

Holy Communion - For Amateurs!

A series of articles offering basic explanation of The Eucharist.

At St Mary's our main worship services are celebrations of Holy Communion. Who can come? What happens? What is it all about? Is it for me, or just for churchy people? Why do it?



Let me commence with some definition of what is meant by 'Holy Communion':
Holy = Associated with God, sacred, divine, righteous, blessed.
Communion = Celebration of The Eucharist - The Christian Sacrament in which Jesus' last supper is commemorated by the consecration of bread and wine.

Herein lies quite a problem – the terms used to define all these 'holy' things are themselves mystified by *religious-speak*! In this series my aim is to assist all who feel '*amateur*' with their comprehension of The Eucharist, indeed the term 'Holy Mysteries' is often used as a description. There is something unknowable and unsearchable about God. We cannot have total knowledge of holy things, we are people of faith – we are called to believe – we do not necessarily know.

In my articles I hope to demystify The Eucharist as far as is possible, with the intention of enabling a deeper understanding of it and, please God, thereby a fuller communion with Him. Jesus' call to love God and neighbour was aimed mainly at the *amateurs* of his time. He often criticised the *professional* religious hierarchy because they oppressed the ordinary people with legalistic attitudes and a misinterpretation of God. This *professional* would like to invite any persons – *amateur* or otherwise, to feel welcome to our worship services of Holy Communion and to enrich their experience of The Eucharist as they participate.

Who can come?

Everyone is welcome – that is unless you have been ex-communicated! I have never met such a person – it's an extremely rare thing these days – so all are most welcome. Even today most people *know* that only Confirmed persons can receive the consecrated bread and wine – and nowadays as most are not, they ex-communicate themselves! Actually there has been a re-think by most of the *professionals* and we now say that if you are baptised (christened) and mature enough (7 plus?) then you may receive. At the point of distribution after the prayer of consecration I almost always say, "All who are baptised/christened and in good standing are welcome to come to receive the blessed bread and wine".

I also ask any who prefer not to take communion to come and receive a personal blessing at the altar rail with everyone else. My words are carefully chosen. There are some who wish to have the full adult instruction of a Confirmation Course before taking communion. I have great respect for them and am ready to run a new Confirmation Course as soon as possible (please contact me). However the new school of thought is that it is good for those baptised into Christ (who are full members through baptism) to receive communion regularly and to develop their faith through practice, then followed by instruction as soon as is convenient. In this way experience and formation precede understanding.

Youngsters: In most churches young people if baptised and over seven years old may also receive communion with their parents consent – but I would desire them to have some basic understanding of their participation first. It is unusual, although not impossible, for younger children to be offered communion. Usually they are offered an appropriate blessing and assurance of God’s love for them.

If you are not baptised then your life has not been offered to God. Why are you waiting? Baptism is the first step in faith along the wonderful Way of Jesus and there is no age limit in either direction! Please come to communion and be blessed. Ask for baptism especially if you want to attend church regularly.

In summary – all are most welcome to a communion service (Eucharist). The baptised are welcome to receive the blessed bread and wine, unless they prefer not – in which case do please seek a personal blessing instead.

Who should not receive communion?

“Those who are (not) in love and charity with their neighbour and intending to lead a new life following God’s commandments”, so says the Church of England Prayer Book. Our Grandparents understood this much better than us, perhaps on reflection they were too hard and we have become too soft. Jesus commands us to go and make friends with anyone we’ve fallen out with to the extent that we have uncharitable thoughts in our hearts and minds. The Lord’s Prayer asks God the Father to forgive us our wrongdoings as we have forgiven others. If we are not forgiving the clear implication is that we cannot be forgiven. This makes us unworthy of God and temporarily out of communion. This doesn’t mean you stop attending church! I realise this is a very brief treatment of a very complex matter and if you need help – then discuss it with me, your Priest/pastor. I will write more on this in forthcoming articles. I would hope that you would feel able to discuss any such hard feelings with me in confidence. Private advice towards resolution and spiritual guidance would be offered and a re-assurance of God’s love and blessing – this is mostly informal in our style of church – in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches it is known as confession and absolution.

