

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Holy Communion 1: Why Christians share bread and wine



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What does Holy Communion mean to you?



Understanding the information (15 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

A significant way of worshipping God, indeed for some Christians the central way of worshipping God, is through sacraments. We can't see God, or fully understand Him. Sacraments are a way in which, through physical and material realities which we can see and take part in, we can meet with God in worship. They make it possible for us to worship Him in ways we can understand and relate to. They also remind us that the world God made is good because He is pleased to use material things to be with us and among us.



Jesus would often link His words with actions that showed the reality of those words. For example, having told a paralysed man that his sins were forgiven (which shocked the religious leaders) he demonstrated it by telling him to take up his mat and walk. (Matthew 9:2-5) The action showed that the spiritual change was real.

Sacraments are a combination of word, sign and action. The classic definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward sign of an inward grace. It is more than a symbol (which links to something by having an association or quality similar to what it represents) because through a sacrament a person can meet with God in such a real way that they are changed and equipped as a disciple. There are many things that are "sacramental" in that they draw us towards God's presence. But when we worship together there are two main sacraments that focus us on what God is doing – baptism (the sacrament that reveals our covenant identity as God's children) and regularly sharing in the breaking of bread and wine.

Jesus had a habit of breaking bread and sharing it – two of his disciples at Emmaus recognised Him after His resurrection as He broke bread. But it was at His last supper with His disciples that He associated the bread and the wine with his own death and gave to them a significance that continues to shape us. On the night he was arrested, all four gospels say that Jesus was celebrating a Passover meal with His disciples. This was the annual meal in which Jewish people remembered how God had rescued them from slavery. Importantly, through bread and wine they remembered how the blood of a lamb (they ate lamb at the meal, and used bread and wine to act out the story) was used to mark their homes, and save them from death as it “passed over” them.

At the last Supper, Jesus shockingly reinterpreted the Passover meal to reveal how God’s purposes were being fulfilled in Him. The bread symbolised his body; the cup, his ‘poured out’ blood - pointing to what was going to happen to him on the cross. Jesus told His disciples that now, when they broke bread and drank wine, it would no longer be to remember being rescued from slavery in Egypt, but, through Him, being rescued from death. It was no longer to remember the defeat of their Egyptian enemies, but to remember that through His death God’s victory over evil was going to be achieved.

He told them, “Do this to remember me.” It is an active remembrance. In the Passover meal everyone who took part was imagining themselves to have personally being part of the rescue from Egypt. People would say you should tell your son that “I am celebrating Passover because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt.” Remembering like this is taking part in a living way in that same story of being rescued. It is similar to receiving a piece of wedding cake through the post if you were unable to be at the ceremony. As you eat it, you receive more than a reminder of the event – you are able to take part in the experience of it in a tangible way. So remembering Jesus in bread and wine is our way of receiving Christ’s victory in the present. It's a sacrament that carries with it the living reality of what it signifies.

The first Christians met regularly in the Temple at Jerusalem, but they also took part in the “breaking of bread”, probably weekly, in their homes. They would have a shared meal, during which they would pass round the bread (probably at the beginning) and the cup (probably at the end). Before passing round the bread and the wine they used a particular form of Jesus’ words and imitated Jesus’ actions remembered from the Last Supper. This is very early practice - the description of the meal from 1 Corinthians 11 was written before the Gospels.

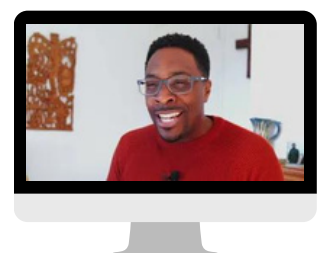
Discuss: Why does remembering Jesus’ death in this way - with physical things - matter so much? Why is it so effective in connecting us with God?

Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM1ukCSeNd8>

What struck you as important in the video?



Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Mark 14: 12-26 in which Jesus shares the Last Supper.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

God of glory,
you nourish us with your Word
who is the bread of life.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit,
that through us the light of your glory
may shine in all the world.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.



Amen



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