

**“People of the Table”**  
**Following Jesus Together: Week 3**  
**Luke 22:14-20, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34**  
**August 15, 2021**

As you know, we are taking three weeks to look at one of what we call “covenant practices”. These are habits or actions that all of us as a group have agreed to step into because we believe they are part of how we grow into the kinds of people God intends for us to be, how we grow into the kind of community that God intends for us to be.

There is an often discussed business truism that says anytime you have a problem that you need to solve, you first need to realize that every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets. Now, that might not sound insightful to you but the truth is we live in denial of that reality all the time. The things you are doing are perfectly designed to give you the results you are getting. If you look at yourself, your life, your family, your community, your church family...the things you are doing are why those things are the way that they are...for better or for worse. All of that is a long winded way of saying that if, as a church, we hope to become the kind of group that God calls his people to be, we have to be intentional about the things we are doing. There is no other way. And our covenant practices are the mutually agreed upon actions we take together, as we ask God to use them to shape us into the sort of people that when our city looks at us they think to themselves “the only good explanation for that group is that God must be up to something there.”

So our covenant practices are things like spending time with God through scripture and prayer, serving others through our giftedness, participation in community, intentional generosity.

The practice that we’re discussing is gathering together on sundays. And we’re simply trying to answer the question “why”? Why do we come together once a week the way that we do? What is the point? What do we think is happening through our commitment to doing this together. And this is important because you have a lot of options as to how you could be spending your time on Sunday mornings. It’s not an easy discipline to be here. Plenty of other things look shinier at times. Sleeping in, brunch, travel sports, the lake. So we’d better know why we’re doing this and why we’re committed to it and what benefit we think we are accruing from it.

This is the last week in our short series on Gatherings before we launch our fall series next week, and I’m excited to be talking about a practice that we are reintroducing in our Gatherings: communion.

Go ahead and open your Bibles to Luke 22:14-20. We’re going to look at the context where Jesus first instituted this sacrament.

**Luke 22:14-20**

**14** And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. **15** And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. **16** For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

If you are unfamiliar, the Passover was a very important feast in Jewish history. It goes back to the time of enslavement to Egypt, when God brought down plagues on Egypt for refusing to let His people go out from slavery and be freed to worship Him. Pharaoh continued to refuse to let them go, and the last plague was that God killed the firstborn sons of the nation. The narrative going on there was that if Egypt took God’s “son” Israel, then God would take their sons.

This was the act that eventually caused Pharaoh to relent and let Israel go. But for the Israelites, they were instructed to put the blood of a sacrificed animal onto the doorposts of their homes, so that the angel would pass over their homes and spare their sons. It's a harrowing story, and the sons of Israel were saved by the blood of a lamb.

So Jesus, here in Luke 22, has been looking forward to celebrating the Passover feast with His disciples. This was an ornate ritual that was full of symbolic meaning for the Israelites. All through His earthly ministry, Jesus had been claiming to be the Messiah, the promised one Israel was waiting to bring salvation. There has been a sense of anticipation building as He has talked about His death, which the disciples didn't yet understand. And then Jesus says there is something special about this Passover, and that He will not partake of this feast again until the kingdom of God is inaugurated.

**17** And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. **18** For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." **19** And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **20** And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

A cup of wine, and some broken bread. This is my body, He says about the bread. Which is given for you. This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

We don't know what all they understood at this point, but this was a category breaking event. This was no normal Passover meal. Jesus says He is starting a new covenant, a new way of relating to God the Father. And in just mere hours, Jesus would allow Himself to be brutally beaten, have His body literally torn to pieces by whips, be hanged on a cross where He would die for our sins, and three days later be raised from the dead to defeat sin and death and hell.

And at some point in this process, the disciples that were sitting in the Passover here went, "Oh! Jesus is the lamb. In the New Covenant of grace, He is the sacrifice whose blood was spilled, causing us to be passed over by God's wrath, to be spared, saved, and adopted into the eternal family of God.

His body was broken for sinners like you and I, and His blood was spilled for sinners like you and I.

