

What's the Point of Holy Communion? And Why Should I Care?

1. Warm-up Question: In its earliest form, Holy Communion was an actual communal meal. Tell us about a favorite memory of a time you experienced wonderful table fellowship with family, friends, church, or others. Why is that memory so meaningful to you?

2. Most of us have experienced Communion only in stylized form with wafers and juice in worship services. Some people find that very meaningful, others don't. What word or words best capture how you feel about Communion in its stylized form?

3. A couple months ago, Janine Parkins called Pastor Jeff to talk about Communion. She told how meaningful it has been to incorporate Communion into her daily spiritual practice. Jeff interviewed Janine at the outset of Sunday's sermon. She described how she and her boyfriend celebrate Communion together at breakfast and sometimes in restaurants by pausing during the meal to break bread, drink a sip of their beverage, and lift a prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving to Jesus.
 - a. As you heard Janine share how she and her boyfriend do Communion, what thoughts or feelings arose within you?

 - b. Preachers often misquote Jesus as saying, "As often as you gather together, do this in remembrance of me," implying that Communion was meant to be celebrated only in formal worship gatherings. But Jesus never said that. Jesus said, "Do this as often as you drink [of the cup]," i.e., each time we sit down at a table, alone or with others. I Corinthians 11:25. Have you ever celebrated communion alone? How did that feel? Or how do you think it would feel?

 - c. Many people think a priest must be present for Communion to be celebrated, but the Bible never says that either. How do you feel about celebrating Communion without a priest?

 - d. Picture yourself in a restaurant sharing a meal with several other people and pausing sometime during the meal to celebrate Communion together. Suppose onlookers notice as, in the middle of your dinner, you break bread, sip from your cups, then pray a brief prayer. Do you think that would be a positive or negative?

4. After the conversation with Janine, Jeff led us through a brief study of what the Scriptures say about Communion. He reminded us how the Gospels tell many stories of Jesus sharing meals with all kinds of people – his disciples, friends and followers, Pharisees, enemies, and – most notoriously – people who were considered "unclean," like tax collectors, prostitutes, and "sinners."
 - a. Clearly, table fellowship was one of Jesus' favorite things to do, so much so that his enemies accused him of being a "glutton and drunkard." Matthew 11:19. This was a false charge, of course, but clearly Jesus was something of a "foodie" who

relished sharing table fellowship. How does this way of seeing Jesus cause you to feel about him?

- b. In one of his famous parables, Jesus describes an Agape Feast in heaven at the end of the Age. He pictures tables filled with social/spiritual rejects, i.e., “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind,” rather than religiously observant people. Luke 14:7-24. What should we draw from parable? What point do you think Jesus was trying to make?
 - c. The thing Jesus most wanted to do right before his death was to share one last great meal with his disciples. We call it the Last Supper, which is when Jesus commanded his disciples to continue “doing this in remembrance of me.” Luke 22:19. When Jesus spoke those words in that context, what do you think the disciples understood him to mean? Do *what* in remembrance of him?
5. Jeff summarized all this by saying, “Whether we celebrate Communion in stylized fashion in a church building or as an actual meal with other people, Jesus wanted Communion to continually remind his followers to live life as he did, as a Love Feast, deeply, inclusively connecting to the people around us.” But the meaning of Communion doesn’t stop there. The breaking of the bread and lifting of the cup were also meant to symbolically remind us that Jesus sacrificed his life (i.e., his body and blood) to pay the just penalty for our sins, so we could be free.
- a. Jeff told the story of the two-year old boy, Aiden McCarthy, who was saved from the Highland Park shooter when his father draped his body over Aiden. His father died, but the little boy survived, covered in his father’s blood. When Aiden grows old enough to understand what his father did, how do you think that will affect him for the rest of his life?
 - b. Each time we celebrate Communion, we’re reminded that Jesus showed supreme sacrificial love for us, and now calls us to show that same kind of sacrificial love. That’s part of what he means when he says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Tell us about a time you’ve observed someone showing great sacrificial love.
6. A third purpose of Communion is to remind us that Jesus is with us always, at every meal, and all points in between. “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20. Just as the empty Elijah chair reminds Jews of the presence of the spirit of Elijah at their sacred meals, so too Communion reminds us that the spirit of Christ is with us at our every meal. Read Luke 24:13-35, as printed on p. 3.
- a. Why do you think the two disciples in this story failed to realize Jesus was right there with them all day long? What are we supposed to learn from this story?
 - b. Tell us about a time when you have been surprised by the presence of Christ?
 - c. Do you think that practicing daily Communion, by yourself or with family or friends, would change your awareness of the presence of Christ? How else might a daily practice of Communion impact your life?

Luke 24:13-35

13 Now [on the third day after Jesus' death two disciples] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. . . . ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. . . . ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.