

A Communing Community

Let's begin with the end in mind: The Lord's Supper is nothing less than being touched by God Himself. Here in this church, Jesus serves us with His body and blood. We come here to be forgiven in a way that involves all of our senses. In Holy Communion, we come into contact with Christ, and we are changed. We can never be the same again.

At least that's what the Lord's Supper is supposed to be like. But how often is it that way for you?

Have you ever come to the Lord's Table with no thanks in your heart? How often have you sung, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory" like a dirge—with no lifting up of your heart—with no joy of sins forgiven?

Do you sense a closeness with Jesus as you commune? Do you open yourself up to him here?

One of the saddest, most misinformed views of the Lord's Supper is from the person who says, "I don't go to the Communion unless I've really been improving in my spiritual life; unless I've really cleaned up the things I've done wrong, and have really become worthy of going to communion." While it's true that Saint Paul urges us to examine ourselves that we might receive the Sacrament in a worthy manner, that 'worthiness' has nothing to do with what we bring to the table. The 'worthy manner' of Paul is a simple trust that Jesus is hidden in bread and wine, and that He comes to this table to forgive our sins. The 'worthy manner' of Paul is an admission of our unworthiness and the belief that Jesus comes to feed unworthy sinners, to pass along the forgiveness He purchased on the cross.

As the hymnwriter Augustus Toplady once wrote: "Nothing in my hand I bring/Simply to thy cross I cling." I bring nothing to the table, yet Jesus still meets me there to give me what I need most. In a blessing that only faith can comprehend, you participate in the body and blood of your Lord Jesus, an idea so important that Paul says it twice in 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

For that reason, the Lord's Supper is intensely personal. At the same time, we need to grasp the powerful community experience that's happening here, too. Again, as Paul writes, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

Maundy Thursday—the Thursday when Jesus gave the mandate "Do this in remembrance of me"—is a time for renewal of Christian unity. It is a time for renewal in the mission we share of communicating Jesus to our community. It is a time to share our joys and sorrows. It is a time to take a stand together against Satan. We will not be such easy prey for our Enemy when we stay in fellowship with one another, and our fellowship is strengthened every time we come to the Lord's Table together. There really is no such thing as a solo Christian. We need each other.

Alone, we stumble. United in Christ, we move ahead, doing far more together than we could ever do by ourselves.

A little girl once got lost in a large cornfield. It was winter, and the temperature was far below freezing. Rescuers searched for her for hours, but to no avail. Finally, one person suggested that the group start at one end of the field, and holding hands, survey the field in a systematic way. Finally, they found the child, who was in very serious condition. The father cried out to God, “Dear Lord, why didn’t we join hands before?”

“Why didn’t we join hands before?” Isn’t it time to do that? It is time for renewal of our Christian unity. When we join hands, we do much better at finding the lost. Jesus will renew us in that unity at His Table. He will come and fill us with His gifts. He will come and make us a body of Christians who take Him out into our world. Our participation in the body and blood of Jesus will always lead to action. That’s just how Jesus is.

One more thing needs to be said about the community experience of the Lord’s Supper. Not only do we share the joy of Jesus’ presence as we commune with our Christian family, but we also stand in mystical fellowship with all those who have died in the Lord—a fellowship that is heightened at the moment you commune.

Do you know the meaning of a semi-circular communion rail? Its design is meant to illustrate that the circle is completed as it goes around the altar and up around the throne of God as we sing with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory! Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed Is He that Cometh in the name of the Lord!”

They sing with us—the great saints of ages past—your grandparents—your parents—your spouse—your brother or sister—your child—all of your loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ. At the moment you commune, you come as close as you’ll ever come in this life to doing what they’re doing right now—enjoying direct contact with your Lord God Almighty, and praising Him endlessly.

Aware of that circle that extends into heaven, we have joy and peace. It’s an intensely personal experience, for when you eat and drink at the Lord’s Table, He enters you and changes you with His forgiving love. It’s also a community experience, for you are bound together with others here in time and there in eternity in our living Lord Jesus.

So come, with all your sin; with all your burdens; with all your weakness. Come, with all your happiness; with all your thankfulness and joy. Come hungry for the forgiveness of your sins and the renewal of this family of faith. Come trusting in your Lord’s promise that his body and blood were given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Come and feast at the heavenly banquet prepared for you. Amen.

