

Title: The Thanksgiving Table  
Date: 08/11/24  
Subject: Communion  
Scripture: Matthew 26:26 - 29

I'm not trying to rush things, but for a moment, think about Thanksgiving family dinners. The extended family gets together, so there are both in-laws and out-laws. Tons of food and tons of stories, some, or many that begin with "remember when..."

The tradition of the Thanksgiving meal goes back 400 years to 1621. The Pilgrims and Indians ate together to celebrate surviving the cruel winter and the first harvest. In 1623 their governor made the first proclamation for a day of Thanksgiving to gather at "ye meetinghouse, on ye hill...to listen to ye pastor and to render Thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all his blessings." However, the Pilgrims weren't the first to have a day of Thanksgiving. That happened in 1619 in Virginia, possibly 80 years earlier by the explorer Coronado.

The Jews had a day of thanksgiving. The Passover was a time to gather family, eat a meal like they had in Moses' time and remember their deliverance from Egypt. Extensive preparations were made – a place large enough and suitable enough to house family and guests, the right foods - lamb and bread with no yeast.

The day before Jesus was crucified, he ate the Passover meal with his disciples. Peter and John were sent to find a man carrying a jar of water, follow him and inform the homeowner they were looking for a place for the Teacher to eat the Passover. Jesus had spoken with urgency, "My appointed time is near" (Matthew 26:18). The day before he said: "As you know, the Passover is two days away and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (Matthew 26:2). When the time for the meal came, he again brought up the subject: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). It weighed heavily on his mind.

The table conversation probably included the disciples using their sanctified imaginations to think what it would have been like to be an Israelite leaving Egypt - the plagues; the blood of lambs placed on door frames so when the Lord saw the blood, he would pass over their homes when he came to kill the first born of the Egyptians; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to guide them; the opening of the Red Sea so they could walk through on dry land; the closing of the Red Sea to destroy their enemy. They gave praises to the Lord for his mercy and power in the past. They would think of how God had worked in their lives. Plus, there was a layer of somberness as they reflected on what Jesus said was going to happen to him.

Wouldn't it have been nice if they maintained that tone? The disciples couldn't do it. They disputed who would be considered the greatest. Peter refused to have the Lord serve him. When Jesus revealed he was going to be betrayed, they began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do that. Peter protested and emphatically insisted that he would never fall away even though all the rest might. You can imagine some of the undercurrents, finger pointing and tension. The day before they had become indignant at the waste of expensive perfume used to anoint Jesus.

Quite the family gathering. Quite the last meal for Jesus. Sometime during the Last Supper, Jesus instituted what's known as the Lord's Supper, communion, table of the Lord and breaking of the bread. The first two titles come from teaching in 1 Corinthians 10 & 11. Communion carries the idea of fellowship and sharing together. The idea of thanksgiving is noted by the Greek word (eucharistia) prominent in the narratives.

Read Matthew 26:26 - 29.

The instituting of the Lord's Supper is in 3 of the 4 Gospels, not in John. Mark's account is extremely similar to Matthew's. Luke adds a few elements and the teaching in 1 Corinthians is comparable to it.

When we merge the accounts, we come up with an expanded experience of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper. It's provided on the back of the sermon notes. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;" and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. I tell you the truth, I will not drink again from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

These are familiar words. That the words are familiar is both good and bad. It's good that they're so ingrained in us and form a part of who we are. It's bad in that they can be rattled off without thought given to their meaning. Eat, drink and off we go. Check off the list. I don't think we're like that, but it's a potential trap.

It's kind of like how the Pledge of Allegiance can be glibly recited and not think about what saying.

Communion was quickly adopted by first century believers. There aren't many details about how to practice what Jesus instituted. The gospel narratives basically record what Jesus did, providing an example for us. The few instructions we have come in 1 Corinthians and are more concerned with attitudes. Believers are warned to not have a dual status where they worship God on the one hand and on the other worship idols. Christians are to examine themselves to see if they have an irreverent manner. Christ followers are to show concern for one another, focus on unity, not be self-centered. They're to focus on the significance of Christ's sacrifice. A time of sacredness and solemnity.

