

“The Meaning of Communion”
By the Rev. Magrey deVega

The Sacrament of Communion draws us together, and draws us out of ourselves, in order to experience the God who has drawn near to us.

Now, there’s a lot that has been said and written and studied about what Communion means, and if I wanted to, I could drone on and on about all there is to say about why Communion is so important in the Christian spiritual life.

But instead of lecturing, I’m going to solicit some help from a songwriter. *The* songwriter, actually. Charles Wesley, the musical theologian of the Methodist movement, offered his reflection on the meaning of Communion through his hymn, *Come Sinners to the Gospel Feast*. Each verse offers a different angle on the mystery of this holy sacrament, and I thought that for the remainder of this sermon, we would simply sing all eight verses, one at a time, interspersed with a few minutes from me talking about what the verse says about Communion.

COME: Communion is an invitation for all of us to enter the presence of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. In a time when physically gathering together is a lost occurrence, when we would rather connect with each other virtually and digitally, receiving Communion is a physical act, when we come together in the presence of God.

*Come, sinners, to the Gospel feast;
Let every soul be Jesus’ guest.
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bid all humankind.*

CONNECTION: Communion unites us as a body of Christ with Christians around the world and across time. It connects us with saints past, present, and future. And that means that when we come together,

*Sent by my Lord, on you I call;
The invitation is to all.
Come, all the world! Come, sinner, thou!
All things in Christ are ready now.*

COMFORT: Communion affirms the constant presence of God in and among us, even amid our most difficult trials. In times of struggle and difficulty, when you feel that God is distant from your situation, Communion gives you the opportunity to taste grace in the bread and the cup, and remember the presence of Christ with you.

*Come, all ye souls by sin oppressed,
Ye restless wanderers after rest;
Ye poor, and maimed, and sick, and blind,
In Christ a hearty welcome find.*

CONFESSION: Communion acknowledges the grace of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, prompting us toward confession and an experience of God’s forgiveness. When you come forward for communion, it is a time of naming what separate you from God, and what is separating you from another person. For Communion to be a time of reconciliation, it must be preceded by confession.

*Come, and partake the Gospel feast;
Be saved from sin; in Jesus rest;
O taste the goodness of your God,
And eat His flesh, and drink His blood!*

COMMITMENT: Communion gives us the opportunity to recommit ourselves to following Christ, so that, in the words of John Wesley, the love of God “may be shed abroad in our hearts. Communion gives you a chance to say, “Okay, God. I’m going to stop living life for myself, and I will renew my pledge to serve you, no matter the cost.” The other way to say this is *covenant*, which is a special relationship that we have with God that requires our continual commitment.

*My message as from God receive;
Ye all may come to Christ and live.
O let His love your hearts constrain,
Nor permit Him to die in vain.*

CONTEMPLATION: Communion helps us ponder God’s holiness and power, and reminds us of our utter dependence on God’s love. Wesley says “his conquering love consent to feel.” And that means that Communion gives us a chance to ponder all that God has done and is doing in our lives. It allows us a chance to take stock of the ways that God is blessing us, and the many ways that God loves us, so that we don’t take it for granted.

*His love is mighty to compel;
His conquering love consent to feel,
Yield to His love’s resistless power,
And fight against your God no more.*

COMMEMORATION: Communion is a remembrance of what Jesus has done on the cross. It is more than mere intellectual recollection; it is a dynamic re-presentation of Jesus, making him vividly real today. “See Him set forth before your eyes.” In other words, when you take Communion, do it in remembrance of Jesus.

*See Him set forth before your eyes,
That precious, bleeding Sacrifice!
His offered benefits embrace,
And freely now be saved by grace.*

CELEBRATION: Finally, Communion expresses grateful thanks for what God has done, and reminds us of our future at the great banquet table of God. This is a time for us to gather together in jubilant celebration, because this is a table of victory that God has set before us. And because of Jesus, God can conquer our sins and set us free.

*This is the time, no more delay!
This is the Lord’s accepted day.
Come thou, this moment, at His call,
And live for Him Who died for all.*

I hope that this little musical exercise has given you a deeper awareness of all that Communion means. The “why” of Communion, if you will. Now, we will enter a time of instruction, as we go through the Communion liturgy, section by section, so that you can see how the ancient words of the Great Thanksgiving draw us into something much greater than ourselves, and much greater than this local church.

It is preceded by the offertory, which we often perceive as simply passing the plates and donating money. But in a deeper sense, the offertory is itself and act of preparation for Communion. As we open our hearts and our minds to a fresh receipt of God’s grace. Some churches even choose to bring up the bread and the cup during the offertory, as a visual symbol of offering ourselves to God to be the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

So, with that in mind, let us receive this morning’s tithes and offerings.

In the name of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, Amen.