

How and Why (of Communion)

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Texts: John 6:51-58 and Luke 22:14-20

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We are midway through our series on Communion. We have considered the historical background of the Jewish Celebration of Passover for Jesus' last supper with his disciples. We have also considered the past, present and future nature of our practice of communion.

Today we are going to look at two gospel passages this morning that provide additional insight and understanding of the bread and the cup. We will also consider the how and why of some of the various aspects of the things we do.

The Scripture passages for this morning are John 6:51-58 and Luke 22:14-20.

First Scripture Readingⁱ John 6:51-58

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to

them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in

you. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have

eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵ for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in

them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

Second Scripture Reading Luke 22:14-20

¹⁴ When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” ¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ Then he 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.” ²⁰ 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.”

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

If I were to ask you what you grew up calling Communion (or maybe what you still call Communion) the list of answers might include: Eucharist, The Lord’s Supper, Communion or Holy Communion, Breaking of the Bread, or Mass or Memorial Celebration.

Each of these names are all referencing the same event, partaking of the bread and the cup at the Lord's Table.

All these names, while referring to the same event in the life of the church, all have slightly different meanings or nuances.

We are going to focus specifically on four of these names this morning: Eucharist, The Lord's Supper, Communion or Holy Communion and Breaking of the Bread.

Eucharist.

The English word "Eucharist" is from the Greek eucharistos, meaning "thanksgiving." Both Mark (Mark 14:22–23) and the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 11:24) use the term, suggesting that there is reason to celebrate when we take the bread and cup!ⁱⁱ

When we come together at the table, we are to remember that this meal is a celebration. Jesus Christ is raised from the dead and lives for our sake.

Jesus reminds us in John 6:57, ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.

This **IS** our reason to be excited and to celebrate. This **IS** our reason to give thanks to Almighty God.

Sometimes we neglect to truly give thanks to God for all of the blessings he provides to us. You will notice that during this series of services on Communion our Offering elements begin after we note the beginning of Holy Communion.

This gives us that opportunity to give back to God from all that God has given to us. It is our chance to say thank you!

Eucharistos, Thanksgiving!

The Lord's Supper.

The next name for us to consider this morning is The Lord's Supper.

This is how I grew up referring to the meal at the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is what we did to remember the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the Cross. We did this because Jesus commanded that we remember him, that we remember his body and blood.

The nuance to this view in contrast to the idea of Eucharist, is much more somber. This view can be seen as more of a memorial than a celebration.

This view of the meal ties back to our passage from Luke today. In Luke 22, verses 16 and 18, Jesus tells us that he will not eat or drink of the supper until the Kingdom of God comes. He is holding the table for us until God brings his full Kingdom to fruition.

Paul reports in I Corinthians 11:25 Jesus saying of the cup and the meal, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." The meal is a memorial.

We are waiting; we are remembering.

The Lord's Supper. Do this in remembrance of me.

Communion or Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is another way we describe the event of sharing the bread and the cup.

Constance M. Cherry describes Communion this way,

The English word “communion” is derived from the Greek *koinonia*, which is translated as “participation,” “sharing,” or “fellowship.” In using this word, both Paul and Luke emphasize the communal nature of the meal. Luke uses *koinonia* in reference to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). Paul uses the same word in addressing the Corinthians regarding the importance of participation together in the bread and cup (1 Cor. 10:16–17). The real focus of the word “communion” is the unity of the body, the uncommon fellowship believers share through Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

In preparing the Order of Service for our services that include the bread and the cup, I use the title of Holy Communion.

This is an intentional choice on my part, emphasizing both the community found within God – Creator/Father, Savior/Son and the Holy Spirit and the community of faith that ***we are*** when we come to the table.

One idea about Communion here is that it is always to be a corporate experience. We never take the bread and the cup apart from other believers. Even when we were meeting virtually – we were together online when we celebrated communion.

We see community being important in the Luke passage from today. Verses 14 and 15 tell us, “¹⁴When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;”

Jesus wanted to spend this time with his disciples. He wanted this connection in his final hours. Jesus desired community at the table. So should we.

Holy Communion. Corporate experience. Fellowship.

All three of these terms: Eucharist, The Lord’s Supper and Holy Communion give us a different lens through which to view this event in the life of the church. All three perspectives are equally valuable *and useful* to gain a fuller understanding and a fuller experience of what we do on a regular basis.

It is this idea of a regular basis, that I want you to consider with the fourth title for Communion –

The Breaking of the Bread.

If you were to poll various denominations and various churches within those denominations, you would find a wide variety of times in which Communion is observed.

In the church in which I grew up in Kentucky, Communion was done once a quarter. In a church of the same denomination in South Carolina, Communion was held only once over a three-year period.

We, and many churches of other mainline denominations, hold Communion on the first Sunday of each month, in addition to a few special “holiday” services – Easter and Christmas being two of them.

Some churches practice Communion each Sunday and some, like many of our Catholic family, have a celebration of Mass (another name for the Service of Communion) daily.

Quoting Constance M. Cherry again,

The earliest Christian community devoted itself to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). Part of their devotion to this practice was that they shared the meal often, presumably daily, for we are told that “day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people” (Acts 2:46–47). Historians believe the breaking of bread referred to a regular daily meal at which the bread and the cup were celebrated.^{iv}

I am not suggesting that we *need* to celebrate Communion each Sunday or to hold a service of Communion every day. I am saying that *when* we celebrate Holy Communion, we need to recognize the importance and value of the Service. It is not an add-on to the normal Worship Service; it **IS** the normal Worship Service.

Today, we are using the full Order of Service as provided by the Presbyterian Church. I wanted us to have the opportunity

to see and utilize the complete Worship Service including Holy Communion.

Each time we share communion, we may do it a little different than the time before. Regardless, of how we do communion, each time we celebrate Communion we include the elements of Thanksgiving, Remembrance and Fellowship. They are all integral to the Celebration of Communion.

Part of the reason that we may have a slightly different order of service is so that the different emphases, Thanksgiving, Remembrance and Fellowship, can all be found in different ways. How you experience each element at each service is between you and God.

When we turn our attention to the Celebration of Communion this morning, I would ask you to see what focuses you find for yourselves.

Let us begin now by Affirming and Confessing our Faith, through the Nicene Creed.

ⁱ Scripture quotations from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible are copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission.

ⁱⁱ Cherry, Constance M. *The Special Service Worship Architect* (p. 155). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cherry, Constance M. *The Special Service Worship Architect* (p. 156). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Cherry, Constance M. *The Special Service Worship Architect* (p. 156). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.