

Island ECC Positional Paper

Communion

The first Christians met together regularly in homes and meeting places to devote themselves “to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42). This act of breaking bread especially at the beginning of the Sabbath was common to all Jews, but this was something different. Jesus had given the bread and the wine, typical of Sabbath meals and especially the Passover meal, a unique and lasting meaning that would forever imprint itself Christian worship. The Gospels provide us with details of Jesus’ last Passover meal with his disciples, when he gave the bread and the cup such new and profound significance:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had 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.” Mark 14:23-25

At this occasion, Jesus transformed the Jewish Passover re-enactment of God’s redemptive act in the Exodus into a remembrance of the redemption of the human race and thus gave to every Christian the means to remember Christ’s sacrifice with these two common elements.

From earliest times, the term used by Christians to denote this important last supper of Jesus is eucharistia, which means “thanksgiving.” This established one of the central meanings of this symbolic meal of bread and cup – a celebration and thanksgiving to God for our redemption through the obedient sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the promise of eternal life through his resurrection. It is clear from the accounts of the early church that this form of “thanksgiving” was practiced regularly and became a part of worship. As this practice evolved through the developing church, it became understood as a sacrament, a practice instituted by Christ himself, and is known today in various denominations and congregations by various names –Eucharist, the Mass, the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, or simply Communion.

The Practice of Communion

The way communion is practiced in churches will vary between denominations and local congregations. At Island ECC, we hold that participating in communion is a central practice of faith for all Christians and that communion is, therefore, open to all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and have put their trust in Him. Individuals do not need to be a member of Island ECC, a regular attendee, or be baptised in order to participate in communion. Communion is to be celebrated on a continual and regular basis and we typically share communion together on a monthly basis in our Sunday services. In addition, communion may take place in special group settings.

The Meaning of Communion, the Lord’s Supper

Communion is a rich occasion that serves in significant ways within the church. It reminds us of Christ’s sacrifice; declares the new covenant found in Christ; and celebrates the body of Christ with brothers and sisters united together in community. Communion provides time for personal reflection and worship and proclaims that the church looks forward to Christ’s return. Let’s look at each of these:

A Symbol of Sacrifice

Communion has its origins in the Passover meal, which commemorates how God redeemed Israel from the slavery of the Egyptians. At the first Passover (Exodus 12), the Israelites were instructed to place the blood of a lamb on their doorways to signal for the LORD to “pass over” the home and thereby redeem the firstborn from death. The culmination of the Exodus reveals God’s plan for the redemption of all mankind in Jesus the Messiah as the sacrificial Lamb whose blood was poured out for us on the cross, allowing the penalty of death for our rebellious nature to pass over us in grace and forgiveness. In communion, the simple meal of remembrance, the bread and cup are symbols of Christ’s body and blood and engage our heart, mind, soul and body to re-enact and give thanks for the story of God’s gracious salvation in Christ. As we share this communion together the presence of our Lord Jesus’ is with us in powerful, symbolic, and very real ways.



The New Covenant

Communion is a celebration of the new covenant we have in Christ: Jesus gave the cup particular significance in the Passover meal “this is my blood of the new covenant.” The old covenant was based on adherence to the Law and to the animal sacrifices offered by the priests for the forgiveness of sins. Under the old covenant, the people would look back to the Passover deliverance and forward to a time when God would redeem His people. Jesus declared that the time and the old covenant is fulfilled in him and that He is the sacrifice for mankind once and for all. The cup now stands for this new personal, gracious covenant that allows all people who follow Christ to do so with confidence that the time and demands of old covenant are over.

The Context of Community

Communion is a time of recognising the Body of Christ (the universal church) to which we belong. The bread symbolises the body of Jesus, who took on humanity and died for us on the cross. In 1 Corinthians, Paul asserts that this metaphor pertains to the church, gathering together as the Body of Christ. Every part is important (1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 12:12-30). Communion is a wonderful occasion to treasure the special privilege of being adopted together into God’s great family with Christ as our head. Jesus broke down the walls of division and made us one in Him, and communion celebrates this fact.

Worshipful Reflection

Communion is further an occasion for personal reflection. Paul indicates that we should examine ourselves prior to taking the bread and the cup (1 Corinthians 11:28). When taking Communion, our personal experience may be deeper and richer if we reflect on the following things:

- Self-examination – honestly looking over your current life and walking with God.
- Confession – confess any sins to your Lord submitting to the gracious conviction of the Holy Spirit.
- Recommitment to God – dedicate your life, work, and family to faithfulness and service to God.
- Reconciliation – review your relationships; being willing to address any problem you may be having with another and being willing to be reconciled with others.

Christ’s Return

Lastly, communion is also a proclamation of the Gospel, a statement of faith in salvation through Christ and the Lord’s return. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). In celebrating communion, we look backward in time to remember what Jesus has done for us in His death and resurrection, and in God’s inestimable love for us. In communion, we also look forward in time to declare our faith – we confess that Jesus will one day return to us. He will come back, and once again He will eat the bread and drink the cup together with us (Luke 22:18).