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Last month I started this series of articles by explaining **who could come** this time I'd like to describe **what happens** at Holy Communion. Many readers will know, because they have been taking part for many years in worship... Communion/Eucharist/Mass has a 'catholic shape'. The church is catholic, i.e. universal, based upon the teaching and practices of Jesus Christ and the Apostles and therefore it should be no surprise that its liturgy (church services) follow a similar pattern throughout the world. The bible itself tells us how from the earliest times Jews who were followers of 'The Way' of Jesus met. They shared a time of reading of scripture, prayer and singing and then remembered him as they blessed bread and wine and shared it amongst themselves in a communal meal (See Mark 14:22-26). The church very quickly spread from the Jewish community into the Roman/Greek world. Saint Paul in writing to the early church at Corinth criticises them for not sharing equally at their church meal (1 Cor 11:17-34). They had turned the Christian Community meal (which he referred to as the 'Lord's Supper') into a feast where some got drunk; some feasted whilst others remained hungry. Some were starting before others arrived. This certainly was not in the spirit of Jesus' example and teaching.

What happens is that Christians meet, not to eat and to drink, but to share in the Lord's Supper equally, together – hence the term 'communion'. Christians began to meet on Sundays because it was the day Jesus had risen from the dead – There meeting was a celebration of the realisation that all that Jesus prophesied, taught and practiced was the truth – God's truth. Prayers, scripture readings, songs and the solemn re-enactment of the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper enabled followers of Jesus to remember him – as he had commanded. It was and remains a holy occasion to celebrate the establishment of a new covenant (relationship) between God and mankind through Jesus and to consider and act upon its consequence for our lives.

One has to consider the culture of those times – wherein the head of the house or village, or assembly was the host and he honoured his guests by presiding at the meal. On the night Jesus was arrested by the Temple Guards Jesus hosted a meal in an upper room in Jerusalem. It was the eve of the *Seder* (Passover) and so all Jews were gathering in their homes for the annual Passover festival celebration.

Present were his disciples and friends. Jesus began the celebration by washing his disciples feet – just as a lowly servant or slave would. Simon Peter at first objected to Jesus – the honoured host – their rabbi – humbling himself in this way. Jesus insisted, saying that all who would lead and follow in his Way must be prepared to be their servants.

Jesus offered the prayers of Blessing and thanks to God for food and all creation. Food was placed in small pots in the middle of the guests and it was eaten with bread. Bread was the staple food and it was baked freshly every day. Bread was normally flat and round, perhaps the size of a dinner plate. Traditionally the host took the bread, having offered the blessing and tore in half and quarters and then shared it amongst the guests and the meal began. Jesus did this, but as he passed the bread to his friends he said that this broken bread was like his body that would be broken for them and they should remember him. It was memorable and Jesus had been speaking on their journey up to Jerusalem about how he would suffer and die and rise again on the third day. What then did the disciples make of these disturbing words? After supper Jesus took the cup (of wine) and said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.” The disciples well understood the Jewish ritual of the blood of sacrificial animals being used as a symbol of the ancient covenant between God and his people. Jesus was saying that a new covenant was to be established and he in effect would be the sacrifice, his lifeblood given so that they might have a new relationship with God.

The body of Christ was broken and his blood shed as he prophesied and so every time we share bread and wine, as Christians, we proclaim his death, waiting for him to come again. We do not eat Christ’s flesh or drink his blood in any physical sense, but in a spiritual sense. Christ is our spiritual food and drink. His life brings the life of the new covenant – the kingdom and reign of God – to us and feeds our faith. We remember Jesus as he commanded, and all that he said and did and we respond: -

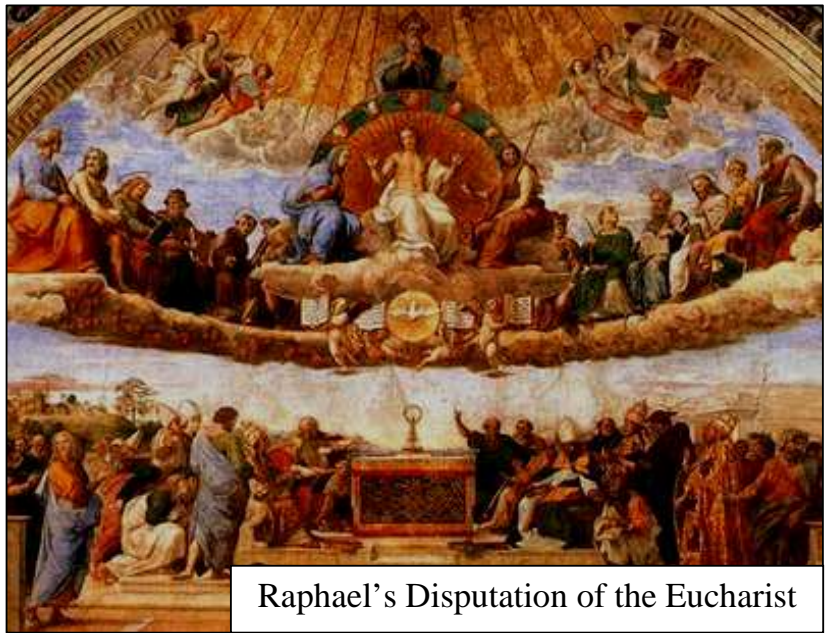
Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your son Jesus Christ. Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice. Send us out in the power of your spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

