

**Is It Possible to Meet Jesus Today?****(Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:17-18; I Corinthians 11:17-34)**

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Brentview has people who come from many different church backgrounds. Most people know that as you attend different churches, the Lord's Supper is celebrated in many different ways. One of my favorite memories was the time when Kathy and I attended a small church in Canmore while on holidays. When it came time for Communion, they began by passing around a large Matzo loaf. The idea was that you would tear off a piece of the loaf and then pass it to the person beside you. You need to know that my wife hates germs, and on this day the man beside her had a bad cold, a hacking cough and a runny nose. So when he tore off his piece of the Matzo loaf and then passed it to Kathy, she decided to 'pass' on the bread that morning. At least I can have the wine she thought. But then, the pastor announced that they only would pass 2 different cups around for us to drink from - real wine would be in individual cups (red wine gives her a headache) but if you wanted to have the grape juice there was a common cup you could drink from. So when the fellow beside her sniffled two times and then drank from the common grape juice cup, she felt the need to pass the cup by as well. So to help explain to the person beside me why my wife had refrained from having communion, I simply winked and said 'she has un-confessed sin in her life that she needs to deal with first'.

When you think back over the different times you have participated in a communion service, what kind of experiences have you had? I ask because as I look back over the many times I have participated in communion services, there have been times where I felt like I was just going through the motions and really didn't experience much. There have also been those times, when in the silence I have had a gentle and even profound experiences with Jesus. One such time was during my first communion service at Brentview and I felt called to come to Brentview. At times I have felt Jesus' nearness and at other times in the quietness I have felt his peace, his care or a nudge about what to do next. So, this morning as we begin a mini-series of 'Things we Share Together' I thought it would be good to look at Communion. For some of you who are new to faith, you would like to know a little bit more about what is really happening during the communion service. And for those of us who have taken Communion for years, it is good to be reminded of what we believe. So let's spend some time before we participate in communion talking about what it means.

## **I. Communion 101**

If you attend different churches, you will find that the Lord's Supper is celebrated in various ways and called different things. In some churches they will use a single loaf and a single cup of real wine, others will use small pieces of cubed bread and individual glasses of Welsh's grape juice. At some churches you come forward to the alter to receive the elements, while at other churches you will remain in your seat. You will also find that the service may be described using different names. As I looked at these names it struck me that each one highlights a different aspect concerning the Lord's supper. In the Greek Orthodox tradition the word mystery is used. They want us to grasp the idea that things happen at this meal which are supernatural for God meets us. The Roman Catholic church uses the term sacrament from the Latin sacramentum, meaning a pledge of allegiance. We are pledging to be Christ followers. Our Anglican brethren use the word Eucharist from the Greek eucharistia which means to 'give thanks' for what Jesus has done. Many Baptist call it the Lord's Supper because Jesus first instituted the meal during a supper in the Upper Room. And then there is

the term Communion which contains the idea that it is a time of communing and meeting with Jesus that it is done within the context of the community of the local church.

### 3000 years in 2 minutes The Passover (1400 BC)

The roots of the Lord's Supper go back the time when Moses was attempting to persuade the Egyptian Pharaoh to free the Israelite slaves. After making many requests (backed by a number of plagues), God finally said 'I will send my Death Angel to Egypt and unless you free my people the first born of every family will die'. That night God told the Israelite people that for their own safety they needed to kill a lamb and paint the doorposts of their homes with the blood of the lamb. When the death angel saw this symbol on their door posts, he would 'Passover' their house and their sons did not die. Here we see two things which God is trying to begin to teach mankind. Firstly, without the shedding of blood we are not safe. Secondly, a lamb's sacrifice would be sufficient to allow the death angel to Passover and their lives would be saved.

Now fast forward 1400 years. The place is an Upper Room in Jerusalem. Here we find Jesus on the very night he would be betrayed piggy backing on the Passover story. Matthew 26:26 says "while they were eating..." so in the middle of having the Passover meal with his disciples he infuses it with new meaning. He holds up the Passover Matzo bread and says "This is my body which is for you" and lifts the cup of wine and says "this is my blood which will be shed for us"(Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:7-18). He is saying that just like the Passover lamb saved the Israelite children from death, his death will give us eternal life.

Early Church now. While some call this the Last supper, it was really the first supper. We find out that as the Early church began, Acts 2:46, they met from house to house and reenacting Jesus' Last supper. Acts 20:7 says that it became a pattern that happened on every Sunday. We also find out that this pattern of having communion happened in different churches in different countries. For example, we know that it was happening in the city of Corinth by 55 AD until 28 years after Jesus' death and resurrection (I Corinthians 11).

