

The First Communion

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Date: 19 April 2026

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Let's read now from God's Word in Luke chapter 14. Luke chapter 22, verse 14, page 882.

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It's a simple faith because it needs to be simple to get through to us as simple human beings.

[2 : 49] In his love and wisdom, God makes things simple for us. The communion meal, variously called the Holy Eucharist or the Lord's Supper, is the simplest of religious meals. It's just bread and wine. Simple elements, the fruit of the field, the fruit of the grape, but taken by faith, these are incredibly powerful. Mysterious they may be, the topic of endless disagreements, but they are our food for faith, helping us to grow as Christians and strengthening us in our faith in Christ. It takes a master to make complicated things so simple that even the smallest child can understand. Jesus is that greatest of masters who gives us a meal every Christian can understand. A meal which everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, can benefit from.

It is a declaration of our faith in Christ, but more than that, far more than that, it's a declaration of Christ's love for us. And this morning I want to go back to the first communion, not the product of the early church, but a clear and direct institution from Christ himself.

It's the night of his betrayal. Jesus and his disciples are gathered together in an upper room in Jerusalem. The sun has gone down. The next time it shall rise, it will be the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus only has a limited amount of time remaining with his disciples, so he only has time for the most important of things, one of which is the communion.

And this is how important the bread and the wine of the Holy Communion is to be to us as Christians. It is to rank high in our list of priorities, knowing that it listed high in Jesus' list of priorities.

All too often we make communion about ourselves, but it's not about us at all. It's about Jesus. The first communion was all about Jesus. And if we want to profit from the Lord's Supper, we need to focus more upon Jesus and less upon ourselves.

[5 : 10] In our passage here in Luke chapter 22, recognizing the unique circumstances under which this first communion meal was celebrated, we want to see three things, Jesus' desire, Jesus' sacrifice, and Jesus' betrayal.

Do you take communion? If you do, why? If you do not, why not? Because remember, this isn't really about us at all. It's all about Jesus. First of all then, this passage shows us Jesus' desire, verses 14 through 16.

Jesus' desire. At this point, just a few hours before his suffering and death, Jesus' head must have been filled with many thoughts. He was a real human being with a human mind and human emotions and human thoughts.

Even though he was in sovereign control of all that would happen, he must have been very apprehensive. What human being wouldn't be apprehensive about the next day's suffering and pain.

But for all that his mind was wearing, the desires of his heart were fixed. Fixed not on himself, but on his disciples. I have earnestly desired, he says in verse 15, to eat this Passover with you.

[6 : 36] With you. We talked about this last week, but it bears repeating. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus didn't want to be alone. He wanted the company of his friends. He wanted to be with them. The human Jesus shares our humanity with us. He shared our need for company. The company of his disciples and his friends.

As he looked into their eyes, he saw their love for him. And as they looked into his, he saw their love, his love for them. Rather than retreat into solitude and melancholy, Jesus opened his heart and gained the strength only friends can give. He wanted to eat this Passover with them.

Remember how in his famous introduction to the gospel, John talked about how in the beginning, the Word was with God. Jesus, the Word, the ideal human being, was created for witness, relationship with others. We talk about communion, but let's split that word up.

Com means together. Union means being joined. At the communion meal, the heavenly Jesus is joining together with us. It isn't so very different from that first communion meal where Jesus was physically present with his disciples. When we take the communion, the heavenly Jesus is joined together with us.

He is spiritually present by the Holy Spirit sharing in this meal with us. He's not physically present in the elements of the wine and the bread, but nonetheless, he is present by his Holy Spirit, his heart's desire to eat this meal with us. Do you think of it that way? That when we're engaged in this simple task of eating bread and drinking wine, the same Jesus who presided over this first communion meal is presiding over ours. He's present with us. His gracious presence serving as the aroma and savor of grace and beauty and strength. Just like he reclined with his friends those 2,000 years ago, he reclines with us today, lovingly looking into the eyes of our hearts and saying, I eagerly desire to eat this with you.

[9 : 14] But to share one meal with his disciples, the meal the night before his suffering, that was not his chief object. Rather, it was to enjoy their company and fellowship forever. As he prayed in his great high priestly prayer in John 17, Father, I desire that those you have given me may be with me where I am. The desire of Jesus was that by his suffering and death to fulfill the ultimate meaning and significance of the Passover meal. Remember how the Passover was held to celebrate God's deliverance of his people from their slavery in Egypt under Moses? The first Passover involved the death of the firstborn of Egypt together with the slaughter of the lambs, the blood of the lambs being painted over the doorposts and the lintels of Jewish houses. Over those houses, having seen the blood, the angel of the Lord passed over, and the Israelites were freed from their slavery at length, brought into the promised land of Canaan.

And through his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus will ultimately fulfill the Passover. Through the death of the firstborn Jesus, all who have faith in Christ will be delivered from the slavery of sin, death, and condemnation, and ultimately brought into the paradise of God.