The Holy Spirit of God is at work in the church as the Priest asks God to send his Spirit that the bread and wine *may be to us*, the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharistic Feast (Holy Communion) is an outward sign of an inner change within the life of the believer. In Christ all things are transformed and made new. Wrongdoings are forgiven, life is renewed and the grace (favour) of God is made apparent. Holy Communion declares the eternal promise of ultimate love by God through Christ, who offered himself on the cross for all of creation.

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The third question I wish to attempt is, **What is it all about?** In 1509 Raphael painted 'The Disputation of the Eucharist' partly in order to answer this very question at the beginning of the so-called modern era.



Raphael's Disputation of the Eucharist

Here is a picture of Heaven and Earth united through Jesus Christ. He sits enthroned in Heaven showing the wounds of his crucifixion as a sign of his self-sacrifice. So here is death and resurrection. On earth the people gather at the altar and ponder the meaning of the Eucharist. Above the altar and below Christ's feet is the disc of the bread (known as the Host) that is consecrated by the priest, as he entreats God that *the bread and wine may be to us the body and blood of Christ*. It is the agency of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Son and the Father above that makes Christ really present in the Eucharist. Note how the Host is signed with the dove to depict this. Christ's throne is shown on a cloud, (with four bibles below - the four Gospel stories). This reminds us that Christ will come again in glory – so the scene is eschatological (looking to the end of time). Note also the central axis of the scene, a depiction of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Gospels and the action of the Eucharist all connected together in an unbreakable bond of relationship.

What is it all about? At the Eucharist we are drawn into God and connected. We are also reminded that the church on Earth is linked to those who have passed through this life and into the Heavenly life. See how the Apostles, Patriarchs, Saints, Prophets and the Blessed Virgin Mary are depicted at Christ's side. The Eucharist reminds us that earthly life has an end and Heaven awaits the faithful.

Before the 1500's and the era of modernity the Eucharist tended to have a much more static meaning – there was an actual transformation of bread and wine into flesh and blood and a worship of these consecrated elements, being Christ physically present (known as transubstantiation). Since The Enlightenment, in modernity, there has been a more dynamic understanding of the Eucharist and this has led to a lot of dispute, hence Raphael's 'humanist' style painting.

Worshippers are drawn into the communion of relationship with the church in Heaven and on Earth. The partaker is no longer worshipping God from afar, but is formed in the new spiritual life of the Kingdom of God that Christ proclaimed.

Here I wish to make an important point – I believe that in receiving the blessed bread and wine (the sacrament) that the partaker is drawn into God. There may be limited understanding of what it might mean, but God's spirit is effective and is not limited by human considerations. For me it is sufficient that the communicant sincerely presents himself before God, prepared through Baptism to receive the Grace (favour) of God. It is perfectly appropriate for understanding to develop as a result of practice (the practice of coming to Communion). Just as the Father makes Jesus' presence real in the Sacrament through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, so that same Spirit acts to change lives.

