

Communion Service - The Suffering Saviour

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let me extend a very warm welcome to you all this morning to our communion service, including those who are watching online. Thank you for joining us in that way. It's a great pleasure. It gives us great delight to be able to come to take communion once again in the congregation after two years without it. And it's wonderful to see the Lord's table. We've had to obviously extend the Lord's table to nearly the back of the church downstairs. And it's great to see so many people have come to the communion today. And I trust that the Lord will bless you as you take communion and bless you too who are watching, whether it's online or on the gallery.

I do pray that God will touch your hearts and that we will all know his presence with us. Now, I'm not going to go through the intimations today on the bulletin sheet. You can just read through that yourselves. Just notice the evening service at 6.30. That'll be conducted by Reverend Callum Murdo Smith. I will give details in regard to the way the table is going to be served today, because it will not be the same way as it was previously in the serving of it. I leave that until we actually come to the point just before we come to the serving of the table when I come down to the table later on. So I'll give specific directions and details as to how the elders will carry that out and how you yourselves will receive the bread and the cups with the wine.

We're going to begin now by singing to God's praise in Psalm number 30. Psalm number 30, from the beginning, that's on page 34 of the Psalm books in the Sing Psalms version.

O Lord, I will exalt your name, for you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat triumphantly. Lord God, in need I cried to you and you restored my health. O Lord, you brought me from the grave and saved my soul from death. You holy ones sing to the Lord, sing out with joyful voice.

When you recall his holy name, then praise him and rejoice. As anger but a moment lasts, life long his favor stays. Though tears may last throughout the night, joy comes with morning's rays. We'll sing these verses in Psalm 30. Lord, I will exalt your name.

[2 : 31] O Lord, I will exalt your name, for you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat. O Lord, I will exalt your name. For you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat. O Lord, I will exalt your name. O Lord, I will exalt your name. For you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat. O Lord, I will exalt your name. For you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat. O Lord, I will exalt your name. For you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat.

O Lord, I will exalt your name. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat. O Lord, I will exalt your name. For you have rescued me. You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat. For God in me I cry to you, and you restore my health.

O Lord, you brought me from the grave, and saved my soul from death.

You holy one, sing to the Lord, sing thou with joy for life.

When you recall his holy name, then praise him and rejoice.

[4 : 25] His hand will but a moment last, life long his day mercies.

Though tears may last throughout the night, join house with morning's grace.

Now we're going to call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's join together as we call upon the Lord. Our gracious and blessed God, as you have gathered us here together to worship you, to remember you in the death you died, as we gather around your table and around your word, we marvel, O Lord, at the patience.

We marvel at the way in which you have continued to bless us, even over these past years. We marvel especially at the preparation you have made for us to be able to come in the first place to you.

That you have laid down a foundation for us, a route, a road that leads into your presence, a new and living way through the death of Jesus. We give thanks, Lord, today that we gather in remembrance of him, in remembrance of who he is and what he has done, in particular remembrance of his death.

[6 : 05] Lord, it is our great privilege to do so. It is a blessing to your people to be able to come to the Lord's table, a blessing to them to remember the way in which he died for them.

We thank you for the desire that you have placed in our hearts today to come and worship you in this way. We bless you for each other. We thank you for the body of Christ in this world, visibly seen in your people.

We thank you for the way in which you have placed us together, as a congregation of your people, as a spiritual family. We thank you for your grace, O Lord, that has brought this about and continues to minister to your people as they need you day by day.

We thank you for your knowledge of us, that knowledge that is complete and perfect in every way. We thank you, O Lord, as we draw near to you, that this is so.

We could never express to you, we could never confess adequately all our sins and the extent of our sinfulness, but we thank you that you know us already and how far that you are able to do for us, exceeding abundantly above what we are able to ask or think.

[7 : 24] O Lord, bless us today. We thank you after such a long time, without being able to gather round your table or at your table, we thank you that today we are able to do so.

We pray that the elements that are used in the bread and the wine will themselves be blessed. We ask, O Lord, that word and sacrament will come truly to touch us inwardly and deeply.

Help us, Lord, we pray as we come together in this way that we may leave this place today with a greater appreciation of what the Lord has done, the greater love for Him, and a greater resolve to serve Him and to be known as His people in this world.

We thank you, Lord, for the privilege of serving you openly, of coming to declare what the Lord has done in the midst of the generation that we belong to.

We pray for all others today who remember the Lord's death in other congregations, whether in this town or elsewhere. Lord, we pray that your blessing will be with them as we pray for ourselves.

[8 : 31] We give thanks for the way in which you have opened up the way for us so that we are able once again to partake of the Lord's Supper. We pray today, Lord, for those who are watching and observing the partaking of your people.

We ask, Lord, that this may be blessed to them. We pray that they may come themselves deeply to contemplate what it is to remember the Lord in His death and to reach out and to seek by faith to take you to themselves.

And if they have already done so, Lord, we pray that you would move them inwardly to join your people as a professing people. And we ask for that blessing today to reach out beyond the table that those things which are done by your people in the sacrament itself may prove to be a means of blessing to those who are not actively partaking at this time.

