

## **Holy Communion**

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

10 04 2009 Sam Jones UMC

### **Introduction**

The current United Methodist **Hymnal** was published in 1989. During the hymn selection process, laity and clergy completed surveys listing the songs they liked best and least. A curious result occurred. The surveys ranked “*How Great Thou Art*” as the MOST favorite and LEAST favorite hymn of church members! There was little middle ground. People either really loved the hymn or really didn’t.

I find a similar attitude in the church concerning **Holy Communion**. For some people, the sacrament is one of the most meaningful moments of worship. They discover great significance in the liturgy and elements. They encourage clergy to schedule opportunities for the Lord’s Supper more frequently.

Others, however, do not find Holy Communion significant. Some feel a misplaced guilt about receiving the sacrament. Others are concerned the service will last too long. Ministers know that attendance drops on Communion Sundays, and some people will actually leave when they enter the sanctuary and see the table prepared.

On the night that Jesus shared the bread and wine with his disciples during the Last Supper, he instructed them: “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” Every meal serves as a reminder of Christ’s command. We observe Holy Communion out of a sense of faithful obedience.

Today we celebrate **World Communion Sunday**. Christians around the globe are gathering together around the Lord’s Table. This morning I want to explore the different elements of the service and their meaning for our lives.

### **I. Invitation**

The Lord’s Supper reenacts the **Last Supper** Jesus shared with his disciples. On the final night of his life, Christ celebrated the Passover meal with his friends. During supper, he said that the broken bread represented his body and the red wine the blood of the new covenant. After sharing the loaf and cup with his disciples, he invited and commanded them, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” Two thousand years later the church still responds to Christ’s call.

The Holy Communion service in our hymnal begins with words of **invitation**:

*“Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him,  
who earnestly repent of their sin  
and seek to live in peace with one another.”*

The simplicity of the **Invitation** is striking. The only requirements are to love God, repent of our sins, and seek to have right relationships with others.

I was born and raised in the Methodist Church. I vividly recall the Communion Service from the older hymnal. The first words proclaimed: *“Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend lead a new life . . . .”* I always seized upon that word **“intend.”** Even with a child’s limited theology, I understood that the invitation was not for people who were perfect but for Christians who were trying to become who God wants us to be.

It is an invitation that we can all accept. In the Methodist tradition, we practice an **Open Table**. Everyone is invited to the Lord’s Table: clergy and laity, young and old, sinners and saints, believers and doubters. Christ our Lord invites to his table ALL . . . .

## **II. Confession and Pardon**

A time of **Confession and Pardon** follows the Invitation. Entering into God’s holy presence, we all too aware of our own sinfulness. When Isaiah experienced his vision of God in the temple, he cried out: *“Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I come from a people of unclean lips and I have seen the Lord!”*

**Confession:** Agreement with God about our sin.

**Corporate:** “We . . . .” Grocery list of sins we can all claim.

The Confession is followed by a declaration of God’s **Pardon**. This moment always raises goosebumps on my arms as pastor and people claim God’s forgiveness. In an audacious moment, I proclaim, *“In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.”* And then you respond with the same words to me.

Clearly understand that *we* do not have the power to forgive and cancel sin. Yet we declare with assurance that God forgives us when we come before him in confession and repentance. Join me now in the prayer of confession and pardon as we claim our birthright as God’s children.

## **III. Great Thanksgiving**

For those who grew up in the Methodist Church, you know the next section entitled **“The Great Thanksgiving”** was added to the Communion Service in the 1989 hymnal. It recalls Jesus’ own prayers of thanksgiving over the bread and wine.

The Great Thanksgiving is a hymn of praise for God’s grace. It also recalls how Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper in the Upper Room. When Jesus took the loaf of bread and the cup of wine, he gave thanks to God and blessed the elements. The minister recalls Christ’s words and actions. The Great Thanksgiving concludes with a prayer for the church as the Holy Spirit continues to abide with us. Let us join in these ancient yet ever new words together.

## **IV. Consecration and Presentation of the Elements**

After the Great Thanksgiving, the minister **presents** the bread and wine to the congregation. We recall how Jesus filled these ordinary **elements** with extraordinary meaning.

The bread is the body of Christ. The red wine is the blood of the new covenant. In sacred silence, we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in the loaf and cup. We experience with our five senses the height, width, and depth of God's grace, forgiveness, and love.

**Bread:** The body of Christ, given for you.

**Wine:** The blood of Christ, given for you.

## **V. Giving the Bread and Cup**

Giving the bread and cup. Variety of means and modes. No one "right" way."

Today's method.

Hands in the form of a cross. After receiving the elements, one response is "*Thanks be to God.*"

Ministers are served first. Not because we are better or get to be first in line but because we are sinners among sinners. Only as forgiven and sanctified Christians do we then serve others. (Invite congregation to receive communion.)

## **PP20 CUP AND LOAF**

### **Conclusion**

The Service of Holy Communion concludes like most worship services with a **benediction or dismissal with God's blessing**. Technically, it is a blessing and not a prayer. So the people are encouraged to look at the minister rather than bow their heads. Hear God's words of blessing upon us all.