What is Holy Communion? It is a dynamic, not a static thing. It encourages, enables, involves, uplifts, feeds, touches, transforms, connects, reassures and if I had to sum this up with one word it would be 'saves'. This is the message of Raphael's Disputation of the Eucharist. Look now to the bottom of the scene and see how the figures represent the many learned people of his time. Medieval was passing into Modernity. **What did it all mean?** It is a 'disputation' that continues to this day. In former times to deliberately miss church was to physically separate oneself from God and would be met by estrangement from the general community. If you did wrong you were ex-communicated. It was a rather static understanding – in/out – black/white – right/wrong – for/against. In modern times we have gradually, generally, become more liberal and inclusive in our understanding. Arguably, the common man has increased freedom to choose God – God is no longer forced upon him. I believe that man needs God and that the Eucharist is a vital means of God's Grace that was instituted by Jesus Christ himself. To receive all the dynamism of God into ones life is a choice that every person is free to make, or not. The church seeks to remember and present Christ, and make him present to all who may choose to come and accept salvation.

That is what it is all about – to be joined to God – to be in His presence – to work with the entire church; past, present and future in Communion, one with another. The overarching message of the Eucharist is one of love – the love of the Son for the Father and the love of the Son for humankind, and this invites our response.

You are welcome at the Eucharist, so please come; pause, prepare and then contemplate what it might mean for you...

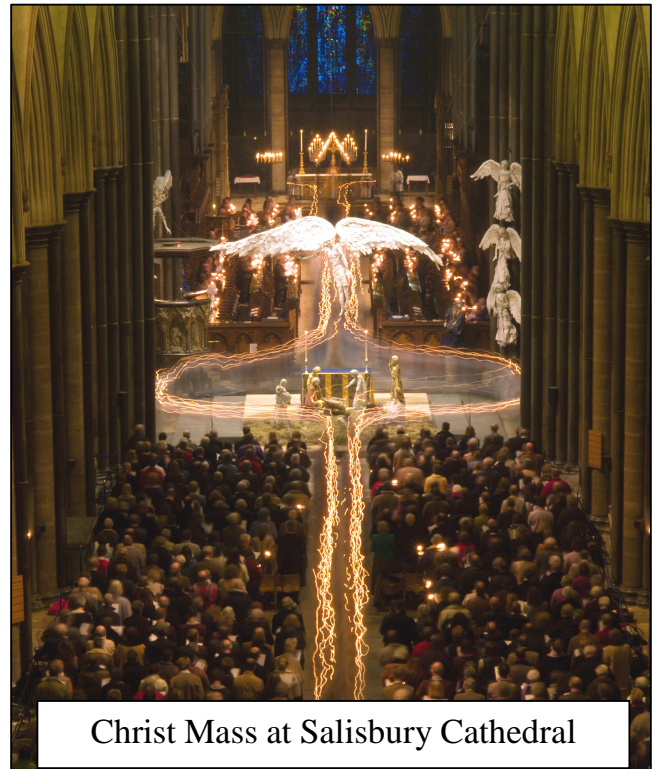
What is it all about? It is all about you and God!

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The Shape of The Eucharist

In my last article I wrote of how I believe partaking of the Eucharist draws one into God. Here is a time delayed photograph of a Mass at Salisbury wherein there has been a candlelit procession. High above the nave and to each side of the crossing Angelic figures are suspended. The procession has left a trail of light as it has moved from West to East, towards



the altar – an encircling cruciform shape has been formed and in this sense the worshippers have been drawn into the action of The Eucharist, with the Altar at the centre. It is Advent and the church watches and waits for the second coming of Christ. The darkness awaits the light; the church assembles to greet Christ.

The Eucharist has a definite shape. Here I begin to offer some explanation of each of the individual parts, which together constitute a normal service of Holy Communion. Worship begins with The Preparation, continues with The Ministry of The Word, followed by The Ministry of The Sacrament and concludes with the Dismissal. There are also the four ‘Eucharistic Actions’ of the celebrant; Taking, Blessing, Breaking and Sharing of the Holy Sacrament (bread and wine). Participation in Holy Communion is not to be taken lightly and this view is part of biblical teaching. Saint Paul in his letter to the early church at Corinth warns against an unworthy manner. He asks for self-examination, that we should be sincere in our approach to God (1 Corinthians 27-34). Preparation therefore is a vital part of the Holy Communion Service. Ideally there should be some time prior to the formal start of the service for private prayer, including personal reflection. In former times, for this reason, church tended to be a rather quiet and solemn place, any socialising would take place after the service had finished. Some might regret the lively and noisy environment that is apparent these days, but the church has had to reconsider the balance of its need to be prayerful, with the imperative to welcome all who come and make them feel at home. The Church is a meeting of the family of God in Jesus Christ and when a family gathers there is always news to be shared, both joyful and sad. In history church buildings were often a place of meeting and even commerce. It was the installation of pews to provide the comfort of seating from the time of

The Reformation onwards that acted to fix them as places of worship and take away much of the flexibility of use of the available space! Church halls then became necessary to meet in.

