

The Lord's Supper

Luke 22:14-23 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

The Lord's Supper

¹⁴ When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. ¹⁵ And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And when He had taken some bread and 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 in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, **"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."** ²¹ But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. ²² For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" ²³ And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.

Introduction

This morning, we celebrate **World Communion Sunday**. Millions of Christians around the world are also gathering around the Lord's Table today. We may come from different countries, speak different languages, and worship in different traditions, but we gather around the same Lord and remember the same sacrifice.

You may hear this sacrament called the **Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist**. These names come from different Christian traditions, but they point us to the sacred meal Jesus instituted with His disciples.

Once in a while, people ask me about the Lord's Supper: Why do we celebrate it? What does it mean? And what is actually happening when we receive the bread and the cup?

Today I want to answer those questions in three simple ways.

First, **why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper?**

Second, **what does the Lord's Supper mean?**

And third, **in what manner should we come to the Lord's Table?**

Let us begin with the first question.

1. Why Do We Celebrate the Lord's Supper?

If someone asked you, "Why does the Church celebrate Communion?" how would you answer?

I would give three simple answers.

First, **we celebrate it because Jesus commanded us to do so.**

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to His disciples. He said, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." — Luke 22:19

Jesus Himself instituted the Lord's Supper. So, when we receive Communion, we are obeying our Lord.

Second, **we celebrate it to remember Christ's sacrifice for us.** Jesus said, "This is My body which is given for you."

Think about those words: **given for you.** His body was given for us. His blood was poured out for us. He willingly went to the cross on our behalf. The Apostle Peter says that Christ "*died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God*" (1 Peter 3:18).

The Lord's Supper brings the cross before our eyes again. We remember that our salvation did not come cheaply. It came through the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Third, **we celebrate the Lord's Supper because it proclaims Christ's death until He comes.**

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*"

Notice those words: **until He comes.** Communion looks backward to the cross, but it also looks forward to the return of Christ.

So, we remember three things: **Jesus commanded it. Jesus sacrificed Himself for us. And Jesus will come again.** Simple enough.

But there is another question.

2. What Does the Lord's Supper Mean?

For centuries, Christians have discussed the theological meaning of Communion. Great Christian leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Wesley expressed different understandings of Christ's presence in the sacrament.

Those theological discussions are important. But today I want to begin with Jesus Himself.

In John 6, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." He tells the people that their ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they eventually died. Then Jesus says that He is the living bread that came down from heaven. And He says something remarkable: "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."

The crowd did not understand what Jesus meant. They thought literally about bread and flesh. So, they asked, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Jesus was teaching them something much deeper. He was telling them that **He Himself is the source of eternal life.**

Think about how dependent we are on food. When we are hungry, someone can show us a picture of bread, but a picture will not satisfy our hunger. When we are thirsty, someone can describe a glass of cold water, but the description will not satisfy our thirst. We need food and water because our bodies need them to live.

And Jesus says our souls have a hunger and thirst that only He can satisfy. That is why He says, "I am the bread of life."

Jesus is not merely giving us something. **Jesus gives us Himself.** He says, "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink." And then He says, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

The important word here is '**abides.**' Jesus is talking about a living relationship with Him. Later, in John 15, Jesus describes such relationship using another picture. He is the true vine, and we are the branches.

The branch cannot live by itself. It must remain connected to the vine. In the same way, we cannot live spiritually apart from Christ. The Lord's Supper reminds us that our life comes from Jesus and depends on Him.

We need Him. We need His sacrifice. We need His grace. We need His presence. We need Him every day.

Remember: The bread and cup point us to Christ Himself—to His body given for us and His blood poured out for us.

And this is important: **the bread and cup are not magic.** We do not earn forgiveness simply by eating bread and drinking from a cup. Our forgiveness comes through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sacrament points us to that grace. At the table, we remember and receive with faith the promise of Christ's saving work.

So, when we come to Communion, we are not simply remembering a historical event. We are remembering a Person. We are remembering Jesus. We are remembering the One who loved us enough to give Himself for us.

3. In What Manner Should We Come to the Lord's Table?

Now we come to the practical question. How should we receive Communion?

I would suggest three things:

Come with anticipation.

Come with self-examination.

Come with reconciliation.

First, come with anticipation. John Wesley had a deep appreciation for the Lord's Supper. He urged believers to seize **every opportunity** to partake, regardless of common practice or personal feelings of unworthiness.

He wrote in his sermon, *"I haste to this Sacrament... because I hope to find Him there"* (see notes). I love that statement. **"I hope to find Him there."**

John Wesley did not approach Communion as merely a religious routine. He expected to encounter the living Christ. That is something we can easily forget.

We receive Communion again and again. We know when to stand. We know when to come forward. We know when the bread is offered. We know when the cup is offered. Because it is familiar, it can become routine.

But imagine receiving an invitation to dinner from someone you deeply admire. You arrive at the table, but you never look up. You are distracted by your phone. You eat quickly and leave. Technically, you came to dinner. But you were not really present.