And Lord, we do pray that you'd bless those who are here for the first time partaking of the Supper. We thank you for them today. We thank you for the encouragement you gave them to come and join with others here today.

We pray that they may know your blessing as they do this for the first time. We thank you for the encouragement that they bring to us in coming in this way. The encouragement that we were longing to see after these two years of not being able to come and see others visibly joining your people.

[10 : 02] Lord, we thank you for this and we pray that they may know your blessing today. We pray for all, O Lord, who may be apprehensive, even having sat at your table before.

We ask that you would bless them today. We pray, Lord, for those as well who should and could be here but are not, who may be watching online but for some reason or other are not able to be here.

We pray for them and we pray for those whose hearts may have grown cold. Lord, we pray for that love to be rekindled in them, that love that would once again come to express their commitment to you and their love for you in remembering you in this way.

We ask, too, that you'd bless those who have given up their time to look after others today, those who are your people, your professing people, but have chosen to give up their time willingly, whether it is in health care or in looking after children and tweenies even here today in Cresce.

Bless them, we pray. We ask, Lord, for thankful hearts for those who are willing to give up their time. And we pray that you'd bless us as a people during these days, not only as a people in this nation, Lord, as we recover and emerge from this time of pandemic, we pray that you would teach us, Lord, that this is your providence, that you have been speaking to us during these years, that you are calling upon us to put our house in order, that you are drawing our mind, O Lord, to the devastation of sin itself as the root of all our woes.

[11 : 44] We pray that you would give our leaders especially to take note of this in such a way as would turn their hearts to you. We ask that you would give them good counsel, that those of your people, O Lord, who seek to bear your truth before them may do so, whether at the highest level or otherwise, in government, both nationally and locally.

We pray for them today who carry your name openly and are not ashamed to testify to you in our houses of parliament, in our councils, in every way, Lord, in which in public life your people bear testimony to your truth and to your grace.

Be merciful to us as a nation, for, Lord, it is evident that truth has fallen in our streets, that we are devastated and ravaged by sinfulness, by an abandonment of your ways, by turning to false gods and to empty cisterns that cannot slake our thirst or meet our needs spiritually.

Lord, be merciful in turning us to yourself. Bless the gospel we pray in our midst. Bless it in our own local communities and throughout our land. Bless too, Lord, the world in which we live, a world that is so marked by devastation and war and deprivation and threats of war and animosity and hatred.

Let your kingdom come, we pray. And we ask, Lord, that the power of your truth and of your spirit may come to occupy the hearts of men and women in places of influence, that we may see an end to such times of crisis in our land and times of crisis throughout the world.

[13 : 31] Remember especially the situation in Ukraine where we still find such uncertainty. We're tempted on going at securing peace.

Lord, may it be that that peace will indeed be secured and we long that the peace of the gospel will come to prevail there and elsewhere. So remember us now, we pray.

Help us as we turn to your word to give an ear to it as your voice speaking to us and as we confess our sins, our uncleanness and our need of cleansing. Lord, we pray that you would forgive our sins, that you would overlook them in your mercy and establish us in righteousness before you and cleanse us from all the defilement of our sin.

For we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. A reading of God's word today is from the prophecy of Isaiah and chapter 53.

Isaiah chapter 53, we'll read from the beginning through to the end of the chapter. Most of us, I'm sure, will know that the chapter 53 of Isaiah is in great detail a prophecy of the sufferings of Jesus as the Messiah, as the Savior of His people.

[14 : 51] Some of us who are older, I'm sure, may remember learning this by heart even in primary school or attempting to anyway. So we'll read from the beginning of chapter 53.

Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no form nor majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his stripes we are healed.

[15 : 54] All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted.

Yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.

Although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring.

He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous.

[17 : 02] And he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many. And he shall divide the spoil with the strong. Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. Amen. May the Lord bless to us.

Reading that portion of his word to his own praise and glory. Now as that's been customary for quite some time, we sing some verses in Gaelic.

These verses are from Psalm 22, verses 15 to 16 in Gaelic. You can find them yourselves in English as well.

Psalm 22 at verse 15. Verses that were so wonderfully and graphically fulfilled on the cross itself.

[18 : 20] When the Lord was surrounded by enmity. And when in his deepest soul he knew the sufferings as the sin-bearer for his people. And how they pierced his hands and his feet, as verse 16 says.

These two verses, we'll remain seated for the singing. Er t'inimachig ma'r fóth a cré a tam o náast a jé. Er t'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché a tam o náast a jé.

O chénk d'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché.

or judge himself. Er t'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché. O chénk d'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché. Where is the guide of the record?

Or Neil? Or■■■■ inrap están as ché. Er t'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché. Er t'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché. Er t'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché.