Preparation can and should commence before coming to church. Jesus instructed us to say prayers privately in a secret place – in the quietness of our own room – this precedes the teaching of The Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6.8). At the beginning of the service there is a greeting which recognises that we gather in acknowledgment of God – we may sing a Hymn of praise, to enable us to focus on worship. There might be a general welcome and then a prayer as we open our hearts to God and ask for the purity that is needed to come into His presence. In prayers of penitence we call to mind our shortcomings and the way in which we have fallen short of God and seek his forgiveness. This is said corporately, but it is always best to set aside some time prior to coming to church for this examination. The minister declares ‘The General Absolution’ - this should not be misunderstood. The minister is not forgiving you (or judging you) – the forgiveness is God’s to grant or not. An absolution it is a formal and ministerial reassurance of God’s providential love and mercy for those who are sincere in their intentions (to amend their lives and live in the way of Christ).

The Ministry of the Word is a distinct time to hear the bible read. We listen to readings from the Old Testament (being the time before Jesus), New Testament (writings of the early Christian Church) and finally and of prime importance a Gospel Reading – the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. There then follows a Sermon, whereby an authorised and trained minister of the church will provide some explanation, reflection and teaching on the bible readings and Christian life itself. We publish our Sunday bible readings in this magazine in order all may have an opportunity to read the three bible readings at home and privately pray through them. In fact the church uses a set pattern of bible readings called The Common Lectionary, this enables the worshipper to anticipate the readings and be in tune with the Season and worship of the church in general. It also covers the entire message of the New Testament and the core of the Old Testament in a three-year repeating cycle. At the end the Nicene Creed is publicly recited – this is the orthodox statement of the universal (catholic) faith of the Church to which all mainstream denominations Anglican, Roman, Greek, Methodist, Pentecostal, Reformed and Chapel would adhere. The Ministry of the Word is completed by the offering of prayer by an ‘Intercessor’. This is a response to the bible readings and sermon, and an opportunity to make requests of God for and on behalf of the church and wider community.

Continues...

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The Shape of The Eucharist –
...continued.

As the Communion service continues Prayers of Intercession are offered by an Intercessor. These are not personal prayers (they would be offered on your own) but are prayers of shared



concern amongst the church. They will pick up on themes expressed in The Ministry of the Word and the time of year. God is praised for all His wonderful acts in creation and the needs of the world and church brought before Him. Prayer is offered for the worldwide church of Jesus Christ; international, national and local prayer concerns; the community, the sick and dying and the newly bereaved. Christians recognise that we are beings who are in need of a wholeness of mind, body and spirit – this we refer to as Shalom (Peace) and so the transition onwards follows a time of greeting each other by the ‘Sharing of The Peace’. Some find this sharing of hands and goodwill a little disturbing in the context of the quiet which has been established during the prayers – but Jesus taught his friends to offer God’s peace as they went. As the congregation prepares to offer worship in common – so we should be at peace, one with another and with God. Jesus taught that any enmity with another person should be resolved before approaching God, lest it should become a barrier. In this sense Holy Communion is just that – communion of followers of Jesus who are at ideally at peace with one another.

The Ministry of The Sacrament

As The Peace is passed in the church the deacon or priest prepares the table (note, not strictly an altar). There is no sacrifice involved in Anglican blessing (consecration) of bread and wine – and to remind us of this words to the effect that Jesus gave himself to death on the cross as a full, final and perfect sacrifice for all, are said by the priest. As the bread and wine and monies are brought during The Offertory we offer prayers of thanks for all the gifts of creation and offer ourselves – our time, talents and monies as a sacrifice of praise towards God and the church. The priest blesses the offertory and takes the elements of bread and wine and begins The Eucharistic Prayer. (Eucharist is the Greek word for thanksgiving). It reminds us of the actions of Jesus at the ‘Last Supper’, that on the night before He died, Jesus as the host at supper with his friends, took

bread and wine and having blessed God for them in the normal way – attributed a new and remarkable meaning. Flat bread that was torn into pieces and shared amongst the disciples to enable them to eat was now His body broken for them! Wine that was poured out and shared was to represent blood spilt as His life was poured out for many!

