



mission
community church

© 2010 Mission Community Church

Message: Sacrament - Communion

Speaker: Mark Connelly

Date: 7.25.2010

Today we're going to talk about biblical communion. I want to tell you right off the bat, this is one of the most difficult messages I've put together in a long time, because at every corner my tradition and leadership in this area has been challenged. I've had to face the fact that I don't think what I've experienced as a believer, or what I've led the church in as a pastor, when it comes to communion, is even remotely close to the biblical model.

As your pastor, I want to walk humbly with God and confess to you today that I have been poorly leading us in the practice of communion. I commit to changing how I lead in this area. I don't think we can make all the changes necessary today, but I think we can take some steps in the right direction, and begin a journey together toward realizing true biblical communion. **Let's pray** for God to give us all humility today.

Communion...the recurrent communal meal of the church in which we live in authentic new covenant community and collectively give joyous thanks to our redeemer.

It was recurrent in the sense that it was something Jesus told the church to continue as a practice. It was a communal meal, not just bread and wine, that was eaten together in fellowship. In new covenant community they shared their food, so the poor among them could eat. The meal was a time of collective joyous thanksgiving for what Christ accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection. **Let's unpack that...**

Communion...the recurrent **communal meal** of the church in which we live in authentic new covenant community and collectively give joyous thanks to our redeemer.

Luke 22:7-16, the cup...the breaking of bread...Passover meal...the cup...singing...prayer. This is the pattern of the Jewish Passover. Passover was a communal meal, **Ex 12:3,4, 16**. The first communion, the last supper of Jesus with his disciples, is patterned after Passover, which was a festive communal meal. It included unleavened bread and wine, along with other elements such as vegetables dipped in salt water and bitter herbs to remind them of the tears and bitterness of slavery. But it also had a festive meal of joyful thanksgiving for their freedom.

When we think of the last supper, many of us have in mind only the unleavened bread and the wine. But the truth is Jesus was leading them in a communal meal that had been practiced by the Jewish people for hundreds of years, **Lk 22:20**. It wasn't a solitary act of private devotion to the Lord. This was a communal meal, where the people at the table interacted with each other. They told stories of God's deliverance. They asked questions. They gave thanks. They prayed and they sang songs together. They looked each other in the eye and discussed as they ate the meal. This is how the early church celebrated communion. (1Corinth here was enough food to get full on and enough wine to get drunk on, if someone hoarded it. It was a meal).

A communion meal is a far cry from what we do. First of all, we don't have a meal. My wife is a flight attendant and she's out of town fairly often so I make meals for myself. I don't do a great job

[Type text]

[Type text]

[Type text]

at it, but even I know, this (hold up cracker and thimble) is not a meal. I never say to my wife, “hey honey, I’m really hungry, can you get me one of those crackers, but only one. If I eat two I feel bloated all night.” I never say, “I’m really thirsty, what I wouldn’t give for a thimble of grape juice.” This doesn’t even come close to comparing with first century communion in the church.

Here’s why this is important...when we eliminated the meal and made it a cracker, communion went from communal to individual. We don’t eat a meal together and discuss and give thanks together. We don’t even look at each other. We encourage you to have a private vertical experience with God, to silently pray alone, and in essence, shut out the people around you. We’ve denied the horizontal, communal component of communion, and we’ve individualized it, which of course fits perfect with our modern mindset.

We drive into our communities, press the garage door opener, drive into our beige stucco box, close the door behind us and retreat to our walled off backyards, away from our community. So, an individualized communion experience sounds good to us, but it’s not the biblical model.

But when we lose the communal aspect of communion, we miss out on much of what the meal was intended to provide. You see, at the table Jesus calls us to live in authentic new covenant community.

Communion...the recurrent communal meal of the church in which we live in **authentic new covenant community** and collectively give joyous thanks to our redeemer.

In New Covenant community, we care deeply about the hurting and hungry among us, and we sacrifice and share with the community. **Acts 2:42-46**, the believers shared what they had in order to help the least among them, and one of the things they shared was their food. That’s why in its earliest form, the church celebrated communion daily. Daily they would bring their communion meal, break bread together, so everyone ate.