[20 : 05] Er t'inimachig ma'r fóth a ché. CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS previous verses briefly as well. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Well, Isaiah lived some 700 years or so before Jesus, before the Son of God became man, came into this world and lived Jesus Christ, the life he lived in this world. And so in that sense, because this is, of course, a prophecy, it is looking forward in time to the coming of the Messiah. It is describing aspects of that Savior that all through the Old Testament God kept referring to and his people kept longing for. And yet chapter 53 of Isaiah is written as if that had already taken place. As if the cross and the resurrection, and all that you read of in the New Testament, as if that was now behind them, the speakers in this chapter are reflecting upon that work as if it is already done. They're reflecting on the sufferings of the Messiah in such a way that present them as already accomplished. He has borne our griefs. He did carry our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. And so there's a wonderful way in which reading Isaiah 53 transports you forward in such a way that places you directly in the New Testament and actually reflects upon what Christ has done as you look back upon the cross. And so it fits so well with what the Lord's Supper itself is about as a remembrance of the death of Jesus, of Jesus in his death. And indeed, it's one of the ways in which we find evidence that this Bible is the Word of God. What else or who else could have possibly put together such an amazing run of references to this one person, to this event, 700 years beforehand?

And of course, there are references in history before that to the coming of the Messiah. But just think of the detail of this chapter. Think of the way that they were so wonderfully accomplished in the detail you find expressed in the Gospels in reference to the death of Jesus. And who else and what else does? But God's particular will and authorship and government of history could possibly have led to things being accomplished in that way. It's one of those evidences internally within the Bible that demonstrates this book is God's Word. This is something that God has produced.

It is the created product of His out-breathing, if you like, of truth, as Paul puts it in 2 Timothy, where he says that all Scripture is inspired, as we put it, but breathed out by God.

[25 : 38] So here's the product of that out-breathing of God in the Scriptures. Now, chapters 38 to 55 of Isaiah deal with the theme of redemption or salvation. Before that and after that, it deals with other things, but redemption in Isaiah's presentation of it anticipates the way in which Jesus Himself accomplished that and anticipates, too, the writings of the New Testament that came to fill out on what happened in the cross and what we read of in the Gospels. So the theme is redemption and deliverance, and at the heart of that redemption and deliverance is the servant of God. This is one of the main themes in this chapter, this passage of Isaiah in these chapters, the servant of God, fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God, who, of course, referred to Himself as the servant of the Father, doing the Father's will.

And at the heart of that theme of redemption is the death of that servant. So there you have from 700 years previous to the event, you have the cross set out as if it had already happened.

And at the heart of all of this is the suffering and the death of the Savior Jesus. And that's what we're doing today in remembering Him in His death in the Lord's Supper as He instituted it Himself. So two things. First of all, we read the beginning of the chapter of Jesus rejected as the Savior, summarized at the end of verse 3. There He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. We esteemed Him not. We did not consider Him to be the Savior, to be God's Messiah, to be the means of redemption.

And as you read through these verses, I'm just going to deal with them briefly, you find in verse 2 how it speaks there of, He grew up before Him like a young plant and like a root out of a dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him and no beauty that we should desire Him. In other words, as was indeed fulfilled in the days of Jesus Himself, He was regarded as very unimpressive spiritually.

His claims were rejected by the majority and by those of the Jewish leaders who examined Him and was rejected thereby. And that's already anticipated in detail here. Look at what it's saying.

[28 : 15] He is as a root out of a dry ground. There's no promise of growth there. There's nothing there that really looks promising in terms of producing fruit, producing a lasting legacy. And the same, there's no form, no majesty. There's no evidence there as far as people were concerned that He was indeed to be the leader of His people. He's not impressive enough. He doesn't have the suitability to be the leader of His people, to be the Messiah, to be God's King. And thirdly, there is no beauty that we should desire Him or look at Him. No beauty, as they looked at Him, they saw no beauty to draw them. In fact, it was the opposite, as we'll see in a minute, to reject Him, to be repelled by Him.

He is not attractive in spiritual terms in order to fulfill the kingship that God had promised.

Now, it may be like that for yourself today. It may be that for much of your life you did not find Jesus in the Gospels to be so attractive to you, so compelling to you, as to actually deliver your life over to Him, to be saved by Him. But the point came when that changed, and the point came, as we'll see in the chapter here, for those who are presented as the speakers in the chapter, when it changed for them as well. And we'll see that in our next point. But here is Jesus rejected as the Savior. There is no beauty. There is no comeliness. There is no promise. There's no form.

There's no suitability. And so, He's just left or rejected, as we'll see. Maybe it was like that for yourself. And today, you're reflecting on that. As you come to the Lord's table, you're reflecting on times when Jesus didn't mean what He means to you now. He wasn't as important to you as He is now.

So, it's not perhaps that you rejected Him altogether or didn't respect the Gospel record and the record of the New Testament and the Bible. Indeed, maybe you'd been taught all your life from a youngster that this Jesus was the Savior of His people. But for you, it didn't come to that point until God actually opened your eyes and you saw, this actually is the very person I need more than anyone else. And you come today to remember Him because of that.