We're not told how often to observe the Lord's Supper, but whenever. The Jews continue to celebrate Passover, but only once a year. I don't think anyone would like to be that infrequent. We celebrate communion once a month. Why? Sort of a desire not to be ritualistic. Sometimes we devote an entire service.

Who can participate in communion? Who should participate in communion? Jesus spoke to his followers. The writings to the church in Corinth describe a participation in the body of Christ and with the body of Christ. Communion is for the context of the body of Christ, those who know him as their Savior.

Communion is open for all who believe. The person who recently placed trust in Christ doesn't need to wait until a seasoned follower of Christ. It's for the child who understands they are a sinner and Jesus is the

one who gives salvation because “Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.” It’s for the mature saint who’s participated hundreds, maybe a thousand times.

I think the Lord didn't want to give too many details as people would transform the observance of the Lord's Supper into a formulaic ritual. Some have. The focus is drawn to the symbols rather than to the one to whom the symbols point.

Jesus declared he was instituting something new, the new covenant. He brought in the superior covenant of grace replacing the old and obsolete one established under Moses. The old one only temporarily covered people’s sins. In the new covenant, Christ’s sacrifice provided a full, complete, and once for all removal of sins. It's available to all but it is only effective for those who place their personal trust in Christ.

Jesus used the Passover meal to point to what God had done and would do the next day through him. Moses had been a temporary messenger from God during the Exodus. Jesus is the ultimate and permanent messenger from God, The Word, as God speaks through his Son. Moses performed miracles. Jesus performed miracles, including the greatest miracle - his resurrection from the dead. Moses was instructed to use the blood of a lamb as protection from God’s wrath. Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood would be shed so all people who trust in him could be saved from God's wrath. Moses was the instrument through whom God brought deliverance for a small people group. Jesus is the deliverer for all humanity.

The importance of giving thanks is noted by Jesus’ actions. He gave thanks when he took the bread and when he took the cup. It probably was a prayer of thankfulness for God's provision for food, the deliverance given to the people of Israel, the deliverance he would provide and for the people he was with.

We thank God he had a rescue plan and delivered us from sin and death. We thank him for Jesus who is the deliverer who brings about our salvation. We give thanks for not having to pay for sins. We give thanks for those with whom we share communion. This is just the beginning of the things included in giving thanks.

Why did Jesus choose common, ordinary items for this new memorial meal for his followers? Why not something costly and extravagant since his sacrifice was costly and extravagant?

He wanted it to be available to anyone. If Jesus demanded people bring costly memorials, their attention might be given to those memorials, their gifts and how much it cost them. Some would be excluded as they couldn’t afford the required amount. Jesus wants the focus to be on him, on his elaborate gifts.

He chose something common and a staple of people's diet - the bread and the cup. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35) to people who wanted him to provide bread from heaven just like Moses did. He’d just told them he was the bread of God who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (John 6:33). He went on to speak about people believing in him, trusting in him as God’s appointed sacrifice.

Critics of Christianity, those who’ve defected from it or masquerade as Christians, suggest Christians change what they say in this area. Don’t use the cross as it might be offensive. Robert W. Funk is the founder of the Jesus Seminar. The name sounds nice but it's anything but as he doesn't believe in the Jesus of the Bible. He advocates for new symbols to represent a new kind of movement. Keep the Lord's Supper but don't

mention any sacrifice or the body and the blood of Jesus. He calls for a dinner open to everybody and would represent “the kinship of all humans” (“At Cross Purposes,” “Are Christian Symbols Ripe for Change?” and “Examining the Dark Side of an Icon,” Christine Wicker, The Dallas Morning News, November 16, 2002).