Brought into a greater than Canaan, a promised land with no sin and death, where pain and misery shall be altogether forgotten, never to return. By his suffering, Jesus is fulfilling the ultimate Passover. And these men gathered round him in this upper room will be its first beneficiaries.

Jesus will go before them into the paradise of God. But through what he will do for them the next day, he will take them to be with him there, so that this one meal shall be the prelude to the eternal supper of Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth. All the suffering and pain Jesus will endure the next day, will be that so his friends can be with him forever, and not just for one night.

Here's the desire of Jesus' heart for his people to be with him forever, and he goes to the cross to make it a reality. And again, when you think of it that way, when we're engaged in this simple act of eating bread and drinking wine at the Lord's Supper, the Lord is assuring us that we shall eat and drink with him forever in the new heavens and the new earth, that we shall always be with him and he with us, and better than we have it now. Our sin and weakness prove a spiritual barrier to our spiritual vision today, but there shall be none of that there, and we shall see Jesus face to face. The bread and the wine are tokens of his promise that we shall be with him always, and the desire of his heart shall be fulfilled and never frustrated, that forever he shall share this meal with us.

[12 : 34] What's the takeaway message? Yes, Jesus is spiritually present with us at this communion meal, and yes, Jesus gives us these tokens of his promise that we shall be with him forever, but behind it all is one word, love. Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free, rolling like a mighty ocean in its fullness over me. And this, perhaps, is the greatest of all mysteries, that Jesus could love me.

But he does. And he wants me to be with him. That's why he's given us the bread and the wine. They're tokens of his infinite, eternal, and unchangeable love for us. And his desire for witness with us. Secondly, Jesus' sacrifice from verse 17 through verse 20.

Jesus' sacrifice. If the major theme of the first few verses of our passage is summarized in the words, with you, the major theme of verse 17 through 20 is summarized in the words, for you.

In a recent sermon, David Parker said, The whole of the gospel is contained in these two words, for you. You will notice that Luke mentions in verse 17 that Jesus begins the communion with the distribution of the wine.

[14 : 09] We're not to take this as a second stone procedure, but rather a one-off action which is uniquely situated in this first meal. Take this and divide it among yourselves, for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

This will be Jesus' first and last celebration of the communion as we know it. He will not eat such a meal again until the coming of the kingdom of God, which in context probably means heaven and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

If there follows the words of the classic institution, we always repeat at the beginning of the communion meal. The word the apostle Paul records for us in 1 Corinthians 11, which we'll recite a bit later on.

You'll notice Jesus begins with giving thanks. The classic Jewish grace given before a meal. The interesting thing here is that presumably before any of this Passover meal began, Jesus would have already given thanks for the whole meal.

By giving thanks at this point, Jesus is indicating that what he's doing now is instituting another meal, a new meal.

[15 : 32] He's giving thanks to God for this meal. Such a difficult thing to do when for him this meal points to his suffering and death.

This is a new meal set apart for Christ and his followers, a meal altogether different from any other meal. He begins by breaking bread and giving it to them, saying, this is my body which is given for you.

All too often, Christians disagree about what Jesus meant when he said, this is my body. The sad thing is the disagreements hide the greater reality of the words, given for you.

And then after the meal, he gives his disciples the cup, saying, this cup is poured out for you. The new covenant in my blood.

Again, the important words are poured out for you. My body for you. My blood for you. Here's a language of sacrifice. Jesus gives himself body and blood as a sacrifice for his disciples.

[16 : 46] That's what the Holy Communion points toward, the self-giving of Jesus on behalf of his followers. Now, we could talk about this all day, barely scratch the surface of what Jesus is truly saying, especially that marvelous phrase, new covenant.

But as I say, it's all summarized really in these words, for you. If the weight of our first point is summarized with the words, with you, the second is, for you.

And that's what makes the communion meal really so simple. It's not just that the elements are simple, bread and wine, but the message is simple. It's for you. This is what makes the communion meal so different from every other festival celebrated by other religions.

In other religions, worshippers celebrate a festival for their God. They offer sacrifices to God to gain merit and hopefully salvation.

But in Christianity, the communion meal is where God celebrates a festival for us, reminding us that he has already offered his son to save us from our sins.

[18 : 06] It is the visible reminder of Christ's words on the cross. It is finished. The work of our salvation is complete. When we eat bread and drink wine, we do not offer a new sacrifice to God to gain salvation.

We recite the words, For you and remember, God has offered the ultimate sacrifice for our salvation. Communion is not a sacrifice we offer to God.

It is the remembrance of the sacrifice God has offered for us. As Jesus looks into the eyes of his friends, the disciples, He loves them and thinks of tomorrow's suffering and death, Saying to them, It is all for you.

Soldiers go to war with the phrase in their minds for king and country, And Jesus went to the cross with that phrase, For you. He did not go to the cross for those who deserved it, For the noble and pure.

He went for sinners like Peter and John. He freely gave his body and blood for those who didn't understand it, And didn't deserve it. This, as I said a minute ago, Is the greatest mystery of the communion.