And as Jesus ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to indwell Christians in the early church, the Spirit did exactly what Jesus said He would: He brought to memory all the things that Jesus said. And what Jesus said here in this passover was "Do this in remembrance of me." When you get together as Christians who've collectively come under the protection and salvation of Christ Himself, do this practice to remember and celebrate what Jesus has done to save us. Not to get too off topic, but as sex is a physical way of acting out and showing the oneness of the covenant of marriage, communion is a physical way of acting out our union with Christ and the reality that we are covered by the perfect righteousness of His body and the sacrificial spilling of His blood.

In the book of first Corinthians, we get some more instruction about Communion in chapter 10 vs 15

### **1 Corinthians 10:15-22**

15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

This was a church of maybe 30, 40 or 50 people that met in a house. So they get one loaf of bread, everybody takes a chunk and he's using an analogy where he's saying, "Just as you all took a piece of the

same loaf, you're all the same church, same community, same family, same people." What he's arguing for here is that communion is supposed to be a demonstration of our unity.

That as we partake of communion, those of us who are Christians, we're showing that we're all in this together; that we all worship Jesus together; that we all acknowledge we're sinners together; that we're all going to Heaven together; that one day we're all gonna rise from death like Jesus together;

The Greek word for "participation" is *koinonia*, otherwise translated as "fellowship" or "communion" with one another. If you've ever wondered why this practice is sometimes called communion, this is why. It denotes us all participating in Christ together, communally, as one family. We are "communing" with Jesus and with each other. They actually called it "The Love Feast." It sounds like a hippy thing, but it was much better and holier than that. Believe it or not, their culture was more separated and stratified than ours is, and people from all walks of life--Jew or Gentile background, slave or free, male or female--would come together and share this meal just as Jesus taught.

**18** Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? **19** What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? **20** No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. **21** You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. **22** Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

In Corinth, there were multiple belief systems, multiple religions--they were polytheistic and believed in lots of gods who oversaw all sorts of various areas and spheres of life. And Paul is saying that behind those false belief systems is actually demonic inspiration. Not demonic like what you've seen in movies, but demonic lies and leading people astray to believe things that are not true. And Paul's concern here is that the church in Corinth separate themselves from these other false beliefs and practices.

Because you can't be a Christian who plants your foot in the church as a Christian – getting up, taking communion and identifying yourself publicly with Jesus – and still having another foot on another team. Saying "I like this about Christianity but I also like this about this other belief system. I like some parts of christianity, and I like some parts of buddhism. I like some of the christian values but not everything that Jesus says or the rest of the bible says. So I take parts of the bible that I like and I combine that with other things that I like and make my own."

He's saying that to take communion requires that you be a christian. That your faith and trust are fully in Jesus. That you are not knowingly and willingly taking parts of what Jesus says and following them but then rejecting the parts that you don't prefer. That's not a deal that Jesus is willing to make. He's not going to negotiate with you. Like, Jesus isn't gonna say "if you will obey my teaching about helping the poor then it's cool to ignore my stuff about how you should treat your spouse." Jesus is patient, but he does not negotiate.

And here Paul is saying, "Nope. Choose this day whom you will serve. You can't serve Jesus as God and yourself as god at the same time." You can't play your life like it is partly yours and partly Gods. Either He is the authority over life, even over things you don't like, or you are. Those are the only two options.

Communion is supposed to show our unity. We are family, nothing comes between us. It's also supposed to signify that Jesus is my god and whatever he says goes. I'm on team Jesus. Paul goes on, on the topic of communion, in chapter 11.

## **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

**17** But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. **18** For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, **19** for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. **20** When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. **21** For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. **22** What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

Here we get a little more insight into their unity problems. Here is the situation. Their church gatherings were a little bit more like our LifeGroup meetings. It was all done over a length of time, maybe even a whole day. And they shared a meal together. But what was happening was some of the wealthier Christians were showing up early because they didn't have to work. They had wealth. So they showed up early and brought all the food and drink, and as the day went on, they ate and drank everything. And then when the poorer folks got off of work and were able to make it over, the rich folks had already eaten everything, drunk everything.