A central purpose of the Eucharist is a thanksgiving to God, the Father, for the exemplary life and teaching of God, the Son. God, the Holy Spirit, is invoked ‘that these gifts of bread and wine may be to us the body and blood of Christ’. There is no physical change in the elements – it is a spiritual change – worked by God in a receptive heart and life of the worshipper. This transformation of the communicant is part of the continuing act of salvation that Jesus has enabled by his loving sacrifice. Ancients had sacrificed animals to their gods, but In Jesus God sacrifices Himself. There is much more than can be described in the limited scope of this article but in regularly attending Holy Communion and taking the sacrament the communicant is being blessed, touched and (re)formed by God. The essence of Jesus’ ministry was the establishment of a New Covenant between God and mankind, a new way in which a broken relationship could be renewed and strengthened. This is an act of grace (unmerited favour), we are not deserving of God’s forgiveness. As we take communion we remember and reaffirm our part in the pledge of love between God and mankind.

The priest stands in the place of Christ and the communicants in the place of His disciples – together The Lord’s Prayer is said, the blessed bread and wine is shared to all the baptised, who love the Lord and ideally have been prepared through Confirmation (or some other teaching) to understand the fullness of the meaning of participation in Holy Communion. After all have received the focus of attention moves away from ‘The Table’ and towards a reassurance of God’s love as a general blessing is announced, normally by the Priest.

Church is a family of believers and news of the activities planned are shared – this may seem a bit dull – but to participate in the outreach of the church and not just its ‘in-reach’ within the building is a vital part of what it means to be a Christian.

The Dismissal

Christians are sent out, into the world, with good news to share (missal). As the worship ends, the service begins – faith that is lively is just that – alive! It is the Deacon as the chief servant & worker to send workers out into the harvest field!

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Surely it's just for 'churchy people' ?

The answer to this is
both yes and no! Yes,
because sharing in The
Eucharist has taken



place regularly since the earliest times and No, because it was never meant to be an exclusive thing. At the heart of Holy Communion is the word 'community' and anyone present, whether a regular or guest/visitor is part of the community which is known as the church. The church is the community of followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus instructed us to meet and remember him in this special way when we shared food together. Holy Communion is a re-enactment of The Last Supper that Jesus had with his core followers (disciples). It was a celebration meal in Jerusalem at the time of The Passover, the week long festival of freedom of the Jewish people as they commemorated their ancestors escape from slavery in Egypt some 1,500 years earlier. Remembering the history and traditions of a society is what helps to form and sustain it. A shared celebration meal is a very longstanding human way of binding people together and it is commonplace that guests might be present – they are not to be ignored or made to feel unwelcome, but good hosts always do their best to make visitors feel included. It is natural that some of the unfamiliar family ways might feel a little disconcerting at first, but we all want to share what we have – the more the merrier as they say!

The Eucharist is of course a very specialised form of celebration meal. Because it has thousands of years of practice and that it is an act of remembering Jesus and all that he has done for us, it has enormous depth of meaning. The Eucharist is for 'churchy' people because it has deep significance and is as much part of their life as eating and sleeping. But it is also for those who feel that they are on the outside and feel excluded. Jesus never pointed the finger at anyone and said they were unwelcome or unworthy! The bible tells us that many of his friends were disreputable in the eyes of polite society. Jesus was critical of those religious people of his time who felt that they were better than the rest, superior and more important to God. Jesus came to teach us all God's ways and a meaning and truth which frees us from slavery to selfish and uncharitable ways.

When Jesus is host at the table all are welcome who come seeking after God and his way for their life. Now there are complex historic reasons why the church restricted those actually taking communion (the blessed bread and wine). Confirmation was required to enable adults who had been Christened/Baptised as children to undergo some preparation. This is about learning more of the meaning of the Christian faith, the depth of meaning of The Eucharist and making a public adult commitment to be a follower of Jesus Christ. In recent years the church has relaxed the strictness of this and recognises that often people need to be made welcome at the table, before they can settle into becoming friends and learning more about the meaning of being a church member. The church has to apologise for being too churchy and unwelcoming! It may take years to get this message across because the idea of having to conform to belong is so much part of our British psyche. With God what matters is more about the 'what we do', than the 'how we do' it.