[30 : 51] So, not only is He unimpressive, but in verse 3, you can see, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. It's not that He was just ignored. It's not that they dealt with Him in a kind of neutrality which didn't really mean any suffering or any actual animosity towards Him by all of those who rejected Him. It's quite clear here, it's quite clear, of course, from the New Testament records as they fill out on this, that the Lord Jesus faced a hostility and animosity beyond anyone else who lived in the world. He endured, as Hebrews put it, the contradiction, the vehement opposition and hatred of sinners against Himself. It's a positive animosity. He was despised and rejected by men.

Just read through the Gospels and look for this point again, especially as you come to those chapters near to the cross itself and the description of the cross, and just look for the intensity of that opposition, the intensity of that animosity, the intensity of that hatred, the vehemence with which He was rejected. You see, you remember the words of the psalmist as well, the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. They examined Him, they looked at His claims, but they rejected Him. They didn't fit with their own understanding or aspirations.

Yet, He was afflicted. They thought He deserved these sufferings. We looked at Him and saw Him, esteemed Him not. We esteemed Him stricken, in verse 4, smitten by God and afflicted. In other words, the verdict of those who came ultimately to crucify Him was that He was actually deserving of these sufferings. He dared to claim to be the Son of God, the servant of God, the one God had sent into the world to be His appointed Savior. As far as they were concerned, that was audacity. That was blasphemy.

That was something that brought the suffering upon Him, and so He deserved that suffering. We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. Look at the way esteemed is repeated there in verse 3 and then into verse 4. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him, esteem Him in the proper way to receive and respect Him and accept Him, because we esteemed Him stricken, deservedly smitten by God and afflicted. What is that saying to us? Really, it's saying something like this, when we view Jesus and His sufferings, instead of being like those people who esteemed Him not and rejected Him, we should actually look upon Him and upon ourselves and be in sorrow not for Him but for us, for the way in which we dealt with Him, the way in which we once regarded Him. They ought to have smitten themselves and seen their need of such a Savior. Instead, they regarded Him as smitten by God and afflicted. Jesus rejected as the Savior.

But then, just remember again that this is looking at things from the point of view of after the crucifixion, after the death of Jesus, looking back upon it, although it's 700 years before it as a prophecy. That's the kind of wonderful imagery you find here. And now the scene changes. Now these speakers are saying, surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities, and so on. You see, the scene has changed. The thinking has changed. The view has changed. The view has changed. The opinion has changed. The conclusion of these people has changed. So it was for yourself. The point came when God came into your experience, into your life, and your whole attitude to Christ changed. Even if it had been one of a neutral respect, now you've come to see Him as one who needs to be received by you, whose your own need of receiving Him is especially made clear to you.

[35 : 42] And Jesus is now recognized as the suffering Savior. That word, surely, there in the Hebrew text of the passage really carries with it, if you like, a spiritual punch. Because we're moving from the rejection that's mentioned in the previous verses to the reality of who He was and what He did and how He's come to be recognized and accepted as the suffering Savior. You see, the sufferings that Jesus went through were repugnant to those who rejected Him. No Savior, no Messiah could come, surely, to suffer in this way and to hang on a cross. That was the ultimate in rejection. That was the ultimate in the refusal, the ultimate reason. But now this punch, now this wonderful emphasis, surely He has borne our grief.

This is the alternative. This is the positive. This is the other side of things. This is the reality. This is really what it was like. This is who He is. And there are three things I want to mention briefly in regard to these following verses. Three things to do with His sufferings. I want us to focus on His sufferings, not just on His death, but His death as the suffering Savior, because His death was really the very epicenter of His sufferings. He suffered much before it. He suffered much even in the time that He was on the cross prior to it. But the sufferings of His soul, as Hugh Martin put it, were the soul of His sufferings. He suffered, first of all, He is suffering alone. Secondly, He is suffering as our substitute. And thirdly on the cross, He is suffering to bring us peace. He is suffering all alone. You see, right through this passage you have a contrast between He and we. He has borne our griefs, yet we esteemed

Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities, the he and the our. In other words, what you really read from that and take from that is the sheer loneliness of Jesus. The loneliness of Jesus in His life on earth, though He was accompanied by disciples, but when it came especially to the cross, the suffering of the cross was His suffering alone.

Yes, you remember indeed how John put it in John chapter 16, what Jesus says there in John 16, how He spoke of the disciples being scattered and leaving Him alone. John 16 and verse 32, where Jesus then refers to the way in which the disciples were going to leave Him. He said, Behold, the hour is coming. Indeed, it has come when you will be scattered each to his own home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world. So, He's speaking there of the disciples deserting Him, leaving Him alone in that sense. But He said,

I am not alone, the Father is with me. And that continued to be the case right through to that most agonizing of cries from the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Because there, in the mystery of that amazing cry, in the darkness of His soul and the suffering with which He suffered at that time, the Lord is saying, Why, my God, have you forsaken me? There is no comfort from His Father's presence. There is no comfort from the knowledge of His Father upholding Him through His Spirit.