A Change happens, when the Roman Emperor Constantine became a believer (313 AD). Christianity changed from being a faith where many Christians died in the Roman coliseums because they were Christ followers, to the hottest new religion on the planet. However, what also happened was that the church changed from a movement that had its roots in homes and smaller gathering led by ordinary people, to groups of people who met in church buildings and great Cathedrals and were led by professionally trained clergy. That transition caused a great change in communion. It wasn't long until a rail was placed between the altar and the people and only the professional priests were allowed to serve communion. Shortly after that, only the priest was allowed to drink the wine and ordinary people received only the communion wafer. Communion changed from a 'remembrance of what Jesus did' to 'the place where God's grace was being dispensed'. So if you missed communion or were not allowed to have communion, your soul was in jeopardy.

One more shift happened. During the 1400's, the Reformation happened where men like Luther and Calvin started questioning, some of the actions of the Roman Catholic church. Then when the bible was printed in the language of the ordinary people, they read that both elements had been served to and by ordinary people so they asked 'why couldn't that happen in their day as well'? It was those kinds of questions that brought us to today, sitting in a room together preparing as clergy and laity to share in the remembrance of the Lord's Supper together.

I wanted to tell you this history not only to show some of the patterns from history but to also remind us that despite the differing ways communion has been celebrated and served, Jesus has been graciously showing up and meeting his people throughout history. He has been challenging, encouraging and blessing Christians through the Lord's supper down through the centuries.

## **II. Communion I Corinthians 11**

Why do we Serve Communion on a Regular basis? I think the answer is summed up in the following.

It helps us remember. As I see the elements, touch the bread and taste the wine, it helps me remember what Jesus did for me. It allows the fact that I am loved by the God of the Universe to wash over me and give me hope again.

It gives us a chance for a new beginning. So often at communion I find myself stopping and admitting 'I fell with that same sin again'. And when the guilt wells up within me at communion, I have the chance to simply say 'oh Lord forgive me please, and can I start again'. Then I can start again with hope.

But here it the greatest part, it gives me an opportunity for a present day meeting with Jesus. That has increasingly become important for me. I was raised taught that communion was simply remembering what Jesus had done. We couldn't believe like the Catholics who during the Sacrament of Communion, believe the Bread and Wine become the actual Body and Blood of Jesus. So as a good protestant, I 'protested too much' and didn't even consider the fact that Jesus could meet me in the Communion service. And then I had this 'Ah Ha' moment. Some of you have heard this, but it happened when I was serving on an Ordination counsel. When the potential pastor was asked what communion was all about, he said it was just a symbolic act. So I asked him "Is communion a graveside remembrance (just looking back at the death of Jesus) or is it a present day meeting with Jesus?" He said it was just a graveside remembrance. And when I heard it said so bluntly, my heart groaned within me. It was as if the Lord said to me, Communion needs to be a present day meeting with your Jesus. It needs to be a time when we expect to speak to Jesus and He can speak directly to our heart. Believing this makes me excited about Communion Sunday and gives me hope. Hope because Communion offers a unique and precious opportunity to meet with my Jesus.

So, what should happen at a Communion service you ask? Turn to I Corinthians 11. It is Paul's instruction to First Baptist Corinth on how to have this present day communion with Jesus. Let me sum it up in 4 statements. It is a time to...

### **Look Back – Remember I Corinthians 11:24, 25**

'Remember me'. How I look at those two words completely depends on the inflection of our voice. I think it is a command. Jesus is saying you need to regularly 'remember me'. As you look deep into His heart and look at His pierced hands and resurrected body, you will 'get it again' that you are loved by Jesus. I think the 'remember me' may also have been given with the inflexion of a plea, as if He was saying 'please, please remember me'. Why? Because He knew how easy we get sidetracked and how easy it is for us to put Him off to the side of our heart and life and how easily we forget. You and I are invited to remember Him, for in the remembering comes the realization that He loved us enough to die for us.

## **Look Within – Examine Yourself I Corinthians 11:27**

Just for a moment, imagine what it would have been like to eavesdrop on the Last Supper. You would have seen Jesus take the Matzo loaf in His hand and then tear it (or snap it if it was the hard kind and small little fragments would have flown in the air). You would have heard Jesus in a husky breathy voice say this is my body which will be broken for you. And you would have seen the disciples looking at each other and whispering that He messed up on the regular Passover Meal procedure. What was he doing? And then with a clenched jaw, Jesus took the cup of wine, dipped his finger in it and as a drop ran toward the center of his hand he would have turned ashen white. He caught himself, raised the glass and with a smile said, “This is a new covenant (Last will and Testament) which is in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me”.

