

# The First Communion

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Date: 18 August 2024

Preacher: Gordon R

[ 0 : 00 ] This is a sermon from King's Church West North. We are in Mark 14, 22-26.

We'll come back to that in just a moment. Let me show you a photograph. And this is, I was a bit worried when I realized how old this photo is, if I'm honest with you.

But this is a picture of a family meal. And you can see I've got a hole in my head. Don't be worried about that. It's just a very old photo that hasn't lasted all that well.

But this is a photo from a few months before Jill and I get married. And around this table we have Jill's parents and we have my mom and her partner and my grandfather and his partner.

And it was a really important family gathering for us. It was in a random pub in Cambridge. Nothing particularly special about the food. But the people around the table are people dear to us before a major sort of life change for us.

[ 1 : 22 ] Where our two separate families become linked in a new way. And Jill and I start our own kind of new family together. And what we're going to be looking at today is a family meal really.

Like a church family meal with Jesus and his followers. That Christians have been continuing to do since he first sort of did it with them. And I don't know if you've experienced, I'm sure you've experienced this.

The interesting thing about meals is it's sometimes hard to know how much is going on in them. Because there can be so much meaning in a meal.

Like this meal wasn't just that we're all hungry. It wasn't... No one said, oh, we must do this before we get married as far as I remember. But I do remember this meal being about significance.

Like it matters that we all know each other. And it matters that Jill and I, young as we look there, are going off to start a new family together.

[ 2 : 22 ] And there was great significance for us in this. And meals can often be like that. Every day, really, when our family sits down and eats together as far as we're able, we're telling each other, you matter.

And this matters. And we never say that around the meal. To be honest, we don't say, right, children, you must sit down because you matter and we matter. We just know that it's part of what we do. And we know that it means more than just filling your belly or making sure you've had enough orange juice or tomato sauce, which we seem to go through.

Anyone else go through gallons of tomato sauce every week? We're starting to get concerned our children will start to glow red. But meals have often much more significance than just being about food and drink.

And it's true of this one. Let's look at Mark 14, verses 22 to 26. So come up on the screen as well for you. It says this, While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he'd given thanks, he broke it, gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my body.

Then he took a cup, and when he'd given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, he said to them.

[ 3 : 38 ] Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink in the new kingdom of God. When they'd sung a hymn, they went out to the mound of olives.

Meals can be really significant. They can also be a bit strange. And this one that we share together, we call it a meal, and I kind of purposely call it a meal.

But in fact, if you came to our house and I invited you around for a meal, and I gave you a little cup of juice, and a little sort of tiny piece of bread, I mean, I can only imagine what you think of us.

You'd be like, come on, Gordon, what are you doing? Do you know, like, we call this a meal, but actually, it's a little bit odd. And what I'm keen that we do today is that we look at what's going on here when we break bread and we share wine together, and that we enjoy what it reveals to us

about Jesus and about his Father God and about the kingdom of God.

Because a bit like, I don't know if you guys have ever had, like, a sweet or a dessert or a piece of food that you've put in your mouth and you've thought, fine, you know, and then suddenly you think, oh my goodness, hopefully in a good way, oh my goodness, there's so much flavor here, like, what is that?

[ 4 : 57 ] It's a bit like that. We went out for a kind of quite a posh meal a few weeks ago in the kind of restaurant we don't normally go to, and they served you the most tiny little things, you know.

I thought, oh my goodness, what have we done? All this money on these tiny little courses. And then you put it in your mouth, and what you tasted was incredible. Like, the layers of flavor and the amount going on as you took each tiny bit of food was amazing.

And I think the Last Supper, as it's called, and communion, if we understand it well, is a bit like that. There is loads going on. There's loads of meaning. There's loads of depth.

There's loads that Jesus wants us to see, and that will bless us, and help us love God more if we are aware of it. So, what we're going to do is work through some of the different parts of these verses together, and just look at what might be going on in this small but significant and rich and deep meal that we're going to give you the chance to share together towards the end of the service. So, it starts like this. While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he'd given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples. A meal together, a bit like us in Jewish society, there's quite a lot of meaning behind it.

