

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We praise you, Lord, for all that you are,
for the creation that is yours,
for its beauty and wonder, its diversity and richness.
We praise you for your presence and comfort
that swaddle us in your purity and enrich us with your abundance.
We praise you for your steadfastness
that perseveres with us, faltering disciples and failing followers.
We praise you that, day by day, you amaze and enrich us
and reveal yourself in new and unexpected ways.
We praise you that you are the same yesterday,
today and for ever – and yet forever new.
O Lord our God, you are indeed,
from the depth of our being,
highly to be praised.

Amen.

Read 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 verses 23-26

Sermon by Revd Peter Lyth

Every Friday at 9am, there is a programme on Radio 4 called, “The Reunion”. It gathers together people who were involved with a significant time or event. One episode gathered people involved in the London 2012 Olympics bid. Another reunited cast and crew who were responsible for putting on the original stage production of “Cats”. There was one that brought together people who were caught up in the Sierra Leone civil war. The list is long, and as you can see, very eclectic. If you have ever listened to it, the discussion, presided over by Kirsty Wark, is fascinating as they reminisce over the events and the part that they played.

Remembering is important. We (hopefully) learn from the past. We have our service of Remembrance every year around the 11th of November (Armistice Day) where the victims and fallen of the World Wars and many conflicts since

are remembered. And regularly in the church, we have an act of remembrance in which we remember the sacrifice that Jesus made as he went to the cross. Although we were not there when it first happened, this act brings us together. I am, of course talking of Holy Communion.

I said regularly because, of course there are variations depending on the traditions of each strand that went on to form the URC. Congregational churches tended to celebrate Communion once a month, whereas in the case of the Presbyterians it was four times a year. We can still see this in the different churches that make up the team. However, the uniting thing is the purpose behind it.

The reading that we heard before is from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and was describing how the church in Corinth was to conduct their meals together by recounting the events of the Last Supper – the meal that we symbolically re-create in our Holy Communion. It is worth reminding ourselves that the meals in the early church were very different from the Holy Communion of today. They didn't have tiny glasses of non-alcoholic wine and small pieces of diced bread (or wafers). They shared in full meals. Paul is reminding his readers that the meal was intended as an act of memorial for Jesus and to unite the church together. Instead, the members were divided by class and wealth, some getting the best food and others getting the leftovers. The reading forms part of our Communion service today, in either this form or the account from one of the gospels.

Nowadays, things are much more equal as what we eat symbolises the body and blood of Jesus and each receives the same.

So what actually goes on at Communion? Here are some thoughts on the matter.

The first thing is that we are doing it at our Lord's command. He says, "Do this to remember me". We do this at the command of Jesus, in order to continually remember his life, death upon the cross and resurrection. Secondly, the meal follows on from one that goes back a lot further. In three of the Gospels, the Last Supper actually takes place at Passover, in John's Gospel, it takes place the day before. Passover celebrates a great act of salvation for God's people – the freeing from slavery in Egypt. We are doing something similar in our actions, as we celebrate the great act of salvation that God performed for us in sending his son. In the Passover, one of the important features is the retelling of the story of God's salvation of his people. There is usually a great prayer as part of the Communion service – this retells the story of God's salvation through Christ.

At the centre of it all, we meet together as the body of Christ, the church. Yet at the same time, we are told that we "feed on Christ, in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving". How does it work? One of the other phrases that we often use is that the risen Christ dwells within us. An analogy is that when we eat bread, or drink the wine, after we digest the food some of the molecules become part of us. In the same way, as we feed and drink the elements, Christ becomes part of our being, transforming us.

The final thing is that it acts as a recurring reminder of the way in which we live our lives as disciples of Christ. There are a number of elements of what we do, of which four act as a reminder of our pattern for discipleship. Jesus **TOOK** bread, Jesus **BLESSED** the bread, Jesus **BROKE** the bread and finally Jesus **GAVE** the bread. And that is the pattern for our living as disciples of Christ. We offer ourselves to him, we are **TAKEN** by him, **BLESSED** by him and are **BROKEN** and **SHARED**. This is how Jesus lived and we are invited to do the same. By eating

the bread that is Christ's body, we are spiritually nourished and we become part of his body to serve him here on earth. It is both a privilege and a challenge.

In the programme "The reunion", the participants are drawn together in order to recall and discuss their shared part in a past event. In Communion, we are drawn together as God's people to share in the memorial of Christ's life, death and resurrection. But there's more to it than that. We go from Communion renewed, having taken in Christ and filled with his spirit so that we can go out into the world once more, strengthened in His name.

Prayers of intercession

Eternal, ever-living, ever-present God,
in the struggles and joys of this day, we pray:
for those who are overburdened, weighed down, demoralised,
fearful or desolate because of what life has thrown at them...
For those engulfed in pain and anguish, facing illness and death...
For those troubled in mind and spirit, who find no peace or calm...
For those alone and lonely, without friend or comfort...
For those frightened and bewildered, who see no direction
or purpose in their lives...
Eternal, ever-living God,
bless them all in this and every hour,
in this and every step of life's journey.
Amen.

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