Such a simple statement - take it, this is my body. In that bread there is the symbol of suffering. When I hold the bread in my hands, I never fail to remember the words for I Corinthians 11:24 ‘that when he took the bread he broke it’. And while we Protestants love an empty cross for it tells about Jesus’ resurrection, I sometimes think the Catholic cross which has Jesus still on it, more profoundly points us to the depth of love and the immensity of his suffering. The amazing fact is that the physical pain was connected to the dread of bearing the sin of all the world and then compounded by His father turning His back on His son. This meant that His suffering went beyond our understanding. As I hold the bread, I need to say thank you Jesus (Romans 6:23). Here is also where my sadness turns to excitement. He pulled it off. Somehow because His body was broken for me, my sins are completely forgiven. My guilt can finally be gone. Because He rose again, He can use this same power to reform me and make me into a new person.

Then He took the wine, probably because wine is red like blood, Jesus added “this is the new covenant in my blood”. It is like a last will and testament. It only becomes valid upon the persons death.

Let me stop for a moment because if you are new to faith, and honestly for us who have been Christians a long time, this is one of those ideas that is crucial to our faith and yet hard to grasp. Mark 14:24 What we know as people is that when we do things which are wrong there will always be a cost involved. We know that if a man has an affair there will be a cost to his wife, children and to himself. The idea is that when someone sins against another, we know from experience someone always ends up paying for it. In a similar way, the bible teaches that when we do things which go against God’s ways, to get things set right with God, a cost will always need to be paid. And from the Old Testament Passover example (which God kept before Israel for centuries) and again what Jesus is saying in Mark 14, the cost of ‘saving us’ was the life (blood) of a lamb. Hebrews 9:22 copies Leviticus 17:11 and says ‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin’. It seems God who understands how the universe works planned that ‘the shedding of the blood of a lamb’ would make it possible for sins to be paid for and covered. Jesus says that when it comes to saving us and putting us in right relationship with God, that cost would be his life (Jesus’ blood, the lamb of God, shed on the cross). Romans 3:23 says ‘For the wages of sin is death’. It struck me as I read that the other day, that when it states this fact it never even hints that we will pay for our sins in that way. Why? Because Jesus was willing to be the one who put His body and His blood on the line for us so He could be put back in a right relationship with God. Communion shows this picture to us. So when I hold the bread and the wine I think of His power to forgive and how His power can flow into my life no matter what my circumstances are. If we keep with the Last Will and Testament concept, I should know from history that after a contract was signed and

sealed, the parties affirmed it was done by sitting down to a meal together. Communion is that kind of a meal. When you sit down with Jesus and He affirms that fact that it is done and you are forgiven. His body and blood sealed the deal to forgive your sins.

### **Look Around – One Loaf, One Body I Corinthians 11:27,28**

Biblically, their Communion service was often preceded by a Potluck supper. However, what happened at First Baptist in Corinth was that when slaves and the rich meet at the supper they weren't sharing and verses 18-21 say there were divisions among them and the poor among them stayed hungry. Paul wanted them to realize that the Communion meal was a community, family meal. The idea was that when we eat of one loaf we are showing we are of one body. Ephesians 4:4 'we are all one body, we have the same spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future'. It says that if we come to this table with something against another believer God will not just let it slide. Look at verses 27-29. He is saying that usually when we get sick, we wonder if it was something we ate or if there is a bug going around. Paul says it could be something we ate, for if we ate the communion bread and hate a brother or sister in Christ Jesus said He will judge with sickness. I won't fool around on this one. He was saying that before you come to this table, you'd better get things right with each other and do it NOW. Why? Because our heavenly father hates it when His children aren't getting along. An employment center in Arizona has a full length mirror as you walk into their office with these words on it "Would you hire this person?" At the communion service Jesus holds up a mirror and asks us 'Do you have sin that needs to be confessed or a person that you need to do business with? If so, do it NOW.'

### **Look Ahead - Proclaim I Corinthians 11:26**

Jesus says in Mark 14:25 that there will come a day when I will be standing in glory beside my dad and we will be seated with millions upon millions of people around this huge table. All of a sudden, the pounding of a great staff will be heard and all will become silent. Then out will walk our Jesus. We will stand and cheer for all He has done in our lives. And He will raise His glass and together we will celebrate that He has kept His word. At the Lord's Table, we are reminded that the best is yet to come.

You see, Communion was never meant to be just a grave side remembrance. It was meant to be a present day meeting with Jesus.

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