[40 : 07] He is alone. Company of His Father, His eternal companionship is removed at that terrible moment, which we cannot describe. We read the words, but then what does it mean? As Luther put it, it's God forsaken by God. Luther had been for hours on his knees, perplexed about how righteousness could be established before God, how God could actually receive him as a righteous person. And on his knees, he pleaded with God, he was seeking light from God over these passages in Galatians and Romans, especially, that dealt with righteousness and how a person comes to be esteemed righteous by God.

And he got up from his knees as he thought about the cross and as he thought about Jesus crucified and the sufferings in my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He got up from his knees and he said, wonders, wonder of wonders, God forsaken by God. God forsaken by God.

God forsaken by God. You know, we speak about being lonely. And there are people here, I'm sure, who know what loneliness is. And I don't want in any way to suggest that that's just to be minimized.

Loneliness is a difficult thing, especially loneliness when loved ones have gone and left the scene of time. But there never was as lonely a place. And there never was as lonely a person as the Son of God, Jesus Christ, hanging on the cross, crying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When I feel lonely in this life, when you feel lonely in this life, when you bring your loneliness to this table of the Lord today, seeking the Lord's comfort, the Lord's guidance, the Lord is directing you to one who really knows what loneliness is in all its extent, in all its depth, the loneliness of the cross, the loneliness of your Savior. And when you're remembering Him today, in the death He died, you're remembering that He died alone when He entered into the sufferings that you deserved, the death that you deserved, the hell that you deserved. When that was being swallowed up by Him, as we saw last night in Isaiah 25, He shall swallow up death. That's what was happening,

Jesus taking the death that we deserved, and dying that death on the cross. Oh, remember, that's loneliness beyond what you and I will ever know.

[42 : 56] And you go back to it again and again and say, Lord, I feel so lonely, but I thank you that your loneliness is an answer to it, because from your loneliness I receive your presence.

And can we say too, surely we can, that as we gather here together today, and it's one of the ways in which the togetherness and the unity of the Lord's people is demonstrated visibly when they come together to the table of the Lord, to the sacrament of communion. Here we are together today.

What has led to that togetherness? What is the ground of that togetherness? Where has that togetherness come from? There's so many ways in which you could answer that in the way in which salvation is applied to us by the Holy Spirit. But where has ultimately that togetherness come, that unity, that company of believers that we have together, where does it come from?

It's come from the loneliness of the cross. It's the loneliness of Jesus in His death on the cross, dying alone, no one to bear the burden with Him, no one to take that sin of His people off Him and help share the load. And we are here today as the fruit of that loneliness, of that suffering. That's where it has come from.

He suffered alone. He suffered, secondly, as our substitute. Verses 4, beginning of verse 4, verses 5 to 6, you can see these are very much related to what you find in Leviticus chapter 16, the chapter that deals with the goat that becomes a substitute for the person that brings the goat to the high priest. And the confession of sin is made over the head of the goat, transferred, as it were, symbolically to that goat. And then that goat is put to death, one of them, another goat, the other goat is led away into the wilderness to be released. And there you see in that wonderful chapter of Leviticus 16 that God dealt with the problem of sin, sin as it alienated us from Him. Sin as it needed to be dealt with in order to provide us access into His presence.

[45 : 25] It required a death. It required a death, a shedding of blood. And it required at the same time liberty, freedom from sin. Sin taken away to appear never again against His people.

Well, you have both in the cross and the death of Jesus. You have actual death that He experienced, spiritual death, separation from God, death to the full extent. But you also have, as the live goat demonstrated, God taking away sin from off His people, having laid it upon Him.

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. All of that really speaks of substitution. And it's not wrong to say that because the New Testament goes back to these passages, the New Testament that speaks of substitution. And forget about that theology that suggests to you today that substitution is really something that ought never to be something that ought never to be mentioned in relation to the death of Jesus or the ministry of Jesus. Because the penalty that we deserved was hell. The penalty we deserved was that death that He died. And He died in our place. He died in such a way that took everything that belonged to our sin. And here He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Instead of putting us there, God put His Son incarnate there. God put His servant Jesus there.

And upon Him, the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Verse 6. It is clearly substitution. He died in our place, in our room and stead, as it used to be put. And today you value that substitution as much as anything else. And you have the totality of that in His suffering, His suffering unto death and the suffering of that death. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. In other words, everything associated with sin and the outcome of our sin and the result of our sin, as well as our sin itself, the root cause of our suffering and our problems, He took it all. He didn't just die and leave the suffering aside. He didn't just die and leave the death aside undone. He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, but He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. You see, it's all there.

And not just our loneliness, but all our sorrows, all our pains in this life. When you go to Jesus to seek His help with your sufferings, with all that tears you up inside, with all that you're familiar with, in the depth of your soul, in what it means to suffer, in what it means painfully to suffer, whether mentally, physically, spiritually, when you go to the cross, when you go to your Savior, when you go to the Lord, and when you come to remember Him in His death, you say, Lord, I do thank You sincerely that every aspect of my suffering was actually brought up by You and taken by You to the cross in your own experience because You died the death that sin deserved. And that carries with it all the sufferings proper to sin and to the effect of sin. There's the totality. But the Father, you see, is involved. The Lord has laid on Him, in verse 6, the iniquity of us all. And that's what you find amplified in the New Testament.