[ 6 : 19 ] It would mean if you ate with people, you're at peace with those people. If you ate with people, you're trusting them. It often would symbolize forgiveness and unity and a sense of belonging.

If you look at the people Jesus would be gathering around the table for this meal, they're an interesting bunch. Who are they?

Well, you've got the guy who will one day deny Jesus. You've got the sons of thunder, James and John, who not long, earlier in the book of Mark, we've seen fighting for their own position and for their own sort of sense of significance.

You've got Andrew, who we traditionally think is probably pretty quiet. You've got Thomas, that we'll see after the resurrection, doubting Jesus and saying, show me for real. You've got Matthew, the tax collector, who would have been despised by people for collecting tax for the Romans.

You've got Philip, who just seemed to miss the point time and time again. And Simon the Zealot, who basically is that slightly awkward, far-right friend you might all know.

[ 7 : 23 ] You know that you kind of think, oh, could you just stop being quite so zealous? And you've got Judas, who will go on to betray Jesus. His followers are, I don't know, what word do you use for them?

In teaching, we talk about an interesting class. They're an interesting bunch. There's a lot going on there. But Jesus chooses to eat with them and to share with them because he isn't looking at them the way the world does.

He isn't looking down at them. He isn't looking at them in their own strength. He welcomes them not because they're good, not because they've got it sorted, not because they've met the kind of standard of being the best of the best at the time.

He welcomes them because he's good, because of what he's going to do, because of his ability and his leadership and his eventual death and resurrection and how it will transform them and anyone who follows him.

He gathers them knowing what he's capable of and knowing what they aren't capable of. When we gather around this little meal and when we take this bread and this wine, we are people who are welcomed to his table.

[ 8 : 48 ] Just as that interesting bunch where he says, if you will follow me, you are welcome. And to take this bread and this wine is to accept the welcome of God and is to take part in the life of God and to join him and say, I accept your welcome and actually I'm not worthy, but you are good.

So the first picture from communion is one of the welcome of God. And do you know what? I think all we can do in the light of that is be people who say, wow, through Jesus, I'm welcomed to be with God and to connect with him and to know him and to know his love.

It also makes us a welcoming people. Like when we know what it's like to gather to his table and to know that he welcomes us as we are and is to then say the same of other people.

And I love that we're a church who says, welcome, come on in. God is good. We're all right. Pretty sinful, to be honest. I speak for myself, but we know that.

But we're here because he's good, not because we're sorted. We're here because he's welcoming. Not actually whether we're welcomeable or not. And I love that, that we live out this welcome as we welcome others.

[10:14] And we offer others peace and acceptance and trust and just say, come on in. He has welcomed us. We will welcome you.

Another thing he says is this. Then says, gave it to his disciples saying, take, eat. This is my body. Okay.

Well, Jews are pretty used to sharing bread. So very kind of normal part of eating together. But also it's a way of looking back at what has happened to them in terms of the Passover and remembering God's goodness to them as he frees them from captivity under the Egyptians.

And they would have had unleavened bread, kind of flat and quite, quite kind of crackly bread because when they were freed from slavery, there was no time for bread to rise. They'd fled so quickly because God had provided a way for them to go out.

So sharing bread would have been a regular way of just remembering God's goodness and provision in freedom from slavery. and they would reenact that meal at Passover and they might say a prayer, something like this.

[11:23] I think this is a beautiful thing. They would say, probably say the motzi, I think it's called, which is, blessed are you, adonai our God, ruler of the universe, or universe, sorry, who brings forth bread from the earth.

For a Jewish person to break bread is to say, God is really good and he provided for us. He provided freedom from slavery and he provided food in the desert for us.

And it's a way of saying, God is in charge, he provides, as he did in the Passover, with freedom, as he did in the desert. But, Jesus does this sneaky thing and there will, I'm almost certain, there would have been a gasp at this point.

So he says, take it and he's given thanks, probably with a motzi prayer. He says, take it and okay, that's what we do. And then he says, this is my body. Okay, this is my body.

That is not a normal thing to do if you are Jewish. In fact, not a normal thing to do if you're not Jewish, is it? In fact, you come to my house and I serve you dinner and say, this is my body, you should gasp.

