

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Communion – Remembering Christ

Do you remember the disciples at the end of Luke's gospel, who were on their way home from Jerusalem after the crucifixion? I'm certain they had little interest in eating a meal. Yet when they were joined by a stranger who asked them about their sad faces, they seemed dumb-founded. "Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?" Opening the Scriptures, He explained to them the meaning of the weekend's events. Their confused, cold hearts began to warm. They could not help but invite the man to stay at their house for the evening. He accepted the invitation.

At the table He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. That's when they realized that this stranger was the risen Christ. He revealed himself to them in the breaking of the bread even as He had at the Last Supper with others before the cross.

As with Baptism, the Lord's Supper was instituted directly by a command of Christ and, in this case by His example as well. On the night before his death, Christ gathered with His disciples to eat the Passover meal. Each person in the room where they were eating this meal would have understood the significance of celebrating Passover. For this was a feast held in remembrance of God's deliverance and redemption of His people from the slavery of Egypt (Exodus 12:14, 13:3 and 10; Deuteronomy 16:3). However on this particular Passover, Jesus turned to the future and talked of His imminent redemptive death, which was to fulfill not only the Passover but all previous sacrificial offerings. No longer would the disciples look back to redemptive symbols and animal sacrifices. From now on, they were to remember Jesus and His perfect final sacrifice—His own life, which was given for them. The account of this Last Supper is given in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and is reviewed again in 1 Corinthians 12:23-26.

Meaning

The meaning of the Lord's Supper is primarily summed up in the command of Christ, "*This do in remembrance of Me.*" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

1. It is a meal of remembrance—a memorial of Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross. This involves reflection and acknowledgment of one's need for God's grace.
2. Based upon a common participation in Christ and His salvation, there is also in the Lord's Supper a communion of believers in the unity of His body (1 Corinthians 10:16). This is the aspect of fellowship with other members of His church—the body of Christ.

At Grace, the two elements used in observing the Lord's Supper are bread (wafer cracker) and grape juice. Jesus, when he ate that Passover meal said (taking the bread), "This is my body, given for you." In the same way after supper he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." What do these two sentences mean?

Both of the elements (bread and cup) signify the *very real fact* of sacrificial death. Christ was well aware that His own body must be sacrificed. In Ancient Hebrew culture the "body and blood" referred to the two component parts of a living thing. Jesus was explaining that His death would be a sacrifice which would open up the way for sinners to be reunited with God. His death would become the basis of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:13, 9:15 and 10:19-22) that would enable all who believe and accept God's gift of salvation to be accepted by God (Hebrews 10:10). This would not happen without His body being beaten, bruised and broken, and His blood being shed.

Some people have struggled over the interpretation of the words of Christ, "This is My body" and "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." Should they be interpreted literally or figuratively?

The reformers of Martin Luther's era debated the precise meaning of 'the body' and 'the blood.' Zwingli, and others with him, argued that Jesus' words meant "This body *represents* My body." The actual bread was not the physical flesh of Jesus, but was to be understood as a figurative expression. Jesus frequently used figurative language to make a point. He said, "I am the door," "I am the true vine," "Whoever believes in Me....streams of living water will flow from him." Symbolism or figurative language as used by Christ is a part of normal speech. The reformers who understood this argued that Christ's body is not present in actual substance at the Lord's supper, but that the elements are to be handled with reverence because of their profound symbolism. The Lord Jesus is present at the communion service in that same manner that He is present in each of our lives. There is no unique mystical meeting of Christ in a way that is different from faith in Him and meeting Him at the cross for salvation.

The participants at communion are believers in Christ--Christians. However before taking communion the Bible does urge that each Christian examine his/her life to see if each is able to partake in a worthy manner. This means checking our heart. Are we in right relationship with God? Are we in right relationship with each of the fellow members of the body of Christ? To come to the Lord's table with a heart of sin that's hardened toward God and fellow man, is to "participate in an unworthy manner." (1 Cor 11:30-31)

One last thought, the supper which expresses the *communion of believers* in the body of Christ, is for the *church* as it gathers together. The disciples came together with the early church to break bread (Acts 20:7). This time of remembering Jesus' death is meant to be observed by the church and not neglected. The privilege of participation should never be taken for granted.