The best way to answer “Why not other symbols or ceremony?” is with another question: “Why any other?” If we take out Christ's death, his willing sacrifice, the giving of his body and blood, the cross - what's left? Not much. Jesus declared that his blood was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, for you. Without Christ's death, there's no forgiveness. There's no hope. Blood was used by God as a sign a covenant had been enacted. The blood of Christ signifies salvation has been purchased and is offered to people. His body was broken though not his bones. His blood was shed. Does anything else encapsulate and demonstrate the length God went? God desires the focus be on the enormity of Christ's sacrifice.

What is communion? One thing it isn't is it isn't a man-made ritual. It's established by Jesus Christ. It was ordained by him which is why we use the term ordinance rather than sacrament. The latter indicates something is a means of gaining or keeping salvation. God's grace comes solely through faith in Christ.

Communion is a memorial meal. Luke and Paul include the admonition from Jesus to “Do this in remembrance of me.” It's to be a lasting memorial. Jesus said he wouldn't participate in this meal until he does in his Father's kingdom. Christ followers are to continue to partake and in doing so, proclaim the Lord's death...until he comes. We proclaim it to ourselves as the basis for our faith. We proclaim it to fellow believers as the basis for their faith. We proclaim it to those who don't know Jesus so they can place their trust in Christ and share together.

Communion is a way to remember our connection and identification with Christ. Those who've placed their trust in Christ have been united with him in his death (Romans 6:3, 4). This is portrayed in believers' baptism by immersion. The person is lowered into the water which symbolizes dying and being buried with Jesus. This points to the inward reality that the person has already been baptized, dipped into, placed into the body of Christ. This happened the moment the person placed trust and confidence in Christ.

There's an obvious second part to believers' baptism - being brought up out of the water. It symbolizes the new life we have in Christ, resurrection from the dead because Jesus has been raised from the dead. “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (Roman 6:8).

Communion is a demonstration of our connection with the rest of the body of Christ, others who've placed their trust in Christ, the church which is known as his body. It's a time of togetherness with people who are like-minded in their trust in Jesus Christ as the one and only way of Salvation. We participate together.

First century Christians were persecuted because people thought they were cannibals who ate human sacrifices because they spoke of eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus. This was fueled because Christians met in secret in the catacombs and underground sewers of Rome. Attackers didn't understand and didn't care to understand.

The best understanding of the bread and cup is they are symbols of Jesus' body and blood. They do not become his body and blood. They are representations. This flows from the original language from which we get the words "this is" and carries the meaning of represents and signifies. When Jesus spoke to his disciples, he held the bread and said, "This is my body." The disciples could see Jesus' body and the bread and that they were are two different things. They would have understood Jesus using the bread as a symbol.

I have pictures of our grandkids in my office on my phone. There's a shocker. I can show them to people and say, "These are my grandkids." The pictures don't change and transform into Caleb, Gabey, Chloe, Sophie, Laynie, Josie and Elijah. They remain pictures but they point to the real grand kiddos.

Stephen J. Cole, "Is He (Jesus) spiritually present with us when we celebrate the Lord's Supper? Yes, but not in some mystical sense any more than He is spiritually present when we worship or hear His Word preached. Partaking of the elements does not automatically confer grace on anyone unless they partake in faith" ([bible.org/seriespage/lesson-11-how-come-lord-s-supper-1-corinthians-1117-34](http://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-11-how-come-lord-s-supper-1-corinthians-1117-34)).

Jesus is the host who invites us to be his guest. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant which brings us into partnership with God. Jesus is the sacrifice that gives us life.

Pre distribution of bread

Cain song *Any More* pictures Jesus Christ speaking: You got a voice in your head, The same old guilt and regret, You heard a thousand times before. After the choices you've made, You're waiting for me to say, "I couldn't love you anymore." The enemy has lied to you. But listen to me, here's the truth. I couldn't love you any more Than I do right now. There's nowhere I wouldn't go To get to you my child. Take a look at the cross, Then you'll know it for sure. I couldn't love you, I couldn't love you any more... You're mine and you matter. Your life's worth dying for.