[12:33] Okay? But they would have with Jesus too. They would absolutely have been like, oh, like what? Because they think this meal is probably a celebration of goodness and friendship.

It might be a hint of, and have hints of, freedom from slavery. But what Jesus is doing is he's looking forward to the cross and he's saying, I'm going to be broken.

Snap. Snap. I'm going to be wrecked, he's saying. It's a future. It's almost, he's remembering the past with them, but he's actually kind of remembering the future.

He's saying, like, this is me. This is a symbol of what's going to happen to me. We're not just thinking that God freed the slaves in Egypt. Actually, God's about to free slaves for good, not just the Jewish people, but anyone who would join in with me and be a part of my life.

There's so much symbolism here that he's saying, like, I provide for you. God provides for you through me, says Jesus. Take, eat, broken.

[13:42] This is my body. This little meal is a reminder of the God who provides, the God who provided in the desert, the God who provided in slavery, but also the God who will provide in the death of Jesus on the cross where his body will be wrecked and he'll be broken for you and for me.

This little meal is a reminder that he did that for you and me. And as we break the bread, we don't do it lightly. We do it in a way that says, wow, he provided through his death on the cross the possibility that we might know God.

God didn't even spare his own son. That's how generously he provides for you and me. And I love that that spurs us on to walk and talk with him as our provider. He provided on the cross in Jesus that we might be friends with God and we'll talk a bit more about that in a moment.

But we get to know him and live our lives as God, as our provider. Like, I have to be honest, I live in that like regularly as just a wow moment that when you have a need, you can turn to him and he will be with you.

And I was thinking, when's the most recent moment like that for me? And I'll very quickly tell you this. about a year ago, I was, when I first started working for and serving the church three and a bit days a week, I would do a day a week supply teaching and we got to the normal time of schools returning last year and very suddenly the supply work that I'd relied on for two years like consistently just absolutely dried up.

[15:27] And suddenly there was about a, about a third of a hole in our sort of household income. It was one of those moments you're like, oh, this will be fine for the first week. Oh, this will be fine for the second week. Okay, the third week, there's still no work.

This is really weird. And it had been so consistently available. I had this great relationship with the school. They'd offered me a job so many times I'd lost count and budgetary changes meant that very suddenly there was just no, there was just no money to get someone in who wasn't on a kind of permanent contract which I had, which I had said no to a few times.

And I prayed. I kind of went, well, Lord, I don't quite know what we'll do but I'm sure, I'm sure you'll provide. And I don't say that sarcastically. I was sure he would provide. And so then the next day, I think it was after praying that prayer, I saw a job advertised for something I'd been doing some training in computing teaching.

I saw it advertised and they said three days a week. I went, oh, I'm only available one, maybe two. And I just felt a nudge of the Holy Spirit be like, kind of, come on, Gordon.

I went, okay, you know, and applied, put in an application, thought nothing of it, thought they'll never, and said, I'm available two days a week. I know you want three and thought nothing of it.

[16:35] Next thing I knew, they called me and said, we want you to come in for an interview and I thought, oh, it feels like it might be you, God. And I thought back to what was kind of nudging me on that and it dawned on me that the school I was applying for was in fact the school in which I'd been baptized because the church I was a part of used to meet in a hall like this but part of our big high school and I had just met with God in this place so many times and been so blessed by this church that it actually gave me a real sense of faith for I've known God here.

Like, I'm not even sure God works like that if I'm honest but I just knew in my heart, I thought, okay, I've known God here, I'm going to apply anyway and I did. They called me, I went to interview with no time to prepare, I'd had a frantic week, I thought, ah, you know, you're with me or not, Lord.

And in the interview, they basically, it was abundantly clear they wanted me to take the job and that they knew I was the right candidate. Now, that must have been supernatural, okay, because it was a pretty terrible interview and then they discovered I was involved in a church and that I was leading a team in a church and they got really excited and it dawned on me the head teacher was a Christian and he too had just sent God in this appointment and because God's the God who provides, it wasn't actually down to me.

It wasn't, I wonder, I wonder how bad I'd have to have done for him to have known that he should still give me the job and that I should still turn up for the interview and be there at interview because clearly God was with us in that process.

