in Jesus's death and resurrection and are publicly initiated into the church. Communion, on the other hand, is a **repeated act** where Christians eat the bread and drink from the cup together and do so as an expression of ongoing **remembrance, proclamation, and participation** in Jesus's saving, sacrificial death.¹

Communion was instituted by Jesus Himself on the night of his betrayal as part of a Passover meal with His twelve disciples. Taking bread, He broke and blessed it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Likewise, He took the cup and said, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28). He said that this was to be done "in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). **Remembering** the sacrifice of Jesus for us is the first purpose of communion. For this reason, communion is to be reserved only for those who have professed faith in Jesus have decided to follow after Him: we have to have an experience of receiving His gracious death on our behalf that we can look back to in remembrance. For this same reason, parents will need to be extra discerning with their children around when they have made a credible profession of faith and are ready to participate in baptism and communion.²

As the Apostle Paul was reflecting on Jesus's words about communion and writing to guide one of the churches under his care, he wrote "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). A second purpose of communion is to publicly, visibly **demonstrate and declare** what Christ did for us, both to one another who

¹ See also our sermon titled "[Habits of the Heart \(Liturgy as Worship\)](#)" for additional teaching about communion and liturgy in general.

² Our leadership doesn't police who is allowed to participate in communion beyond regularly reminding our congregation about who it is for and in what spirit it is meant to be taken in. But generally, communion should follow after baptism. If you have decided to follow Jesus and wish to participate in communion but haven't been baptized, please reach out about baptism. Similarly, parents should help their children discern their faith in Jesus and after their children are ready to make a credible profession of faith and be baptized, then they should be invited to the communion table.

follow Jesus and to those gathered with us who don't yet believe and thus do not yet participate in communion.

Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul also said this mysterious couple of sentences: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" A third purpose of The Lord's Supper is **participation** (or communion) with Him and His sacrifice in some mysterious, spiritual, and very real sense. Jesus said something similar and provocative in the Gospel According to John when He said, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:56) What, exactly, this means has been a major point of debate across the various streams of Christianity. For our part at Door of Hope Northeast, we are content not to push beyond the language that the New Testament has left for us (we do not hold to the Roman Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation*, for example), but desperately want to recognize that the grace of a deep spiritual union with Jesus is occurring when we eat and drink this communion meal together and in the proper spirit.

The New Testament does give some guidelines for how churches can take The Lord's Supper in "a worthy manner" (1 Corinthians 11:27). One key idea is that it is meant to be communal and unifying rather than individual (1 Corinthians 10:17) and typically happens when the church is gathered together for worship. Flowing out of that is the idea that it is meant to be done in a way that gives equal participation to the whole believing community—no one is to be overlooked and no one is to take so much for themselves that it leaves none for others.³ Another important idea is that the communion table should be approached with self-examination, making sure that everyone approaches with an understanding of what they are doing (see above) and recognizing the connection both to the given body of Jesus and the community of people that makes up the "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:29)—these together will produce the right kind of reverence.

Reflection on the sacrifice of Jesus through communion naturally produces grief over our sin that made His death necessary, but it is also meant to be a moment of joy, celebration, and thanksgiving as we freshly recognize the grace that has been and is being given to us through His death and resurrection. Lastly, communion is an **anticipation and a foretaste** of the future grace that will be given to us when Christ returns and we sit down at His table with Him for the greatest meal the world has ever known, the beginning of His healing and renewal of all things (Revelation 19:6-10). For this reason, we will continue to participate in The Lord's Supper until the Lord returns.

³ See 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 where evidently the poor were being left out of the sacrament, to Paul's great concern.