

## **Holy Communion: What does it mean?**

9/29/2019  
Y. Joe Kim

*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)*

### **1. Celebrations**

Three weeks ago, Christine and I went to Bourne UMC and joined their 225th Church Anniversary celebration. The church invited old church members and staff and had dinner together. After dinner, they sang and gave thanks to God for their faith journey. On Sunday, the church had the anniversary worship service. Dr. Andrew Foster, III, the District Superintendent joined them and blessed the congregation. The people took a photo after service and shared an anniversary cake. Although Bourne UMC is not our church, they are part of the same denomination and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Next Sunday on October 6, we will celebrate World Communion Sunday. We will have a guest speaker, a liturgical dancer, and a singing duet. As you may have read in the insert of the bulletin today, on World Communion Sunday, we celebrate with our brothers and sisters from around the world as one family in Christ. We remember that we are connected with all of our brothers and sisters in the world by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

### **2. The Holy Communion**

For the past two thousand years, the church has continued the practice of Holy Communion. At Swift Memorial Church, we receive Holy Communion once a month. Some churches celebrate communion every week. Acts 2:42-46 tells us that the early church took communion every day. Why did they do so often? Do we understand the meaning and significance of Holy Communion?

The account of the establishment of the Lord's Supper is described in three gospels, Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:17-20 and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The first practice of Holy Communion occurs when Jesus and his disciples come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. While Jesus and the disciples had the Passover meal, Jesus follows two traditional parts of the meal, the passing of bread and the drinking of wine. Jesus gave these traditions new meaning as representations of his body and blood. Jesus used the bread and wine to explain the significance of his death on the cross.

In today's New Testament passage, we notice that Paul talks about Holy Communion to the Corinthian Christians. Why does Paul talk about Holy Communion with the Corinthians? It is because some of the Corinthians are taking Holy Communion in an inappropriate manner. In 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, Paul says, "**Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**"<sup>29</sup> **For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.**" Paul does not want the Christians in Corinth to take Holy Communion without knowing the meaning of communion. What do you think the appropriate understanding would be when we take Holy Communion?

### 3. Remember & Give Thanks

Let us take a look at how Holy Communion is begun. Luke 22:19-20 says, "**he (Jesus) took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."**"<sup>20</sup> **And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."**

Jesus wants his disciples and us to do Holy Communion in remembrance of him. Why? It is because he would give his body for us. He means that he would give his life for humanity dying on the cross. In Old Testament times, people's sins would be forgiven when they would bring animals for the priests to sacrifice in the Temple. According to Exodus 24:8, the agreement of the sacrificial system was sealed by Moses with the blood of animals. This was an old covenant God made with the Israelites.

Jeremiah 31:31 & 34 talks about a new covenant: "**The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.**" The focus of the new covenant is on the forgiveness of sin without sacrificing animals. Jeremiah looks forward to the day when the Messiah would come to establish the new covenant. At the Last Supper, Jesus says that he makes a new covenant with his disciples and with us through his blood (Luke 22:20).

What do we remember when we receive Holy Communion? We remember the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross and the forgiveness of sins. We also remember that by his blood he has made a covenant relationship with us. The word "communion" is "koinonia" in Greek. It means a partnership, participation, fellowship, communication, distribution, or contribution. Partaking

in communion is an act of confirming the covenant relationship between Jesus and God's people. No one can break the covenant relationship because Jesus initiated.

Holy Communion is also called the Eucharist. "Eucharist" means thanksgiving in Greek language. In Holy Communion, we give thanks to God for what Jesus has done. What Jesus has done is that he not only died on the cross, but also he was risen from the dead and promised that he will come again.

#### 4. Proclaim the Gospel

I am sure that everyone understands that we remember and give thanks in Holy Communion. What about what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26? Paul says, "**you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**" Paul says in Holy Communion, we declare or speak of the death of Jesus and his return. As far as the timing of Jesus' death and His return is concerned, there is a big gap. The early Christians believed that Jesus would be back very soon. But it has been almost 2,000 years since that time. No one knows when Jesus would be back. Where would Jesus be before his return? Christians believe that Jesus is present in Holy Communion.

Some believe that when Holy Communion is observed in the church and when the elements are consumed, the elements literally become the body and blood of Jesus. This is called "transubstantiation." "Transubstantiation" means that the elements transform into the body and blood of Jesus. Most Roman Catholics hold this view.

Martin Luther believed that the body and blood of Christ were present "in, with, and under the elements." This is called "consubstantiation." "Consubstantiation" means that Jesus is with the elements. Most Protestant Christians believe this.

Symbolic reference is another understanding about the elements of communion. This belief is that Jesus is somehow spiritually present when we participate in communion.

Although each view is different about the presence of Jesus at the communion table, we need to remember what Jesus say in Matthew 28:20; "**surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.**"

Why is the presence of Jesus important at the communion table and in our entire life's journey? It is because we can do nothing without Jesus (John 15:5). That is why Jesus tells his disciples, "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**" (Matthew 28:19). We can't make disciples without Jesus.

When we receive communion, we remember what our mission is. Holy Communion is a time for us to remember what God's great commission is. It is a moment that we renew our commitment to Christ Jesus.

## **5. The Jewish Roots to Communion**

When we have Holy Communion, we have to keep in context that the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples was a Passover meal. Exodus 12 says that the Passover was instituted by God to celebrate Israel's deliverance from Egypt and to remind the Israelites of what God had done. The Passover was an annual reminder of what God has done for the people of Israel.

Taking the Hebraic roots of the Passover, Jesus taught the disciples about this deeper meaning, an image of the spiritual freedom that has come from His blood shed on the cross.

## **6. Conclusion**

When we take the Lord's supper, we remember what Jesus has done, his sacrificial death and the forgiveness of sins, and the covenant relationship. Holy Communion reminds us of his resurrection, his return, and his presence. When we have Holy Communion, we give thanks to God for sending us Jesus to save us. The most important point we have to keep in mind is that we proclaim his death until he comes. The word "proclaim" can be translated into "preach, show, declare, teach, speak of, and make known." Holy Communion reminds us that we are supposed to let other people know the good news of Jesus Christ by words and actions.

## **7. Application**

I am sure all of us remember what God has done through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We are so grateful for our salvation, His love and grace. Through God's plan and His guidance, we live in this area and serve the Lord through Swift Memorial UMC. In response to God's love and grace, where do we find ourselves in the life and ministry of Jesus? Do we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ? What does our daily life reflect about what we are committed to?

I do not think we are called only to be in the audience to watch an exciting game like Super bowl. We are called to participate in the game not as a coach but as players to win the game and to win God's people for Christ Jesus.

I am so grateful to Susan Scott, who put together Swift Memorial strategic plan. These ministry ideas are from the elder team and church Administrative Council. We still look forward to hearing more ideas from you. Although we have a wonderful plan, if no one implements this plan, nothing will happen.

Would you and I pray over the sheet of paper and ask God what God may be calling us to among some of the ministry plans to proclaim the gospel of Jesus in our church and in our community? May God inspire us and challenge us to renew our commitment to Christ Jesus. Amen.