Paul says that the wealthy are getting preferential treatment and being inconsiderate of those who have to work and those who were poor and not able to bring enough for themselves. The ancient world the Corinthians lived in was rigidly divided. There were rich and poor. There were free men and slaves; there were the Greeks and barbarians--those who didn't speak Greek. There were the Jews, many of whom became Christians, and then there were the Gentiles, who Jews had looked down upon as long as anyone could remember. There were Roman citizens and then those who weren't Roman citizens who were viewed as lesser breeds by them. There was the cultured, and the ignorant.

The early church was supposed to be the one place where all people from all those different stratified groups could and did come together. In Jesus they found something that united them that was far bigger than any of the cultural differences that would typically divide them. Because there are no second class citizens in the kingdom of God. And Paul says that the meal that is supposed to bring you together and unify you around Jesus is actually now causing division among you because you are operating like your culture does and not like God's redeemed church.

**23** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed (that's the last supper,) took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, If you have ever heard another name for the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, it comes from this--the Greek word *eucharisto*, or "to give thanks"...he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (remember this is Jesus celebrating the passover, in the midst of the last supper, and giving instruction on how his followers are to participate in the Lord's supper.)

**26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Jesus's return. Restoring all that sin has broken here on the earth.

**Communion is meant to be a way of saying "this is my story and this is who I am, everything else is a lie. These are my people and nothing comes between us. And Jesus is my God, whatever he says goes."**

So watch how seriously he calls us to approach it.

**27** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

The Greek word used for “unworthy manner” can also mean irreverent. We don’t approach communion flippantly. As though it’s just an empty tradition.

**28** Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

There should always be some self inspecting that happens before we take communion.

**29** For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. **30** That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. **31** But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

Paul actually says that some in this church have gotten sick and even died as a result of this. It looked like natural causes but their sickness and even their death is a form of God’s judgment on them for claiming to have aligned with Jesus but hypocritically being content with sin in their lives. It’s serious business.

**32** But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. **33** So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—**34** if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

So now we have covered the origin of communion, and the primary corrective teaching about it in Scripture. This morning I want to invite you to the Love Feast. But first Paul says we need to examine ourselves and make sure we are approaching with reverence.

#### **4 postures to approaching the communion table:**

##### **1) “Jesus is my God and what he says goes.”**

Communion is meant to be a way of saying “Jesus is my God and what he says goes.”

To accept this invitation you need to repent of your sin and trust in Jesus Christ. You need to turn your back on your old way of life and turn your face toward him.

If you think, “Well I’m religious.” I’m not talking about religion, I’m talking about Jesus.

If you think, “I’m a good person.” I’m not talking about morality, I’m talking about Jesus.

“Well I’ve been burned by the church and Christians are hypocrites.” I’m not asking about church or Christians, I’m asking if you have a relationship with Jesus where he has forgiven you and made you His.

Have you rightfully acknowledged Jesus as God and judge? Have you accepted that He gives you commands, not suggestions or options? Have you walked away from your old life to follow Jesus? Have you given your sin and your self-definition to Jesus--placed faith in Him alone to save you and make you right with God?

First we need to examine our relationship with Jesus. Do you love, trust, follow, and submit to Jesus? Is there any unconfessed sin in your life?

##### **2) “This is who I am, everything else is a lie.”**

You are told a thousand lies every week about the story you are living in. Communion is a reminder of the actual story you are living in. What this table tells us is that you are so sinful the Son of God had to die for

you, but that you are so loved He was glad to do so. That's a story that gives great humility and great dignity. The most important thing about you is your place in God's story.

So in taking communion we remember where we came from--that we were lost without God and without hope in the world. We remember what lengths God went through to make our salvation possible. He climbed up on a tree he created and died and then rose from the dead to defeat the curse of sin and death over us.

We remember that because of His sacrifice, this is where I am now--I'm a part of the redeemed, washed, sanctified, historic, global and eternal family of God. I know that some of you will get hung up on the reverence stuff and get nervous taking communion. Like, you're gonna dip the bread in the juice and brace for lightning.

Listen, if your faith is in Jesus but you can't shake the feeling that God is disappointed in you, that you bother Him. That's he's frustrated that you aren't farther along than you are by now...then what you need is to remember...in my place condemned he stood. You stand before God as if you were Christ because Christ stood before God as if he were you.