[49 : 54] The Father took the sin of His people. He laid it upon His Son. His Son willingly took the sin of His people and all the suffering that it entailed. He took it willingly to Himself. And He took it willingly to die the death that He died. And whatever you find in the inadequate theology of our day, not just inadequate but distorted, which will tell you and suggest to you that substitution is not at all to be thought of in terms of the death that Jesus died or what Jesus was doing on the cross.

And that if we think of the Lord laying upon God, laying upon someone who Himself was innocent, the sin of His people, well, that amounts to cruelty. That amounts to something totally unworthy of God.

That is a misunderstanding, I dare say, of the essence of the cross. It's a misunderstanding of 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21. He has made Him to be sin for us, the one who knew no sin, so that we might be made, the righteousness of God in Him. There's a transference. And there's no transference without substitution. And there's no substitution without the Father being involved, without God in His plan from all eternity, actually executing that plan at Calvary on the cross.

That's what you're remembering today. That He took your place. That He took your suffering. That He took your death. And therefore that He is in every sense the complete Savior for you.

As the hymn writer put it, bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah. What a Savior. That's who He is. That's what He has done.

[52 : 00] And that's why He has done it. He suffered alone towards our togetherness, towards our reconciliation with God. He suffered as a substitute, taking our place and the death that we deserved. And finally, He suffered to bring us peace. You see, verse 5, upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with His stripes we are healed. Chastisement normally refers to the way God deals with correction of somebody, His people. He chastises His people.

But in Jesus' case, the chastisement, the infliction of pain and the laying of our sins upon Him, that chastisement was not because He deserved it, but in order to bring us peace, in order to deal with the sin that stood between us and God, in order to reconcile us, in other words, to God, and bring about that reconciliation. It's essentially the same thing as you find in Romans chapter 5 and verse 1. I'm just going to finish shortly with a reference to these verses. Romans 5 and verse 1, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through Him also, we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Or you go to Colossians, you have similar reference in Colossians chapter 1, wonderful verses in verses 21 to 22, where he speaks again about Jesus and God reconciling all things in Jesus to Himself, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. You who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him. Reconciliation, taking those at enmity with each other, removing the enmity, bringing about friendship.

And it is Jesus by His death who accomplished that for us. Peace is not just the absence of conflict or war.

Peace in these terms is a description of friendship with God, everything being right from God's side and from our side to bring us together as the best of friends. That's what we are.

[54 : 45] That's what you are today at His table as you remember Him in His death. Peace is one of the highest blessings that we have from God, the peace of reconciliation, the peace that comes through the cross.

Jesus recognized and received as the suffering Savior. Surely He has borne our griefs. He was wounded for our transgressions. He died for them. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, suffering alone, suffering as our substitute, suffering to bring us peace.

Lord our God bless you. Lord our God bless to us your word, we pray. Enable us today to now come to take communion in that spirit of thankfulness, the spirit in which we come to recognize you in the gospel and in the Lord's Supper.

Help us, Lord, to recognize you even through the taking of these elements. And as we do so, help us, we pray to receive you once again, even if we have done so many times before in the way in which the supper enables us.

And continue to bless us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing some verses once again. We're singing from Psalm 103. Psalm 103 in the Scottish Psalter.

[56 : 30] Singing verses 1 to 5. That's page 369. Singing these five stanzas. So thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless.

Verses 1 to 5. Psalm 103 to God's praise. O Lord, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name, to magnify and bless.

Bless, O my soul, the Lord, thy God, and not forgetful be.

Of all his gracious benefits he hath been stored on me.

All my name iniquity to God, most gracious be for him.

[58 : 16] Who thy disease, for unpaid, doth heal, and be relieved.

Who doth redeem thy right, that love, to death misnought, or done?

Through thee with loving kindness, thou untended mercies found.

With abundance of good things, thou hast satisfied thy love.

So that he must be eager, say, treat you with his value.

[59 : 40] Amen. It's customary for us at this time to read our warrant for the observance of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians, chapter 11 and at verse 23.

Verse 23.

You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Before we turn for prayer, following that example that the Lord set us, let me just say a word about the way in which the table will be served today, because we do have some differences given our situation.

We have individual cups with wine, and we also have the bread dispensed in a different way. The elders will shortly after I've said a few words after prayer, the elders will take the elements, the bread first, and then the trays with the cups of wine.

And they will use these empty pews and come in, one from this side, one from the other side, and give you the bread first of all. The bread will be dispensed by the use of these tongs that are specially for this purpose.

[61 : 16] So I'd like you, when it comes to yourself, to just cup your hands like this, so that the elder can drop the piece of bread into your hand. You are then free to just take that bread as you would in the usual case.

So he will drop the bread into your hands, or just please keep them cupped. The tongs will not touch your hand, and you will not touch the tongs, just to make sure that things are kept, because of health, kept secure.

