Communion as Celebration

# Scripture: Luke 22:7-20

# Key idea: Communion is also a time for celebration

# Introduction

## Communion is a multi-faceted diamond.

Just as we might hold an exquisite jewel in our hand and turn it to see the light refracted through the various facets of the diamond, so it is with the sacrament of communion in theology. When we think about it and see its various aspects in our mind’s eye, we are amazed at all the different lessons that it teaches us about the work of our Lord Jesus for us. The fact that this sacrament which Jesus instituted goes by many different names in the church should be a hint to us that it has many different emphasizes. Let’s quickly review some of them.

* It is a simple remembrance of the events of his passion. Jesus’ death was the climactic moment of a sacrificial life. Jesus instituted this sacrament on the night of his arrest. Going to the cross was in his mind. Communion takes us back to those events.
* It is a perpetual mnemonic of the true cost of sin and the true definition of love. As the Bible says, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). But, thanks be to God, Jesus has paid our penalty.

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:10 NIV

* It is a proclamation of the Good News of forgiveness of sins because of Jesus death on the cross. The cup we take is a cup of forgiveness.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 NIV

* Communion is an acted sign of the new covenant, a living icon of the new agreement that God has made with humanity through Christ.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Luke 22:20 NIV

* To receive Communion is to enter a time of self-examination, when Christians are reminded to repent of our sins and remember that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done by because of God’s ever-new mercies that we can be given a place in the kingdom of light. Communion as a sacrament has a sense of present renewal by confession and cleansing.

Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 1 Cor 11:28 NRSV

* Communion is a token of our pardon, a reminder that the one who has promised will forgive those who confess and turn from evil.

…and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Heb 12:24 NRSV

When we lift the cup we are reminded that grace is speaking a “better word” on our behalf.”

* By taking Communion, we live in the analogy from Scripture that as physical food and drink nourish the body, so the Word of God and the Spirit of God nourish our soul. Partaking somehow mystically strengthens us.

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” John 6:57, 58 NIV

The mood at most communion celebrations today could be said to be somber. Most communion hymns have rather melancholy tunes. I suppose that helps us to remember our Lord's passion.

But this morning for a few minutes I’d like us to look at one more facet of the Lord’s Supper. I’d like us to think about communion as celebration. We do routinely call what we do on such Sundays as this "celebrating Communion." Is it just habit or is there a deeper reason why we call Communion a Celebration? I would suggest that it is not a meaningless nomenclature habit. In fact, the word celebration fits with the basic meaning of what we are doing and remembering.

**There is a fundamental sense in which Communion is a celebration.**

## The early Christian church understood the element of celebration in the Lord's Supper.

The description in Acts 2:46, 47 is usually interpreted to mean that the early church regularly celebrated communion in homes along with a meal. The text clearly tells us that these meals were times of gladness.

In Acts 20:11 the text also mentioned that the group at Troas “broke bread and ate” before Paul departed. This likely refers to sharing in the sacrament and then eating together.

Jude 12 calls such gatherings "love feasts."

In I Cor. 11:17-33 Paul talks about the communion celebration of the early Corinthian church. We learn that the Corinthians definitely served communion as a part of a big celebration. However, apparently, some among them got so carried away with the celebration part that Paul condemned them for their excesses and lack of sensitivity to the poor. From that letter on, in Christian history, Communion or the Lord’s Supper has been separated from a larger meal most of the time. Ever since Paul's letter, it has stood alone. But remember that Paul’s admonitions were aimed at excesses, not against their joyfulness.

So apparently, Communion started out in the earliest church as a much more celebrative event. What did the early church know that we are in danger of forgetting? Let’s see what we can learn about communion as a time of celebration.

# Communion, as Passover before it, is a time of celebration of our deliverance.

## Just as Passover was a celebration of deliverance, so is Communion.

Jesus instituted what we call Communion at a Passover celebration.

Bread and wine were among the courses of the normal Jewish Passover meal.

The Jewish Passover also was a mix of somber and celebrative.

Exodus 12:14 in describing Passover, uses the Hebrew words for feast which the experts tell us could well have included celebrative dancing, and processionals as well as a feast of food shared by the families. (BDB p. 291)

Bread of affliction was one item on the menu (Deut. 16:3). It was bread without yeast which reminded them that their forefathers did not have time to let bread rise when they fled Egypt.

