



Communion



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WHAT COMMUNION IS

The term 'communion' means to 'share in' or 'take part in' and a communion service is one where we share bread and wine and, through those symbols, we share in both the death of Jesus and receive its benefits. A communion service is sometimes called by other names:

The Lord's Supper

This name reminds us that the service was begun by Jesus, our Lord, at His last meal on earth.

Eucharist

Eucharist comes from the Greek word meaning 'thanksgiving' and so reminds us of the gratitude we owe to God and to Jesus.

HOW IT BEGAN

The last meal that Jesus ate before he was arrested, tried and put to death, was a Jewish Passover meal (Matthew 26 vs 17-30, Mark 14 vs 12-25, Luke 22 vs 7-23, 1 Corinthians 11 vs 17-34). The Passover meal was an annual reminder to Jews that God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12). The food that was eaten at such a meal, including bread and wine, became symbols to help recall those events. Jesus shared this meal with His closest friends, His disciples, it was an intimate and moving occasion. It was during this meal that Jesus took the bread and wine and gave it new meaning by saying that they were symbols of His body and blood that would soon be broken and poured out as He died on the cross.

WHAT WE DO AT A COMMUNION SERVICE

Jesus said to His disciples that they were to continue His example of sharing bread and wine when they met in order to do two things:

- To remember Him (1 Corinthians 11 vs 23)
- To look forward to His coming again (1 Corinthians 11 vs 26)

So when we take part in communion we are continuing something that followers of Jesus have done since that meal in the upper room and in doing so are doing something that Jesus told us to do.

We also:

- Renew our relationship with God. Jesus described the wine as a "new covenant in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11 vs 25). A covenant is a strong agreement between two parties - in this case between God and man. In the Old Testament God made a number of covenants with His people and they were sealed with the sacrifice of animals. Jeremiah foretold of a new and better covenant (Jeremiah 31 vs 31—34) and Jesus gave His life to seal this covenant (Hebrews 8—10)
- Renew our relationship with each other (Matthew 5 vs 21-24). We are called to live our life in right relationship with each other. In the days of the early church it seems that Christians 'broke bread' as often as they met together in their homes (Acts 2 vs 42—46, 20 vs 7—11) they saw it as a meal together.
- Express our unity in Jesus. We are His body on earth (1 Corinthians 12 vs 12—31). The 'one loaf' of bread expresses our unity (1 Corinthians 10 vs 17, Philippians 2 vs 1—4).

WHAT HAPPENS AT A COMMUNION SERVICE

As different Christian Churches have grown so each celebrates communion in a slightly different way, but it is not how a communion service is conducted that is important but what we are doing when we take part. This is reflected in the fact that whilst we often follow an established pattern in Thornbury Baptist Church we also vary that pattern and the way that communion is taken.

Communion is usually part of one morning and one evening service each month. There is no set pattern of words (liturgy) but a communion service will usually have all or some of the

following elements:

- A table will be laid with a loaf of bread, a decanter of wine, an empty goblet and trays of individual glasses already filled with wine (by tradition we usually use non-alcoholic wine or fruit juice).
- There will be a time of preparation, maybe with some songs, silence, Bible readings and prayers which may include prayers of thanksgiving and prayers of confession for the things we have done wrong.
- The person leading the communion will break the bread which will then be passed round on a plate to each person in the church with each passing the plate to their neighbour before then eating the bread. When passing the plate it is good to do so with a word of blessing for the person you are passing it to. Quiet, personal, prayer is encouraged after taking the bread.
- Once everyone has had the bread the person leading will usually say some words from the Bible concerning the meaning of the wine and the small glasses will be handed out, with each person keeping hold of the glass until everyone has one at which point we all drink together.
- Often, after eating the bread and drinking the wine, there will be prayers said for those in need and others may be welcomed into membership - this is to emphasise the relationship and unity elements of the service.

There may be times when communion is handled differently, sometimes people will be encouraged to come to the front to receive the bread and wine and to be prayed for or sometimes the table and the chairs are arranged differently.

A communion service is a special service because it follows directly from the example and command of Jesus, and the Bible has much to say on how to approach such a service, but at its heart it is highly symbolic. We recognise that nothing happens to the bread and the wine, it is just normal bread and wine bought from a shop, but it symbolises the body and blood of Jesus who died for us.

WHO CAN TAKE PART

Communion is something that has taken place from the time of Jesus right down the centuries to the present day. As the Church has developed into different denominations there has also grown differences between churches in how a communion service is run, but at its heart each Church tries to obey what Jesus asked his followers to do at that last supper. Within Thornbury Baptist Church we invite all and any Christian believer to take part in communion, whatever their denominational background or none.

The Bible does, however, explain that the taking of the bread and wine should not be undertaken lightly as everyone in the service is asked to “examine themselves” before taking part (1 Corinthians 11 vs 27—32). God’s own Son sacrificed His life in our place to pay the price for our sin and to bring us into relationship with God. To continue in deliberate sin is to sin against this work of Jesus. We are also called to live in right relationship with each other. There is no pressure to either take or not take communion, the key issue is honesty before God. There will be times when it is for the best to pass the bread and wine by, no-one will think any the less of you if you do this.

There is no age limit on who can take communion and children are welcome if they have a relationship with God through Jesus but we would ask that they do so at the discretion of their parents, children’s and youth leaders or member of the Church Leadership team.

THE PLACE OF COMMUNION

Communion does not just happen in the context of a Sunday service, within Thornbury Baptist Church communion is sometimes shared in other meetings such as Home Groups and Youth Groups within the church. Wherever communion is held, and whatever the format, the purpose and symbolism remain the same.