So after that, you just take the bread, and the elder will move on with the plate to dispense that bread to others, until we've reached the end of the table. The same with these trays where you have the little cups of wine.

The trays will be carried by the elder into the pew following the bread, and then will go just along the pew. And if you're just in your own time, they are very small, these cups, so please just take your time with them.

Lift them out of the tray, and then you can take the wine, just as you would with the larger cups passing through the table as previously. As soon as you have the cup, take your time with it, but then just take the wine.

[62 : 29] And after you've taken the wine, please just hold the cup, because another elder will come afterwards to collect the cups. With a little basket, you just need to drop it in.

First of all, the bread with the tongs into your hands. Secondly, the trays, lift out the cup, take the wine, hold on to the cup until the next elder comes to actually take the empty cups into the basket that he will be carrying.

So please just take your time. We all realize this is new. It's new for the elders as well. It's new for me. It's new for yourselves. Don't rush. Don't rush. Just take your time with it. And we pray that God will prevent anything that would actually disturb our peace at the table.

Thank you for your attention with that. Let's now pray. O Lord, our gracious God, as we give thanks for all that this table represents, we pray now that you will bless it to us.

We pray that as we come to use bread and wine in the way in which you instituted, that these will be blessed to us spiritually. They will be consecrated to a holy use by your own blessing of them.

[63 : 48] And we pray, Lord, as we come before you to take the communion, that we will do so with gladness of heart, with humbleness of heart, with confession of our sin, with our thankfulness for your forgiveness.

And with an acknowledgement, Lord, that you are our God. That as we had last night in our thoughts, O Lord, that we all might say, this is our God.

And we have waited for him. And so we crave your blessing, Lord. And we do again give thanks for the way in which we are able to do this once again after such a long time without it.

We pray again that you would bless those here for the first time. Once again, we pray for your blessing for them. We pray too, Lord, for all of us who have been here before. Help us to renew our vows in your presence.

Help us to know, Lord, that you are indeed our God and have been and will continue to be so. Help us, whatever our thoughts, Lord, might be of our circumstances in life, to realize that everything represented on this table is the means by which God has taken account of us and provided against our needs so abundantly.

[65 : 07] Receive our thanks. Cleanse us from sin. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Before the elements are dispensed, you can just draw your mind back to the passage we had in Isaiah chapter 53, where again you find reference to the Lord actually bringing to our notice the way in which in verse 6, all we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The key word as you come to take the communion is remembrance or remember.

Remember where you were. Remember where the Lord found you. Remember you were a lost sheep. Remember we were all lost sheep.

We had turned everyone to our own way. We were using what we thought was our own best thoughts, our own best conclusions, until the Lord changed us and enabled us to see Jesus for who he was and who he is.

Remember that he found you wandering out in the open field spiritually as sheep without a shepherd. Remember what it took to rescue you.

[66 : 27] Remember today that these elements represent the journey that he took. The journey that included especially his death on the cross, followed by his resurrection from the dead.

Or remember how much was involved for the Lord in that. A journey like no other. A rescue like no other. A regard like no other.

A love like no other. You know we see sometimes shepherds in this world going out to rescue their sheep in a blizzard. Deep snow.

Sheep perhaps covered by the snow itself if they've not found shelter. You see that shepherd. You see the dedication. You see the love for those sheep. As he would seek to rescue them and bring them back safely.

Well here is in an infinitely more amazing way. The love of the good shepherd. This he says is, My father loves me because I lay down my life for the sheep.

[67 : 26] He came on this journey from heaven into this world. And not just to take our humanity, but as we were saying earlier, to take our sin, to take our death, to take all that we deserve.

And that journey reached the cross, where he poured out his soul and to death. And it's all about your rescue. Remember where he found you.

Remember the journey he took. Remember as far as we are able, what that involved for himself. And remember where he took you to.

He took you back safely. Into his own care. He didn't just go to rescue you and say, Now you're safe. I'm going to leave you here.

He took you into the custody, the protection, the safety of his grace. He took you into his companionship. He took you into salvation.

[68 : 28] He took you into that relationship with God, which you now enjoy. Remember. Remember where you were.

Remember the journey he took. Remember what was involved, especially in the cross. Remember how he rescued you and came to you and took you home to be with himself forevermore.

We read in that night in which the Lord was betrayed that he took bread and when he had broken it, after giving thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me.

After supper, he took the cup and said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show the Lord's death.

[69 : 49] Well, now that we have taken communion, under the key word remember, as we come from communion, the key word for us would be rejoice.

Not that we weren't rejoicing in coming to take communion, but the following chapter in Isaiah begins with these words, Sing, O barren one, who did not bear, break forth into singing and cry aloud, You who have not been in labor, for the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married, says the Lord.

Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out. Do not hold back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.

O Lord, also obviously from Isaiah's point of view speaking to the people as they waited for the promise of the Messiah to be fulfilled and for growth in the future, they were regarded as still barren without children spiritually in anticipation of the New Testament age.

And yet she's required to sing because these days are coming. And as we come from the table of the Lord, that is our great privilege as well. You've remembered the Lord in His death.