Passover reminded the Jews on the one hand of the bitterness of their slavery in Egypt and on the other hand of the joy of their deliverance.

Communion reminds us on the one hand of the sad price that Jesus had to pay for our sins and on the other hand of our joy at being forgiven through Jesus.

## Passover was a celebration of deliverance from slavery in Egypt; Communion is a celebration of deliverance from slavery to sin, self and Satan.

In Passover the Jews remembered the bitterness of slavery. Bitter herbs were eaten to commemorate the bitterness of the Israelites in Egypt. But Passover also celebrated a double deliverance.

First, it celebrated the deliverance of the people of Israel from the tenth plague. They remembered how their ancestors had placed blood on the door frame and the angel of death had passed over their houses.

Passover also celebrated the great deliverance from Egypt - the Exodus. (Seder service p. 24) After the tenth plague, the Israelites left Egypt. They were set free from their slavery.

Communion is a reminder of our deliverance from spiritual slavery. The Bible teaches us of the bitterness of our fatal slavery to the 3 S's; sin, self and Satan.

But Communion also celebrates our deliverance. Rom. 6:17, 18 tells how we were slaves to sin but have been set free.

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. Rom 6:17-18 NIV

Eph. 2 reminds us that we used to be under control of the enemy of our souls.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Eph. 2:1, 2 NIV

Now in Christ, we are delivered from that kingdom and brought into the kingdom of God’s dear Son! That is cause for celebration indeed!

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Col 1:13-14 NIV

## Both Passover and Communion celebrate deliverance from death.

In the first Passover, deliverance from death was obtained when the Israelites put the blood of the lamb they had killed over the door. Then the angel of death did not visit their houses.

When we celebrate Communion, we remember that our deliverer, Jesus Christ, shed his own blood. Our deliverance is by the blood of Christ, the blood of the perfect Lamb of God, a Lamb without blemish or defect; crucified for you and I.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18-20 NIV

Grape juice that we use in communion is a symbol of his blood and of our deliverance from spiritual death through it.

# Communion and Passover both contain an element of Thanksgiving to God for his bountiful supply.

The Jewish Passover festival occurred in the spring which in Palestine was actually the beginning of the harvest of the winter and spring grains.

The Passover prayers contain an element of thanksgiving to God for his bountiful supply of food. "Praised are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the earth." (Seder service p. 19)

In some churches, Communion is called the Eucharist which comes from the Greek word for giving thanks. The use of this word as a title for the sacrament comes from the giving of thanks which Christ did over the bread and the cup when he instituted it.

When we remember what Jesus did for us, we give thanks as we remember that his grace is more than adequate for our salvation.

For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Rom 5:19-21 NRSV

We also give thanks for his promise to us that he came to give us life more abundantly. – John 10:10

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. John 10:10 NRSV

Through him we have crossed over from death to life (John 5:24).

# Both the Passover and Communion celebrate an anticipated victory.

Remember that the first Passover happened before they left Egypt. But it anticipated what God was going to do. He was going to deliver his people, Israel, completely from slavery.

Still today, when Jewish people celebrate Passover there is a sense of anticipation of what God is yet to do. The last cup of wine at Passover was called "Elijah's cup" to remind those present that Elijah was expected to announce the Messiah's coming at Passover. An empty chair is placed at the table for Elijah.

When Jesus instituted Communion, the “Elijah who was to come,” John the Baptist, had already announced Jesus (Matt. 11:14). Yet, at that Passover, Jesus sustained a sense of continuing expectation when he said, “I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18). Or in Matthew’s version,

I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Matt 26:29 NRSV

Paul declares that we need to maintain the sense that we celebrate a coming victory. He affirms that communion has a sense of anticipated victory because we look forward to the day of Jesus’ coming.

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 1 Cor 11:26 NIV

When will this great celebration to which Jesus looked forward take place? The best answer is the celebration described in Rev. 19.

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:  
“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.  
Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!  
For the wedding of the Lamb has come  
and his bride has made herself ready.   
Rev 19:6-7 NIV

Today as we take communion, let us celebrate also the anticipated final victory of our Lord. Maranatha – Even so Come Lord Jesus!