It's been a massive blessing. I'm loving teaching in this school. I get to freely share about Jesus which is amazing in almost any school these days and it's one of those moments where I've just known God as the one who provides.

[18:16] Most of all, this meal is a reminder he provided in Jesus but it's a reminder of his ongoing provision for you and me. He can be trusted and he is generous with us as the God who provides.

It's also a meal where Jesus says this, he says, it says that he took the cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them and all drank from it.

This is my blood of the, and most translations say new covenant which is poured out for many. He said to them, can you imagine a shock if you hadn't been shocked by Jesus saying about the bread, this is my body.

Then after, note, I think it's almost cheeky of Jesus that he gives them the wine first and then once they've drunk it he says, this is my blood. Because a good Jew doesn't drink blood, doesn't have blood in their meat.

They make sure it's drained before they eat. it would be seen as just disgusting really to drink blood and to think of it would normally have filled you with a sense of that's not right, drinking the life of another being because that's their understanding of it.

[19:30] It's a thing that contains the life of something else. In the Passover, which we haven't got time to look at today but you may well know this story, in the Passover the Jewish people, they take

the blood of an animal and they place it over their doors to basically free them from death coming and taking their firstborn children.

It's one of the most moving, the Prince of Egypt is an animated version of the story which I think is, we haven't got time to look at but it tells this beautifully and in a quite terrifying way for an animation because there's this moment where the thing that saves the people of God from terror and horror is the blood of an innocent lamb and Jesus is pointing to that here.

He's saying a great exchange will take place. His blood, his very life will be spilled and when you and I face judgment because of that blood death will not touch us.

We don't have to be bound by the judgment of God because an innocent lamb, Jesus, his blood was poured out for you and me and it frees us from judgment and I've used two words there.

I've said poured and I've said spilled. The accurate one is poured out for many. There's a willingness there on the part of Jesus, not just a thing that happened but a choice.

[ 21 : 09 ] Jesus chooses the cross where his blood will be poured out for you and me. For us people who are born as sinners, who sin but who are protected from the judgment of God by the blood of the lamb Jesus.

A sacrifice so great that it covers you and me who put our trust in Jesus for our lifetime and beyond.

One of my favorite quotes about this is going to come up on the board here because I don't know about you but there are days where you wake up and you think oh God how could you love me?

I am a mess or I've done this wrong or why did I do that thing there? And I love that the forgiveness of God because of Jesus' blood poured out covers all all of our sin and I love this quote on this because I find it so reassuring and I think you can arm yourself with a similar phrase if you find yourself feeling condemned because his blood was enough to make us right with God.

Luther says this he says when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell tell him this I admit I deserve death and hell what of it?

I know the one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf his name is Jesus son of God and where he is there I shall be also he's saying he has done enough the blood covers me and my sin and it rescues me yes I may still deserve it but it's been paid in full wow there's another part to the idea of the cup which I'm not going to go in detail but to share a cup for a Jewish person would be to share a sense of unity a sense of fellowship but really the cup is a symbol of destiny it's how the Bible talks about people's future it's how the Bible talks about sharing a future with someone and when we follow

[ 23 : 40 ] Jesus our life is hidden with him in God we join with him and as we share this bread and this wine we're saying I am with you because of your death I am with you in forgiveness and the Bible is pretty clear that we share suffering with him too but that doesn't mean life will be free of suffering it means that we're with him in suffering there is no judgment for us there is good life for us and we get to walk tall as we share life with him which is a really big symbol we haven't got time to talk about a great deal but in scripture the idea of destiny and shared kind of future together so as he shares his cup he is saying you're with me you share in my goodness okay finally can you imagine this if Jesus at the end of these verses had just said this he tells him he's basically hinting time and time again I'm gonna die I'm gonna be broken my blood will be poured out and then he says this truly I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine can you imagine after all that and being like oh you really are just going to die oh