[71 : 07] Sing. Rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord Himself. Rejoice in all that He has done. Rejoice in all that this represents on His table.

You remember Paul as he wrote to the Romans in chapter 6. Dealing with the transition from sin, from being under sin and slaves of sin and being brought under Christ to be servants of God, bond servants of God.

And he said, what fruit did you then have in those things of which you are now ashamed? Of course, the answer to that is none. They were detached from righteousness. But now, having been freed from sin and become servants of God, you have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life.

Rejoice. You are a free people. You are the people of God. You are the children of God. You are the family of God. You belong to one another as you belong to Him.

What greater ground is there for rejoicing than to rejoice in Jesus, to rejoice in His salvation? You know, when the Bible tells us to rejoice, as Philippians 4 there puts it, rejoice in the Lord.

[72 : 27] And again I say rejoice. He reiterates it. He says it twice just for emphasis. It's not rejoicing in the sense of worldly happiness. It's not that the element of happiness is missing.

But it's a lot more than what we normally call happiness. Because what we normally call happiness can so easily be disturbed and replaced with gloom.

Rejoicing in the Lord is a deep-rooted satisfaction in Christ. It's not dependent on your circumstances. You take it with you into your circumstances.

And when in providence gloom does come your way, and pain and suffering and sorrow and loss and loneliness comes your way, remember the loneliness of Jesus, but remember too the reason for rejoicing in Him, that He has met all your needs, not only for your life in this world, but for the journey through to eternity, through death, through resurrection, through glory.

Rejoice. Rejoice. You have a reason to rejoice tonight, today, above most people in the world, because the Lord is yours, because He has brought you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you is His love.

[73 : 58] Rejoice. Make the most of it. Don't minimize it. Don't minimize it. Don't think it as something that you might not really want to show too much.

As you are able, as the Lord enables you, rejoice in your Savior. Enjoy His salvation. And, can we not say too from that passage, prepare for growth.

Friends, these two years have been very difficult, very trying. We've not been able to engage, as we used to, openly, in different ways of evangelism, of reaching out, of witnessing personally, and publicly.

But now that things are beginning to improve, and we pray we'll continue, as we emerge from these restrictions, set before your minds today, the growth that God is delighted with.

Growth in your own life. Growth in your own soul. Growth in your relationship to the Lord. Prepare for growth too, in terms of advancing His cause.

[75 : 11] The growth of the congregation. The growth of Jesus' kingdom in all our communities. May He bless these thoughts to us.

We're going to sing now, once again this time, in Psalm 72. Psalm 72 from the Scottish Psalter, these words that we normally have, to conclude our communion service.

Psalm 72, and at verse 17, page 314, His name forever shall endure, last like the sun it shall.

Men shall be blessed in Him, and blessed all nations shall Him call. Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel, for He alone doth wondrous works in glory that excel.

And blessed be His glory, His name to all eternity. The whole earth let His glory fill. Amen. So let it be. His name forever shall endure.

[76 : 16] His name forever shall endure.

Last like the sun it shall, and shall be blessed in Him, and blessed all nations shall live all.

Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel.

For He alone doth wondrous works in glory that excel.

without excel. And blessed be His glorious name, and blessed be His glorious name, to all eternity.

[77 : 46] The whole earth let His glory fill.

Amen. So let it be. Just a word of thanks at this point.

I want to thank yourselves for the way in which you made it so easy for us to actually administer the communion at this time.

I want to thank you for your acceptance of the changes which we had necessarily to bring in, which that made it so much easier for the session in actually coming to the point of administering the table and serving the table.

So thank you sincerely for your cooperation in what we had decided to do. I also want to thank the elders, not only those who served the table, but the whole Kirk session, because we were deliberating on this for some time.

[78 : 59] And I want to thank them for the way in which they dealt so peacefully and in such a brotherly way. And I have to say in such regard for yourselves too, as the congregation, in coming to their final decisions as to how best to carry out the serving of the table.

So I do wish to thank them and for the way that they carried that out today in such an accomplished manner. And our prayer is that God will continue to bless us in the days to come as a congregation.

I want to thank you too who are here today and weren't taking communion. It's always an encouragement to us to see people coming. And our prayer is that you will, without, I hope, too long a period, come yourselves to sit at the Lord's table.

And the same goes for those who are actually online as well. We thank you for your interest and for your presence. And for those who belong to the congregation, I hope that seeing things as you saw them through video would reassure you that we have everything that, as far as we can, manage in place for a safe environment.

And I would encourage you in that to not only come to take communion next time, but also to come to join with us in the regular worship of God each Lord's Day. But thanks above all to God.

[80 : 19] Thanks to God for his continued patience with us, for his provision for us, for his ongoing grace. We cannot manage without him.

And we know how much we need him, even though we fail to appreciate that so often. But he has confirmed for me certainly today, and I'm sure for yourselves as well, that he is still our covenant God, who has not turned from us, who continues to take such an interest in us, and to provide for us, and to treat us as his own spiritual family on earth.

And what is more precious than that? Let's stand for the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen. Amen.