

## ... ✨ ... THE LAST SUPPER ... ✨ ...

By now, you should be well into the season of spring and in proximity to Resurrection Sunday, i.e., Easter. We've already been discussing the new life Jesus makes available through his death, burial, and resurrection. In that light, let's shift our hearts toward a more reverent posture and examine some of the details just prior to his crucifixion. We'll begin with the Last Supper and the sacrament of communion that Jesus instituted during the meal. As we revisit familiar verses, try to imagine yourself at the table with Jesus and view the events with fresh eyes.

On the night before Jesus was crucified, he celebrated Passover with his disciples. As he ate with his closest friends, Jesus conducted the first communion service. Matthew records that Jesus took some bread and blessed it, then broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body," (Matthew 26:26).

Jesus knew that after the meal he would endure unimaginable suffering, and the bread represented his soon to be broken body. Our Lord would be mocked, tormented, beaten, and nailed to a cross. Even at that very moment, Jesus was being betrayed by one of his closest friends, Judas. Yet, he willingly endured each agony so that we could receive healing in mind, body and spirit.

After breaking the bread, Jesus took a cup of wine and blessed it. "He gave it to [the disciples] and said, 'Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many,'" (Matthew 26:27b–28). The wine represented the blood of Christ that would be shed so that each human could enter into a covenant relationship with God.

Prior to Jesus' sacrifice, our sins prevented us from approaching the presence of our Father. Yet, the blood of Christ covers and cleanses every blemish so that we are made worthy to have a personal relationship with the Lord both now and for all eternity. By reminding us of Jesus' sacrifice, communion reminds us of just how deeply our Savior cares for us.

The sacrament doesn't magically make us holier, but rather, helps us grow more firmly rooted in our relationship with Jesus. Paul exhorts, "You should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup," (1 Corinthians 11:28). In other words, as we partake, we meditate on God's love, Christ's sacrifice, and our own sin. As we commune with our Lord, we remember just how much we need a Savior, we express gratitude for his continuing work in our lives, and we repent of any thoughts, words, or deeds that dishonor him. So, as we conclude for today, let's ask the Spirit to examine our hearts and bring us into closer communion with Jesus.

*Lord, thank you for enduring unimaginable suffering so that I could receive hope and healing. Thank you for giving me new life and opportunities to flourish. I ask you to reveal any areas in my life that aren't submitted to you. Expose any patterns of thought or behaviors that don't honor you. Forgive me where I've failed you and sinned against you. Please replace any areas of sin or bondage with the freedom that comes from your work at the cross. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Personal Reflection:** Although communion is often a corporate act, the sacrament can also be practiced in solitude. So, let's prepare to partake right now. Take a moment, first, to gather your elements. You can use wine, juice, or virtually any beverage, as well as bread, crackers, or any small morsel of food. The items you use are far less important than the meaning behind them. Second, take a moment to allow the Spirit to examine your heart. Practice the discipline of listening that we discussed on days 21 and 23. Confess any sin that God reveals and express gratitude for his sacrifice. Third, re-read the second, third, and fourth paragraphs above to guide you through receiving the elements.

.. . ✨ . . . MEANINGFUL MEMENTOS . . . ✨ . . .

The last couple of days, we've been discussing the institution of communion. As a pastor, I've led communion more times than I can count. I've also performed countless baptisms. Therefore, during one recent communion service, I began to ponder why each of us is only commanded to be baptized once, yet Jesus calls us to celebrate communion repeatedly.

Allow me to share what I learned from my meditation, prayer, and study. Paul writes,

*On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, [Jesus] took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.*  
**1 Corinthians 11:23b–26**

In other words, Jesus tells us to partake of communion in *remembrance* of him.

As he often does, the Lord helped me understand this principle through the lens of my garden. In my garden alone, I'm surrounded by a wide range of mementos that remind me of joyful moments. A cute stone gnome I purchased while visiting family in Kentucky sits by my front patio, and an ancient Canaanite ballista excavated while working in Israel sits by my back patio. Throughout the garden, I also have a star hibiscus transplanted from my Gram's house 20 years ago, a large agave I dug up and brought home from a family trip to Florida, and a stained-glass stepping stone my Mom made when Asher was born.

In short, when we want to keep meaningful memories fresh, we keep mementos nearby. Similarly, God instructs us to create reminders of his work in our lives. Although we scoff at the Israelites, who whined and disobeyed even after witnessing numerous miracles, the truth is that you and I are just as fickle. Thus, the Lord encourages us to place reminders in our lives to help us stand strong in our faith.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to wear his commands upon their wrists and foreheads so that his words would be foremost in their actions and thoughts (Deuteronomy 6:8). Later on, when the people crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, the Lord commanded them to create a pile of stones as a memorial (Joshua 4:4–7).

Communion serves a similar purpose for you and I. When I partake of communion, I'm reminded to obey the statutes of my Lord, not out of obligation, but out of gratitude. The bread and wine, like the stones in the Jordan River, are a memorial of crossing from my old life to a new one.

As for the distinction between communion and baptism, communion is a deeply personal moment with our Savior, while baptism is a public celebration. Baptism is an outward declaration of our inward transformation. It is a public statement that we've decided to become part of God's family and live according to Kingdom values. Although there is nothing wrong with being baptized a second time to recommit our life or reaffirm our faith, we aren't commanded to do so. Yet, we are called to take communion on a regular basis because Jesus knows we need regular reminders of his sacrificial love.

*Jesus, thank you for allowing your body to be broken and your blood to be spilled as a ransom for my sins. Help me to grasp the gravity of your sacrifice and live accordingly. Teach me to walk with an awareness of your sacrifice on my behalf and live in fullness of gratitude. Although I can never*

*repay the price you paid, I pray that my life would bring you glory and build your Kingdom. In your name, Amen.*

### Personal Reflection

If you attend a church that regularly partakes of communion, consider how you can place additional reminders in your life of Jesus' work on your behalf. If you don't attend church or if your faith family doesn't regularly partake, consider adding a weekly time of personal communion to your calendar.

