

# *Sacred Actions For Holy Living: Gathered At The Lord's Table*

*Bible Reading:*  
*Exodus 24: 1-11*  
*Matthew 26: 17-30*

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"Are we going to eat in heaven?" the seventh-grader asked his pastor.

"No" came the quick reply.

The boy's face fell as he exclaimed, "Oh, but eating is half the fun of living."

Typical grade seven guy response, wouldn't you say?

Meals are important to all of us, not just those with bottomless pits.

Some of the most important events happen around food – marriages, business dealings, anniversaries, community gatherings.

Meals have been throughout history, and remain today, occasions for people to gather in an intimate setting where true encounters occur, and sincere fellowship happens.

This is why Jesus, seeking the best for his disciples and for the budding Church, instituted a special *meal* as a time of great strengthening of faith, and commanded that the Church observe this meal and that all Christians take part in it.

Before we gather for that meal, for Holy Communion, we'll consider it in the light of scripture. And we do so as the first in a sermon series entitled "*Sacred Actions For Holy Living*".

In this series we'll consider some of the central acts that we engage in as a worshipping Church - acts that shape us and prepare us to be an active Body of Christ in this world.

Holy Communion being one of the most important.

Next week we'll consider the act of Ordination.

Then Holy Baptism.

Finally - the Ministry Of Reconciliation; the time in our liturgy for confession of sin and assurance of pardon.

There could be more, but for now these four will be considered.

Today - the holy act of Communing.... together.... with Christ.

In this event, we believe that we

– somehow –

through a mystery of faith

in some very real way

eat with God.

Eating with God.

The most vivid Old Testament prelude to Holy Communion is in Exodus 24.

Try to imagine it —

There are Moses and the elders.

Gathered with all Israel before God's mountain.

There is rumbling, smoke and fire.

Strict warnings are given that no one other than these appointed ones should approach.

A sacred worship service is held.

God's Word is read.

The people commit to it.

A great sacrifice is made.

Blood is flung -

on the altar

on the worshipers.

Moses and the elders then climb the mountain.

.....AND....

**They**

**see**

**God.**

Imagine!!

Right there in His holy presence!!

They see Him!!

**AND.....**

what happens next????

They ate and drank.

The intimacy of food. A Holy Communion of the most immediate sort.

Sorry, pastor.

I think your seventh grade boy was on to something.

I have a feeling we **will** eat in heaven.

Exodus 24 is not a one-time event in the Old Testament, either.

The Lord commands that in the worship life of Israel sacred meals accompany the offering of sacrifices.

Festive meals were to be held right in the temple.

The worshipping family and the presiding minister - eating and drinking together in the holy presence of God.

If you'd like to do some extra reading, check out Deuteronomy 12 or Leviticus 7.

Food belongs in worship.

The nourishment of body and the nourishment of spirit are joined.

Food strengthening the body.

God's presence strengthening the spirit.

**At the same time.**

I tell you this because everything that Jesus did on earth has an echo, a precursor, in the Old Testament.

Including His instituting the sacred Lord's Supper.

This is that echo.

Our catechism, in Q/A 75, says that there are two things which this sacred meal does.

It reminds us.

It nourishes us.

It reminds us of Christ's work and draws us to the cross.

*First,*

*as surely as I see with my eyes*

*the bread of the Lord broken for me*

*and the cup given to me,*

*so surely*

*his body was offered and broken for me*

*and his blood poured out for me*

*on the cross.*

It nourishes our spirits, pouring heavenly power into us; Christ's vitality and life flowing into our lives.

*Second,  
as surely as  
I receive from the hand of the one who serves,  
and taste with my mouth  
the bread and cup of the Lord,  
given me as sure signs of Christ's body and blood,  
so surely  
he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life  
with his crucified body and poured-out blood.*

Reminding.

Nourishing.

Understand something right up front.

While we are active participants in the act of Communion, we are **NOT**  
hear me

**NOT**

the primary actors.

The power in the Lord's Supper does not come from us.  
It comes from the Lord.

If you do not accept the reality of an unseen Spirit being present;

If you will not in faith be open to the presence of a supernatural being;

then all you see is a bunch of people sitting around with some food.  
a pitifully small amount of food, at that.

A bunch of people doing their best to psych themselves up via the power of memory, reaching back to  
some event in the distant past.

The better they could remember, the more unique and special they could make this event appear, the  
more power it would have.

That's all you'd see.

And that's all it would be.

**HOWEVER**

We are gathered here as a people of **faith**.

In **faith** we **do** open ourselves to the presence of the same Supernatural Being who appeared to Moses  
and the elders on the mountain.

We **do** accept the reality of His Holy Spirit being very much among us.

By faith we acknowledge God as the host of this,  
the *Lord's* Supper.

We are but the guests.

Called, ushered in, welcomed and loved.

But as guests.

As recipients.

**Not** as the primary actors.

**Not** as the hosts.

The effectiveness of Communion flows from the cross, not my memory.