Hebrews tells us that we can now boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence. By all means, do a quick heart check. And if there is glaring unrepentant sin, please address that. But otherwise, approach the table with confidence. Because the story is no longer a story about your sin, it's a story about His righteousness.

If you are reconciled to God through the broken body and spilled blood of Christ, you are now a beloved child of God. That is who you are, everything else is a lie. Come to the Father as if that were true.

As you take the bread and wine or juice this morning, remember, "This is where I've come from...This is who I am...This is where I'm going...Everything else is a lie."

### **3) "These are my people and nothing comes between us."**

Communion is supposed to be a way of saying "these are my people and nothing comes between us." We all take from the same loaf, as Paul says. This act is supposed to showcase and solidify our unity in Christ.

Am I taking seriously the unity of God's people in the church? Or am I ok with broken relationships and sin separating me from others?

We are the united family of God under the spilled blood of Jesus, so let's act like it. Some of you may have tension in your relationships here, and it's been months and you still haven't dealt with it. You haven't approached to lovingly confront, or patiently forgive, or even just clarify weirdness. In the book of Matthew, Jesus says that whether it's your sin or someone else's that has caused a relational rift, the impetus is still on you to go and reconcile no matter what. So maybe for some of you you need to grab someone and have a quick conversation before taking communion today.

### **4) "Jesus is what I need most."**

When I stop to think about it, my mind wanders to the question: why a meal? Out of all the symbols or rituals Jesus could have chosen, why this? Many ancient gods were represented by impressive statues, and worshippers would come to bow and worship. Jesus, instead, sitting around a table with his close friends, men he had come to love, chose this ritual. He chose a warm meal, hearty bread, and wine.

He chose something that has to be done with friends. You can't have a feast without friends. And it boggles my mind if I really stop and think about the God of the universe sitting around a table, having genuine friends.

He chose something you can do anywhere, because He goes with you. This meal would be observed and celebrated from homes to cathedrals, all across the globe and all across time. There is no pilgrimage required--only some simple elements and some Christians.

He chose something that you must put inside of your body. Something you ingest. There is profound meaning in that, for us humans who can't continue to live without ingesting food and liquid. He did this after He called Himself the bread of life, the fountain of living water. After He claims that He will need to come and live inside of us through His Spirit. His cleansing, redeeming work goes all the way to the inside, to the deepest parts we can't see or touch.

I don't know if you've ever felt like God isn't there. Like He may have abandoned you. If you have felt that way, or feel that way now, do you know that the table disagrees with you? It beckons you to come, taste and see that you are not in fact forgotten by the Lord. Chew the bread, taste the wine, and know that Jesus will never leave or forsake you.

Jesus is what you ultimately need, and Jesus is what you've been given.

I'll let you in on a little inside secret: One of my favorite things in the world that I get to do as a pastor is getting to watch our people take communion. I am privileged to know so many stories, so many backgrounds. I know how Jesus has radically saved many of you. I know the supernatural work He's done in your life. I know the conflict you've had with one another in the room. I've heard the wails and seen the tears when you've realized you are going to need more of Jesus to get through certain things in your life. I've witnessed the doubts and confusion.

So when I see you partake in communion, I see you for yet another week proclaiming that Jesus is what you need most. It's beautiful. When I see us do it together, with all of our differences, sins and tensions: I can see it for what it is: a miracle.

### **People of the Table**

And as we week in and week out, approach this ritual with these things in mind, we over time become people of the table. People who are growing in Christ-likeness become full of grace, because we know how much we need it. People who reconcile quickly with extravagant mercy. People who take our unity as a church very, very seriously. People who have a smile in the face of life's challenges only because we know a table is coming in eternity that will make all this difficulty pale in comparison.

You and I, depending on the week, might walk in here full of shame, running on fumes, clinging to mental health, massively confused, or at the very least well in need of a crisp reminder of God's never-changing covenant love for us.

What a stunning invitation we have each and every week to come to the table to say "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for giving me what I needed most of all. This, ultimately, is all that matters. It also gives me assurance that you'll give whatever else I truly need."