I love the fact that that's not where it ends that he says this next bit which is so very important truly I tell you I'm not drinking again from the fruit of the vine until until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God he Jesus is pointing forwards and as we share this bread and wine together this is a very small meal looking forward to a very very good future Revelation 19 6-9 expresses it better than I ever could and we're not going to go into lots of detail I just want you to absorb the feeling of this future meal that Jesus knows is going to happen because I think the feel of it says much more than teaching into it in detail it says then I heard and this is a picture of the end of time really the big wedding feast to come that we get to join in with and that Jesus is looking forward to then I heard what sounded like a great multitude like the roar of rushing waters like loud peals of thunder feels a bit like Murrayfield or something if anyone's ever been to a really big kind of sporting like a big crowd sounds like some pretty crazy stuff and 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 fine linen bright and clean was given for her to wear standing for the righteous acts of God's holy people then the angel said to me write this blessed are

those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb and he added these are the true words of God this bread and this wine this small meal is looking forward to a great future that one day there will be the best of the best wedding parties in heaven as Jesus and his church are together and there's no more messed upness it's all good and it's all celebratory sin and death and dying and sadness all of those things have gone away the multitudes are gathered

Jesus is there in his new kingdom and you and I will be ready and perfect and whole and we were praising like mad if you've been to a wedding party or a number probably then imagine that but so much better there's no hangover the next morning the goodness just carries on he is good and we will be with him and all will be well this meal is future looking and says one day even if it's not now even when we experience trials and suffering one day everything will be really really good we will have a shared future with him you and I at this when we break bread and share wine together we're remembering how welcomed we are how he says come on in come and be with me and get to know Jesus that he provides for us that he says this meal is also a reminder that he's the God who provides in Jesus' brokenness and provides for us in every day that we don't have to fear separation or sin any longer because he's provided for that and the blood spilt that we're joined with him that we share a cup with him and we say I am with you because of what you've done Jesus and it's a looking forward meal that says one day one day all will be well and we are welcomed into that you and I are invited to share the goodness of God through Jesus' amazing work and radical acceptance and his death and his resurrection and I wanted to just give you a sense of the different flavors or the different kind of things going on as we break bread and share wine together and that's what we're going to do now we're going to share a family meal together little as it is but huge as it is in meaning and what

[ 29 : 27 ] Jesus is revealing to us and wants us to know as we take the bread and as we drink the wine together if you are someone who follows Jesus I would love for you to feel free to join in with that and it might be that you're visiting but you know that you love him and you're following him then do join in it is a family meal that is significant so if you're not following him I would let it pass you by and if you want to chat with me and know more about following him I would happily chat that through with you but if you put your trust in him join in with a family meal as you feel able to and we'd love to welcome you to that there is also a second chance if you're someone who has to nip out to go and do teas and coffees or anything like that we will do a mini breaking of bread and sharing wine together for our kids workers afterwards so if for some reason you need to dash out come back afterwards and you can join in then let's pause for a moment and then Luke's going to help lead us in this in 1

Corinthians chapter 11 Paul's writing to the church there and he says this that everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup and I guess examine means to pause to think and to let God speak into our lives again and just remind us of our sin but his goodness as we've been exploring today so should we just do that you might want to close your eyes and just pause let's pause to remember our weakness and his goodness father of our lord Jesus Christ we confess that we've sinned in thought and word and need we've not loved you with our whole heart we've not loved our neighbours as ourselves in your mercy forgive what we have been and help change what we are and lead us to what we one day will be that we may do justly love mercy and walk humbly with you our God Amen a couple of scriptures to help us the Bible says this in 1 Timothy this saying is true and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and in Lamentations it says because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail they are new every morning great is your faithfulness and I know four folks are going to come and help us distribute the bread and the wine and we would invite you to take hold of those and just wait and then we'll take them all together once we see that everyone's got the bread and technically grape juice so if you're one of those people come and help us distribute this

Scripture tells us that the Lord Jesus on the night that he was betrayed took bread and when he'd given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me invite you to take the bread just now in the same way after supper he took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes shall we drink the juice together let's pray

Father thank you for this sharing with you thank you for your great welcome you welcome us wow  
Lord thank you that you're a God who provides you provided for us that we might know you we  
might know you as the one who who lives with us and provides for us thank you that you're the God  
who who forgives our sin and who helps us to live for you and oh Father thank you so much for that  
promised future that we get to to look forward to the best banquet imaginable that one day we'll  
celebrate with you God you are so good to us and we thank you  
Amen