The power of Communion is channelled through the Holy Spirit, not my ability to work up certain inner feelings.

Moses was called, with his people, to prepare for the sacred meal through worship; yielding to Yahweh God through sacrifices, cleansing rituals and prayers.

Moses came on that mountain covered in the blood of the sacrifice.

We are called, together as a people, to prepare for this sacred meal. That is what the whole of today's worship service is designed to do. It is a preparation of opening our hearts and yielding our wills to the Lord.

We come into the presence of God, to the table of the Lord, covered by the blood of the greatest sacrifice in history, the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

We come with all our baggage and lay it at the foot of the cross.

We are as patients who come to the hospital and yield themselves to the surgeon's scalpel. The Holy Spirit begins to do reconstructive surgery on our minds and hearts and spirits, shaping us into the people that Jesus desires us to be.

And God's power flows.

Mysteriously.

Wonderfully.

Really.

God's power flows.

Reminding us of our salvation, of our status as children of God, of the eternity that is waiting for us - won for us by Jesus.

Nourishing our spirits, healing damaged places deep inside, restoring hope and trust in Christ, giving new energy to our souls.

John Calvin, for whom this church is named, said of Holy Communion that it is "*a mystery which.... I am unable to comprehend with my mind.*"

There is no good rationale, scientific explanation for what happens.

No more so than you can scientifically, empirically explain what happened way back when as Moses and the elders ate on the mountain.

It is 100% a God-thing.

A holy, mystery-filled, Spirit-directed event.

Calvin says that the Holy Spirit "*is a kind of channel by which everything that Christ has and is, is derived to us,*" functioning much as the rays of the sun carry the energy and substance and power of that heavenly body, fixed in a certain point of space, to us on earth in another point in space.

We come in faith - hearts and minds open.

The Holy Spirit pours the warmth and power and love of the Great Son of God into our hungry, needy hearts at the Table.

The form in which that happens -

white wine, red or grape juice

white bread, brown or unleavened

gathered in groups at the front or sitting in the pew

standing or kneeling

All of that is secondary, says Calvin.

God works in any one of those outer forms.

However you do it, says Calvin, **just do it.**

Do it regularly.

Do it a lot.

Calvin writes in his Institutes:

*"...the sacrament might be celebrated in the most becoming manner if it were dispensed to the Church very frequently, at least once a-week."*

As far as Calvin was concerned -

You can never get too much of the power of God.

You can never present yourself too open to the Lord.

You can never receive too much of His grace and mercy and filling love.

The more, the better.

So.....

Come, believer, with open hearts.

Come, hungry.

Come in faith.

And our Sovereign God will do the rest.

Come, ready to be reminded of and drawn to the cross

As you see bread broken, and in your mind's eye see nails pounding through flesh, and thorns ripping into a scalp, and a spear plunging into Jesus' side.

As you listen to the sound of the cup being filled and watch the glistening redness, and in your mind's eye see the Son of God hanging on the cross, bearing the sin of humanity.

Come, being reminded that not only is this so for others.

*"This is my body, which is given.....*

*.....for you."*

*"This is my blood, which is given.....*

*.....for you."*

It is for **me!!!**

What happened on the cross at Calvary

was

**FOR ME!**

Come, with open and hungry hearts - praying that you will be nourished.

And you will be!

In John 6, Jesus commands us to become one with Him; to take Him in; to eat and drink Him. 1 John 3:24 & 4.13 tell us that we become one with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus comes in and brings the real presence of Christ to our Spirit.

Says the Catechism,

*Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body.*

*And so, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.*

*And we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit,*

*as members of our body are by one soul.*

Perhaps it sounds all very mystical and unearthly.

Well, quite frankly brothers and sisters -- it is.

Communion is a time that goes beyond our heads. It is aimed straight at the heart. It is a time not to analyse, but to take in, to receive,

to become vulnerable,

to lower our barriers

to joyfully **COMMUNE** with Jesus through the Spirit.

Look at the bread and think - **BODY**

Look at the wine and think - **BLOOD**

And then –

Bow your head and say - **SPIRIT OF JESUS, TOUCH ME**

And He will. He really will.

Sometimes it is a deeply moving time, and spiritual sparks fly.

Sometimes there is quiet spiritual growth and retrenchment.

And sometimes - well, sometimes we come with barriers up. Our hearts and minds are preoccupied, elsewhere.

We are not tuned in. Then Communion becomes a time where the Spirit begins to break down some of those barriers and reconnect us with Jesus.

However it happens

somehow,

every time there is Communion,

God is at work!

Reminding us of the cross,

Nourishing us in our spirits,

Drawing us towards each other - more in unity as Christ's body on earth.

Moving us towards that final day when we will be reunited with all believers in His Presence in the New Creation.

And - will we eat there?

Brothers and sisters -

Yes we will.

Oh how we will eat at the Great Marriage Banquet of the Lamb.