We can do the same thing with Communion. We can be physically present at the table while our hearts are miles away. So today, don't come simply because it is the first Sunday of the month. Come because **Christ invites you**. Come with anticipation. Come expecting Christ to meet you with His grace. Come remembering what Jesus has done for you.

Second, come with self-examination. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:28, *"But a person must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup."*

Communion gives us an opportunity to stop and look honestly at our hearts. Is there sin that I need to repent? Is there an attitude that I need to surrender? Is there something between me and God that I need to bring before Him?

Paul warns the Corinthians that they were participating in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Their problem was not simply what they were eating and drinking. Their problem was the way they were treating Christ and one another.

So, self-examination is not about trying to make ourselves perfect before we come to the table. If we had to become perfect before receiving Communion, none of us could come. We come because we need grace. We come because we need forgiveness. We come because we need Christ.

Self-examination means coming honestly before God and saying, **“Lord, search my heart. Show me what needs to change. I repent of my sins. Forgive me. Cleanse me. Draw me closer to You.”**

Third, come ready for reconciliation. The Lord's Supper is not only about our relationship with Christ. It also reminds us of our relationship with one another.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:23–24, *“If you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there... and make peace with your brother.”*

What a powerful word before Communion. Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone you need to call? Is there an apology you need to make? Is there a conversation you have been avoiding? Perhaps there is someone you have been carrying in your heart—not with love, but with resentment.

Communion reminds us that Christ died to reconcile us to God. And because we have been reconciled to God, we are called to pursue reconciliation with one another. We do not come to the table because we have everything together. We come because Christ is putting us back together.

Conclusion

So, what do we remember when we come to the Lord's Table? Let me leave you with three simple pictures.

First, Christ is our Passover Lamb. John the Baptist called Christ “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). Paul also says, *“For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.”*—1 Corinthians 5:7.

In the Old Testament, the blood of the Passover lamb marked the houses of God's people and the angel of death passed over.

But Jesus is the greater Passover Lamb. His blood covers the entire humanity. His sacrifice delivers humanity from sin and death. His blood was shed for us and covers us. And God's wrath passes over us.

So, when we receive Communion, we remember: **Christ died for me.**

Second, Christ is our Living Bread. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty."* —John 6:35

Our bodies need food. Our bodies need water. But our souls and spirits need Christ. Nothing else can satisfy the deepest hunger of the human heart. Not money. Not success. Not possessions. Not recognition. Not even other people. Only Christ can give us the life our souls truly need.

So, when we receive Communion, we remember: **Christ is my life.**

Third, Christ is our Lord. At the Communion table, we remember not only what Jesus has done for us but also who He is.

He is our Lord. We belong to Him. He remains in us, and we remain in Him. Our lives are now connected to His.

So, Communion is not merely something we do. It is a reminder of who we are. We are His people. We are recipients of His grace. We are followers of Jesus Christ. And we are called to live as His servants in the world.

So, when you come to the Lord's Table today, don't come merely because it is Communion Sunday. **Come because Christ invites you.** Come remembering His sacrifice. Come hungry for His grace. Come honestly, with a repentant heart. Come ready to forgive and to seek reconciliation. Come with thanksgiving. Come with anticipation.

Come believing that the One who gave His body and shed His blood for you still loves you, still calls you, and still invites you to abide in Him.

Remember: **Christ is our Passover Lamb.**

Christ is our Living Bread.

Christ is our Lord.

And as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim His death **until He comes.**

Amen.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Christ is our Passover Lamb, our Living Bread, and our Lord. Which of these three truths do you find yourself needing to remember most right now, and why?
2. Paul tells us to “examine ourselves” before Communion (1 Corinthians 11:28). What does honest self-examination look like for you, without sliding into either careless indifference or paralyzing guilt?
3. World Communion Sunday reminds us that we share this table with believers around the world. How might that truth shape the way you come to the Lord's Supper?

Notes:

In the usual schema, there are four views of the Lord's Supper:

1. The **Memorialist/Zwinglian/Baptist** view. Jesus is not present in the elements, but believers reap a spiritual benefit from partaking because they remember his death.
2. The **Calvinist/reformed/"spiritual presence"** view. Christ's body and blood are spiritually consumed by the communicants as they physically partake of the bread and wine.
3. The **Lutheran/"consubstantiation"/"in, with, and under"/sacramental union"** view. The body and blood of Jesus Christ are present alongside the substance of bread and wine. Christ is united to the elements.
4. The **Catholic view ("transubstantiation")**. When the elements are blessed, they become Christ's body and blood.

*John Wesley favored the **spiritual presence** view, as demonstrated primarily through his writings, but also in his hymns.*

(<http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/42615/what-was-john-wesleys-view-of-the-lords-supper>)

*Wesley's sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion," the 1745 Hymns on the Lord's Supper, and the UMC statement *This Holy Mystery**

John 6:48-58 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

⁵² Then the Jews *began* to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ He who eats (**chews—**kc) My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ He who eats (**chews—**kc) My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats (**chews—**kc) Me, he also will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats (**chews--**kc) this bread will live forever.”