[19 : 24] Not what the elements are. But that Jesus loved us as we are. Sinful, undeserving, and weak. In the light of this truth, That the entire communion, In fact, the entire message of the Christian gospel, Is summed up with these words, For you.

We need to question the attitude with which we prepare for, And attend the Lord's Supper. If you're anything like me, The communion becomes about me, And not about Jesus.

Am I worthy enough? Am I prepared enough? Am I good enough? The thing is, The communion's never been about me, Or any of us.

It's all about Jesus and his words, For you. We do well to think about ourselves, Less at the communion table, And more about Jesus. None of us are good enough to take the communion, But that's the point.

Jesus took the punishment of our sin, So that we could take the bread and the wine. He promises to be with us at the communion table, Because it's all for us. It's not about us. It's never been about us.

[20 : 31] It's always been about him. If at all today, Your heart is drawn out to Jesus, Even if you're not sure you're a Christian, But you want to be, Then the communion is for you, Because Jesus meant it that way.

Would you say to me, Colin, I'm not worthy. Well, neither am I. None of us are worthy. Jesus is worthy.

Jesus is worthy. And he commands us, Saying, Take, eat, it is for you. Take, drink, it is for you.

Jesus and his sacrifice has done it all. And he bids us come, And remember.

And then thirdly and finally, Jesus' betrayal. Jesus' betrayal from verse 21 to 23.

It would seem, From Luke's account of this first communion meal, That Judas Iscariot was present.

Judas ate the bread Jesus gave him.

[21 : 37] Judas drank the wine Jesus gave him. He was one of those 12 disciples, Gathered around that table. He was one of Jesus' friends. But Judas betrayed him.

And Jesus knew he would. There are two short questions, I want to briefly explore in this final point.

The first is this. Why didn't Jesus expose Judas, As the betrayer?

Why didn't Jesus expose Judas, As the betrayer? Jesus clearly knew that Judas, Would betray him to the chief priests. But from the question, The disciples ask in verse 23, It's clear the disciples didn't know.

Jesus left them in the dark. Jesus could have exposed Judas, But he didn't. Because if at this stage, Jesus had exposed Judas, The other disciples would immediately, Have cast Judas out from their group.

Then if that happened, The disciples would have been in their guard against Judas. And when later they saw Judas approach them in the garden of Gethsemane, The arrest would not have happened.

[22 : 48] If Jesus had exposed Judas, As perhaps we would have done if we'd been in Jesus' shoes, Jesus would not have been arrested, He would not have been tortured, He would not have gone to the cross, And he would not have saved us from our sins.

He didn't expose Judas, Because in love, Jesus was determined to go to the cross, And give himself as the sacrifice for our sins. He had set his face like flint to go to Jerusalem, And nothing, Not even Judas' betrayal, Would stop him from demonstrating the love of God for us on the cross. And so we wonder, And we worship Jesus, For his refusal to expose Judas Iscariot as the traitor he was.

Praise God for this, This shows God's determination to love us to the very end, And never give up.

It's that love which will not let me go, In which we may rest our weary souls.

But though our grip on Jesus may grow weak, He who allowed himself to be betrayed, Will never lose his grip on us. If that's the first question, The second is this, In verse 22 we read, The Son of Man goes as it's been determined.

[24 : 14] Determined. The word determined in verse 22, Is that from which we get the English word, Horizon. Horizon. This was the horizon of Jesus.

All he could see at this time, Was his passion and his cross. His eyes are fixed on that, Which he must endure on our behalf for us. The word determined, Also helps us to understand that, What was happening to Jesus was not a random set of events.

He wasn't the victim of a serious series of unfortunate events. He was nobody's patsy. Rather, In love, Jesus was following the horizon of his preordained destiny.

That destiny which he, Along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Had determined to be for the creation of the universe. Can't you see such love and commitment here?

That for us, And to be with us forever, In the wise and loving council of the divine trinity, Jesus, Went toward the horizon of the cross.

[25 : 24] This is God's way of salvation, Through faith in Christ and his death for us. And of course, This raises for us the futility, And foolishness of anyone who thinks, They know another way to be saved, Than through Jesus Christ.

If this was the way God, The divine trinity, And all his infinite justice, Love and wisdom, Determined it to be, Through the suffering and death of the cross of Jesus, But we, Finite, Foolish, Sinful human beings, Think different.

That it's by our good works, Or religious observance, That we are saved. Who do you suppose is right? God? Or us? It really is very simple, Don't you think?

Bread and wine, With you, For you, This Holy Communion, Is the high point, Of our worship and practice. It needs to be simple, Because we're all simple people.

The gospel's simple. Christ has done everything for you, So that you can forever be with him.

Perhaps for these last few weeks and months, You've been wandering from your faith, The vitality of your relationship with Christ, Has grown cold.

[26 : 48] Now is the time to recommit yourself to him. Not to doing great things for him, But to remembering what he's done for you.

And remembering that the end point of our faith, Is not what we do, Or who we are, But the knowledge and experience, Of the witness of Jesus.

Now is the time for that recommitment. And now is the time to take, Eat, And remember.

Thank you.