Holy Communion in this sense is definitely for people who do not naturally see themselves as 'churchy' The bible shows us that as people came into contact with Jesus, new meaning and joy was brought into their lives. So we want all to feel welcome at our table at St Mary's. We don't need to know why, or how often they might come, we don't need anyone to feel excluded. We want to honour all that come to Jesus in any way and enable them to sit and eat with him and us, his friends. There is time to share and to get to know one another. There is time to learn more and deepen faith along the way.

For those who are considering a visit to church my message to you is; come and feel the welcome and please make yourself known. To those who are regular in church, please make room and share what we have in Jesus in every way. At St Mary's, West Moors we are trying to form ourselves as an extended Christian family community. The church is so much larger than it was and as we continue to grow in numbers and in outreach so we can know the joy and satisfaction of being both more churchy and less churchy at the same time.

So I conclude with the most important thing that we all need to realise. In God's eyes we are all amateurs together, we all have so much to learn and experience. To be community we have to be in communion with one another – it should come as no surprise then that at the Last Supper when Jesus had announced that his time had come – that he gave a new commandment – that we should love one another, as he has loved us. See you in church?

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Why do it?

The picture shows Jesus sharing a meal with his friends, perhaps at The Last Supper.



In this last article in the series we look at some straightforward reasons why Christian worship focuses so strongly on The Eucharist.

We can place ourselves there with Jesus, he is the host, and we are his guests. He has promised to be truly present when we are gathered in his name. It's as if one is invited to 'The Palace', we feel honoured to be in his presence. In sharing together we are bound to him and together, and this strengthens us. Holy Communion is a fellowship meal. We gladly obey his instruction to remember him when we meet together. We do it, for the love of Christ compels us.

We call to mind the passion of our Lord – how he chose to submit to all that the authorities could afflict him with – how rejection, humiliation, suffering and death itself did not extinguish the power of his divine love. When Jesus rose from the dead, death was conquered for us. To participate in Holy Communion is to enter into The Passion of Jesus; to die to self and rise to new life in Christ and his community, the church. It is an act of re-creation.

We are nourished by the real presence of Christ that is spiritual food and drink to us in our lives. We are able to express our thankfulness in our participation and offer worship. We are inspired and enabled to go out and share with others the good news of Jesus and key to this is that God is faithful and loving to the point of offering himself in sacrifice for us – which is the exact opposite of what God rightly deserves. Holy Communion connects heaven and earth, God and man and is a foretaste of the eternal banquet of heaven in a supernatural way.

We do it because it brings us 'comfort' (in the language of the Prayer Book).

Some churches do not celebrate The Eucharist at their services of worship as frequently as others, if at all. Their services might be more focussed on listening to a lengthy sermon or perhaps the singing of more worship songs, or even a sustained time of open prayer or silent reflection. These differences mainly occur as a result of The Reformation and the resultant emergence of many new denominations, each bringing a variety of style and method to their worship.

What is clear to me is that worship has to make Christ present in the midst of his church – otherwise it becomes an empty exercise, devoid of any spiritual food. I have always said that if you do not feel Christ present by His Spirit in a particular church, then try another church – don't give up on Christ! We all need somewhere to live, but most of us move occasionally. What we have to guard against is avoiding challenging situations which might be good for our spiritual growth and turning into a church wanderer, who finally ends up homeless! How many there are, who have had an argument with someone in the church, or a minister and have ended up homeless as a result!

Why do it? The church does it in response to God who calls us into relationship. A relationship cannot be one-sided by definition. The church does it because we know that it is our part in the relationship. We have to work at it; allow ourselves to be challenged, shaped and formed in The Way of Jesus. To do this we bring ourselves and we freely give of our time and other resources. We speak of a covenant between God and man, renewed specially in Jesus and that finally is the reason that we celebrate The Eucharist – because it is the occasion of the renewal of the eternal covenant in Jesus Christ.

On the night before he died,
he came to supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he gave you thanks.
He broke it and gave it to them, saying:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

At the end of supper, taking the cup of wine,
he gave you thanks, and said:
Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Therefore, heavenly Father,
we remember his offering of himself
made once for all upon the cross;
we proclaim his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension;
we look for the coming of your kingdom,
and with this bread and this cup
we make the memorial of Christ your Son our Lord.

I pray that you may ever be in close communion with God in Jesus Christ.

Andrew Rowland