In fact, Paul specifically addressed the church in Corinth for not being communal about how they ate the communion meal. **1Cor 11:17-26**, the problem in Corinth was they were celebrating communion in a divisive way, without concern for the poor and hungry among them. Their communion was patterned after the culture they lived in, not rooted in the example of Jesus. In their culture the rich ate before the poor. Those higher in socio-economic standing got the best seats, the best food, and the best wine, while the poor waited for the leftovers. That’s what they were doing in Corinth when they celebrated communion. They weren’t eating in new covenant community, so they were hardened to the needs of their community.

You’ve often times heard it explained when taking communion that we must not eat it in an unworthy manner, as meaning, have a time of private introspection and make sure you confess your sin’s so that you won’t eat in an unworthy way. But that’s not the meaning of the passage at all. The context of the passage is when you eat without care for the hurting and hungry in your community, THEN you eat and drink in an unworthy manner, **1Cor 11:27-34**. The problem is people eating their fill without concern for the hurting, that’s what makes their communion unworthy. And it’s a serious problem in the eyes of the Lord, vv 29,30. God doesn’t want us to be just vertical, just ‘me and him’ in communion. We wants us to eat this meal as a community in loving care for each other.

Someone might say, ‘that’s why I don’t like mega churches. I want a small church where we can celebrate biblical fellowship and communion.’ To which I would say, ‘hold on. The early church was

[Type text]

[Type text]

[Type text]

a mega church that figured this thing out. Acts **2:41, 46**, they were a church of over 3,000, roughly our size, and they still had biblical communion. They meet together as a large group in the temple, much like we meet here. But then they broke out into small groups in homes, where they broke bread and celebrated the communion meal. We don't practice this today, not because we're too big, but because we haven't led well in this area. That has to change.

Communion...the recurrent communal meal of the church in which we live in authentic new covenant community and **collectively give joyous thanks to our redeemer**

Passover was a joyous celebration of thanks...**Ex 12:14; 2Chron 30:21-23** (my calls to Rabbis). God designed Passover to be a joyous festival of thanks to the Lord for rescuing them out of captivity. At communion we joyfully give thanks (eucharist means thanksgiving), to our redeemer for rescuing us from spiritual captivity to a spiritual enemy, and setting us free through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Communion is patterned after Passover, and the early church celebrated it with joy, **Acts 2:46**.

We've turned communion into a somber occasion of silently focusing on our sin and confessing so we'll be worthy. Listen, it's good to confess your sin, but that's not the purpose of communion. Communion is a celebration of the effectiveness of the cross to pay for all our sins, and the joy of the resurrection of Jesus which he promises we will partake in. It's a time of rejoicing and gladly giving thanks.

To the first century church celebrating the communal meal, having some dude off by himself, solemnly holding a cracker would have just been weird. You're at a festival not a funeral.

Are we celebrating biblical communion? We sit individually in silent reflection rather than interact in community. There's no social component of sharing with the poor among us. We take a cracker and thimble instead of a meal. We make it a somber remembering of our sin and the death of Jesus, rather than a celebration of resurrection life. I'd say we've missed the boat on this one.

Where do we go from here?

Honestly, God's word has been messing with me on this, up to and including today. I'm wrestling with what to do with this cracker and thimble thing, do we bag it all together? And how do we restore a more biblical model of communion meal in a church of 4,000 people? I don't pretend to have it all figured out, but I'm going to suggest a starting point. As I further wrestle through this with our staff and board and leaders, we may have other changes to make. But here's where I want to start...

Restore the communal meal in your small group. That's truly the most biblical model. The early church gathered as a large group in the temple, but they broke bread in their homes. This week I'm going to send out a suggested format for your group as you celebrate communion together (nothing magical, just a suggestion to help)

Restore communion as a time of joyful thanks to our redeemer. When you take communion in your homes, give testimonies of salvation, or testimonies of God goodness. Give thanks together for the cross and the resurrection. It should be a hope giving celebration.

[Type text]

[Type text]

[Type text]

For now, ***I don't think we should stop taking the cracker and grape juice together.*** Not because it fulfills biblical communion, but it will help serve as a reminder to us all to go from here and regularly pursue community and take communion in your homes together.

And we're going to add something new today. Every time we take communion in this large gathering we're going to ask you to ***give a little more for the hungry and hurting in our church.***

We're going to take our normal offering. But then as you leave we're going to ask you to drop a few dollars, whatever cash you might have on you, maybe what you planned on spending on pizza today, and give it to the poor among us (Mike will explain more on that in a few minutes).

Honestly, I still have lots of questions about our communion that I need to think and pray about longer. But today we start on a new journey to pursue biblical communion at Mission.