



Mark 14:23–26

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Reflection

We're in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, the night before Jesus dies, in the middle of the last Passover meal, the first Lord's Supper. Reading from Mark 14:23–26,

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Ours is an ancient faith, extending back thousands of years to the time of Abraham and before. And just as this Passover moment in Jesus' day extends back to the events of the Exodus, so too does our celebration of Holy Communion (or the Lord's Supper) extend back to this very moment in the Upper Room in Jerusalem and through it to Moses' day and Israel's exit from Egypt. This moment reaches forward too, to the wedding feast of the Lamb in the new heavens and the new earth, when the kingdom of God is fully and finally here (more on that later). But for the moment, in short, this historic meal has great significance.

Returning to our ancient faith, however, it follows that in so many of the expressions of the Christian faith we stand on the

shoulders of those who've come before us. An example in Anglican circles is the 1662 Book of Common Prayer still used and revered today in more traditionally orientated Anglican communions.

In the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, the claim is made that Jesus...

‘... did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again.

We then ask God that we who receive this bread and wine...

‘...in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood’.

There are two things there that pick up on the Bible's teaching of this amazing moment. It is symbolic. But it's not 'just' a symbol, but also a powerful act that seems incongruent with the size of the portions. Two things.

Firstly, it is a perpetual memory of his most precious death. We remember. We do this, according to Jesus, 'in remembrance of me'. Memory is a powerful thing. Memory is a way to take the past, and make it live in the present. Memories make sense of the present, and can shape the future.

That's what the disciples were doing that day, they were taking the past, namely, the Exodus out of Egypt when God saved them and redeemed them by sacrifice. By

passing this story onto their children, they were keeping alive a truth about God: he loves us, and saves us.

But Jesus was changing the focus of the memory. As I said yesterday:

‘... his disciples in that moment would have known that this was the beginning of something profound, a new beginning of sorts, a new and greater exodus of God’s people.’

From now on, ‘remember me’ when you eat and drink. No longer is the Exodus the great moment of redemption. I am! And so not only do we look back, but we lean forward just as Jesus does in today’s passage bracing himself for his bloody death to come, we not only look back but we

lean forward like Jesus to ‘that day’ when we will all drink the fruit of the vine in the kingdom of God.

But back to this moment. By taking bread and wine, we are remembering Christ’s suffering and death to save us, the New Covenant by his Blood.

“Drink this, in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for you and be thankful.”

And we do it, ‘until he returns’.

Secondly, we become partakers of his body and blood. What does that mean?

23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to

them, and they all drank from it.

He is taking a cup at the Passover and he gives it to them and says, 'Take it in'. Drink it. Consume it. Get it into you. We share, then, in his body, since he gave himself up for us. And we share, then, in his blood, which was shed for us and for forgiveness when he went to the cross. We 'receive Christ by faith in our hearts.' In that sense, we become partakers.

Let me be clear. We receive Christ by faith in our hearts. We do not receive Christ by bread in our mouths. It is by faith we are saved, not by the so-called Mass. And we receive him in our hearts, not in our stomachs. In other words, I am not a Roman Catholic.

It is a symbolic meal. But not just a symbolic meal. By taking in the bread and wine, it allows us to both remember his death, and partake in his body and blood, and lean forward to his glory.

To what end? Jesus says that his blood 'is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'

Think

Yesterday I encouraged you to break bread at home with your family, and take delight when you do so at church. How long until you next take communion at church? Do you long for it? Is the state of your heart and your life fit at the moment to receive it? Or is there a sin you need to repent of? A person you need to forgive?

The Apostle Paul warns people who are living and acting in a selfish way:

“So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.” 1 Cor 11:27

In other words, the bread and the wine – small as they are -- speak of a great love, great forgiveness and a great salvation. But since God is involved, we ought not to treat this lightly. That’s why Paul goes on to say in the next verse,

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

Take the time to examine yourself. Some more gold from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer:

“Have ‘ye ... truly and earnestly repented you of your sins’? Are you ‘in love and charity with your neighbours’? Do you ‘intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways’?”

In other words, you take the bread and wine if you are a Christian (someone who’s truly repented), you are in right relationship with others (as far as it depends on you), and you intend to be obedient ‘henceforth’.

So examine yourself! Is there something you need to do before Communion Sunday? A person you need to contact? A sin you need to stop in the power of the Spirit? A prayer you need to pray?

Pray

Pray about this. Ask God for forgiveness for your sins, since Christ's blood was poured out for you. Pray for a person you are out of relationship with. 'Love your enemies,' Jesus said.

And is there a sin to bring to God? He knows you are doing it anyway! Ask him for strength to overcome. But notice verse 23,

23 Then he took a cup, and when he

had given thanks ...

Do you hear that? When he had given thanks. Do the same today!