

Good table manners!

So how should we celebrate the Lord's Supper together?

- **Relaxed not rushed**

Meals could be long affairs in early church times lasting several hours! Meals created an informal and warm atmosphere in which people feel comfortable to talk and pray. We can't always have a meal when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, but we can try and make enough space for it to be a relaxed and intimate place.

- **Joyful not somber**

The atmosphere should be one of joy and thanksgiving. This doesn't mean it should be 'trivial, but the more serious moments should still end in joy. Otherwise we miss the joy for which Jesus endured the cross (Heb 12: 2) and the victory of His resurrection. Singing and prayers should therefore be central. As well as quiet and reflective moments, this should be a positive and public 'proclamation' of all Christ has done for each person participating.

- **Community not individual**

Traditionally, the Lord's Supper can be formal, silent and individualistic. Instead we should celebrate being a people together through Jesus' body and blood for us. This means talking and praying openly together in Christ's presence. Sharing with one another makes this truly the Lord's Supper. In the light of this, small groups are often the easiest places to e-capture the original excitement of the Lord's Supper – especially if there's a meal too!

So lets Remember, Celebrate and Proclaim until He comes!



Knowing God



Making God known

WHAT IS COMMUNION?

Saying by doing

All of us use actions to speak louder than words – the pat on the back that says 'well done', the hand-shake to say 'it's done', a hug that says 'I love you'. We also have special meals to say 'happy birthday' or to celebrate a marriage because meals are the best way of celebrating something special together. Communion is a special meal to celebrate not just by saying but by doing.

The Last Supper – The last shall be first!

Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his friends in Jerusalem as any Jew would at that time of year. The Gospels record this event known as 'The Last Supper'. In Mark 14: 12-26 we see some of the symbolic foods and actions that comprised this meal. Four cups of drink were shared by the host during the meal accompanied by various readings and prayers. Between these cups, different foods were eaten to symbolise the Exodus events that this meal remembered – bitter herbs for bitter slavery in Egypt; a Lamb which was slaughtered and eaten on the night when the Angel of death passed over the houses with the lamb's blood on the door posts; unleavened bread for the rushed departure from Egypt with no time even to let the dough rise.

Jesus, as host, took the unleavened bread and blessed it and broke it as was customary. But then he said something that would have silenced the most lively party – **“Take, this is my body!”** The bread that symbolised the exodus departure from Egypt is now given new meaning. As the meal continued and the Passover lamb was served, the Disciples recovered from this shock, only to get another. Jesus took the third cup, known as the 'Cup of Thanksgiving' and gave thanks and they drank from it. Then Jesus said **“This is my blood!”** No Jew would ever dream of drinking blood as the life of the animal was in the blood (Lev 17:11). It was to make atonement not to drink. But Jesus gave the wine this radical new meaning.



Jesus continued to shock the Disciples by singing the closing hymn without drinking the fourth 'cup of consummation'. They left a rather confused bunch!



None of this made sense until a few days later when they saw their Lord's body being broken in crucifixion and his blood splattering on the ground. Jesus was the 'Passover lamb' 1 Cor 5:7, who was sacrificed for their Exodus out of slavery to sin. Through his broken body and poured out blood, they could be saved and freed. Only when he had fully paid for sins did he drink the fourth cup, crying out; "It is consummated" Jn 19:29. Jesus gave a special meal to remember these special Truths. The last supper was the first of many Lord's Suppers.

The Lord's Supper – Host and Guest!

If the Passover was a meal of thanksgiving and celebration – the Lord's Supper is even more so! Eleanor Kreider describes it as;

“A Joyful celebration of God's people around a table, remembering and meeting their Lord, who is host and guest!”

Lets unpack this by looking at different names used for this meal:

◆ 'Breaking of bread' – the context

In New Testament times, this was a common euphemism for having a meal, as we might say 'having supper'. This phrase reminds us that the kind of setting in which the early Christians celebrated communion was a meal table. Jesus deliberately choose simple symbols that would be present at any half decent meal – bread and wine - and invites us to use these ordinary symbols around an ordinary meal table to remember the extraordinary things he has done. So Luke tells us that the early Church regularly **“broke bread in their homes”** and praised God with **“glad and generous hearts”** Acts 2:46.

◆ 'Eucharist' – the atmosphere

This is the term often used in Anglican Churches, meaning 'thanksgiving' or 'joyous'. Jesus used the 'Cup of thanksgiving' in the Last supper to introduce the Lord's Supper because the right atmosphere for this meal is gratitude and joy! Paul therefore refers to it as **“the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks”** 1 Cor 10:16. This thanksgiving and joy is expressed as we worship around His table. The lord's supper in this atmosphere becomes a visual proclamation of all that Jesus has done 1 Cor 11:26, like God's drama which we perform to his praise and glory!

◆ 'Lord's Supper' – the purpose

This is the term Paul used in his letter to Corinth. It emphasises that the meal is all about our Lord Jesus. Through his death and resurrection he invites us to the meal and by His Spirit he joins us at the meal. As one Church notice board said; **“Jesus Christ invites you to a meal to be held in His honour!”** We remember Christ's death and resurrection but we do so in His presence so it is more than just a memorial. Just as the sun's rays can be focussed into a certain place through a magnifying glass so Jesus, who is everywhere, focuses his presence with his people around his table. So Jesus' promise in Rev 3:20 is never more fulfilled than at the Lord's Supper; Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me. We should therefore make him the focus of conversation and attention and expect to encounter Him as we do so.

Paul describes the occasion as “fellowship with Christ” 1 Cor 10:16. The word fellowship means 'sharing' and is a warm, intimate word. Christ comes to feed us spiritually as we eat the bread and drink the wine physically John 6: 53-54. As we eat the bread it symbolises receiving forgiveness and freedom from sin through the cross. As we drink the wine it symbolises Christ's life flowing into us, for the life of a creature is in its blood, and as we drink the wine it represents the blood and therefore the life of Jesus. So at the Lord's Supper we give our thanks and praise to Jesus and he gives his spiritual life to us.

◆ 'Communion' – the community

Communion is the Latin word for our English word 'fellowship'. As we share with the Lord, we also share with one another. The one loaf representing Christ's broken body also symbolises that we are now one united body through him 1 Cor 10:17. Communion is a place where we are bonded together and our love for one another is displayed—the Early Christian communion was therefore nick-named an 'Agape feast' (Jude 12) as God's love was seen among them.

Putting it negatively, if this doesn't happen, the lord's Supper doesn't happen 1 Cor 11:20-22! Put positively, communion is a great place to express our love for one another through sharing food, praying for one another, using the gifts of the Spirit to build one another up, giving financially to those in need – this is true communion that pleases our host and guest.

