

Resolved
Communion Sunday
1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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Resolved New Year Communion

What song do people sing on New Year's Eve? "Auld Lang Syne." Do you know what it's about? It's the song that all of us can sing the first couple of lines, but then we have to start humming, right? The song comes from a poem written by Robert Burns in 1788 in old Scottish language, and set to the tune of a traditional folk song. The original tune was probably a much faster rhythm than the way we sing it, so according to research, it would have been a "sprightly dance" instead of our melancholy version.

The title may be translated into English literally as "old long since", or in more common vernacular, "long long ago", "days gone by" or "old times". That's "Auld lang syne."¹

Here is the original poem, translated into English:

Should *old* acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Should *old* acquaintance be forgot,
and *old* lang syne (old times)?

CHORUS:
For (old times) auld lang syne, my
dear,
for (old times) auld lang syne,
we'll take a cup of kindness yet,
for (old times) auld lang syne.

And surely you'll *buy* your pint *cup*!
and surely I'll *buy* mine!
And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
for (old times) auld lang syne.

We *two have* run about the *slopes*,
and *picked* the *daisies* fine;
But we've wandered *many* a weary *foot*,
since (old times) auld lang syne.

We *two have paddled* in the *stream*,
from morning sun till dine;
But seas between us *broad have roared*
since (old times) auld lang syne.

And there's a hand my trusty *friend*!
And *give me* a hand o' thine!
And we'll *take* a right *good-will drink*,
for (old times) auld lang syne.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auld_Lang_Syne

I don't know if you gathered from the lyrics, but *Auld Lang Syne* is a bar tune; it honors the past, the shared experiences of community among friends, and the song encourages having a toast, or sharing a drink, to recognize the great things that they've shared together, and to affirm what is ahead for them.

I'm not here to promote bar tunes, but I can appreciate the *intent* of the song, because recognizing the past and moving into the future is what we are going to do together today as we resolve ourselves to Christ and each other by sharing communion at the Lord's table. We will share a cup, alright, but it will be the cup of a new covenant, poured out for our forgiveness. We will share it together. In this act, individually and *especially* as a church we will resolve to commit ourselves to Jesus and his leading.

The fact is, we cannot experience true communion outside of the context of community; communion is a celebration of our unity as a Christian community, as we find it in Christ. One of the reasons we will all hold the elements and then consume them at the same time is because it is a communal act of resolution.

So before we share in communion together, I want to take a few moments to remind us of the significance of what we are about to do.

Do you know what the Catholic Church calls their communion or eucharist service? *Mass*. "Mass" comes from the same root word of "mission" which is *missa*. The word means "to send out." Isn't it interesting that down through the ages, the church's word to describe the *gathering together* for communion means "*to be sent out*"! So when the mass is over, do you know what they do? They "dismiss," or "de-mass." To be dismissed is to be sent out to carry out the mission. So there is a rhythm of mass and "demass" (or dis-miss-al), a gathering and a sending.² We gather together and then we are sent out on mission.

Today we are going to participate in another key part of what it means to be the Church – the people of Christ "gathered," or "massed," in order to better be the people of Christ sent out or "de-massed; dismissed." We will do that by sharing together in communion.

Now, before we go further, I want to tell you that I've made some assumptions about you. I know that's dangerous sometimes, but I think you will understand. I have assumed that you are here because you have some interest in God and spiritual things. I realize that peppered among us is the occasional person that is only here because you were dragged here by your parents or your spouse. But for the most part, I think it's safe to say that for most of us, you are here to learn about Jesus and to grow in your relationship with him, and to do it with a group of people who also want to do the same thing. So let me tell you, whether you're here of your own interest or not, you've picked a good day to be here, because you will get a front row seat to see what we are all about.

And because of my assumption about you, I am operating off the basis that you have an interest in what God has told us in his Word. So for a few minutes, I want to share God's Word with you, and then we are going to practice what it says as we experience God's presence, right here, in a profound way – through sharing together at the Lord's Table.

² Much of this information comes from "Ecclesiology: The Church as Communion and Mission," by Dr. Morris Pelzel.

I'd like us to learn some things together about this act of communion, which is older than the history of the Christian church itself (Remember that what was the Passover feast, celebrated for centuries by the Jews, was the setting for Jesus' last supper with his disciples before he was arrested and crucified and then rose from the dead. *That* was the first communion service, and it was fifty days *after* that, on the day of Pentecost, the Church was born. That means that the very first communion took place about a month and a half before the Spirit birthed the Christian Church). Let's learn today from Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth, which lists the earliest known liturgical statements about the Lord's Supper. Would you help me honor God's Word by standing with me as it's read and declared:

"But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have God's approval will be recognized!

When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this!

For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.' In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.' For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.

So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.

But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord's Supper, wait for each other. If you are really hungry, eat at home so you won't bring judgment upon yourselves when you meet together." (1 Corinthians 11:17-34, nlt)

You can be seated. This is the Word of God for the people of God – thanks be to God! Now, I know that's a long passage, but I want us to see just a few very important things that this tells us about what we are going to do together today.

First, I want you to see the importance of...

1. Unity.

(1 Corinthians 11:17-22)

Paul starts off this passage telling the church, "I have no praise for you..." Paul began chapter 11 by praising them for how they had held to the traditions that had been passed on to them. But now, when it comes to keeping the tradition of the Lord's Supper, he can't praise them at all. In fact, he says that their gathering together actually does more harm than good. Have you ever been in a church whose gatherings do more harm than good? Anytime there is disunity in the body, it doesn't do anyone any good and in fact causes even more harm. One of the most frequent complaints I hear from unbelievers about Christians is that we are too judgmental toward others and that we fight with each other. I'll admit that sometimes non-Christians are looking for an excuse to blame the church for things, but in this case it's not those outside the church that are making the observation – it's the Apostle Paul himself accusing the church in Corinth of disunity. Now, the church in Corinth met in one home, and it likely wasn't a very big church – probably about 40 or 50 people. Forty or fifty people who are not unified, especially over communion. Unity is vital no matter the size of the church. The larger the church, the harder we need to work to maintain our unity. Amen?

For a little more background, it's worth noting that their communion gathering was different than ours. The early church apparently ate it regularly, possibly even every week. We know they came together "on the Lord's Day," which is Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:2).

A second difference between our communion and theirs, is that theirs was a full meal rather than a small ceremony in a worship service. So the Lord's Supper was like a "potluck dinner" that the early Christians had regularly in remembrance of Christ's death."³

In addition, it helps to know that their culture made a big deal about distinguishing between the "haves" and the "have nots" and you wanted to be in the "haves"! So there was a lot of "positioning" among themselves, making sure everyone else knew how important they are. So the people who thought they were more important would crowd into line to get the really good food, and then the poorer people among them would have to pick through the leftovers. Those who thought they were "better" than others would push and shove their way to the front of the line and take all the Kentucky Fried Chicken and potato casserole, which meant the poor, weak, and less fortunate were left with a jello mold with carrot slices in it. Paul is pointing out that they should have been coming together as *common sinners* all needing the salvation that the eucharist meal symbolized and *serving each other*, but instead they used it as an opportunity to put themselves first and create

³ Kenneth Schenck, *1 & 2 Corinthians: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006), 166–167.

division. Rather than affirm their unity, it highlighted their bad attitudes and created division.

Years ago when I was a youth pastor at a large church, I was helping serve communion. I was assigned to the section where most of the senior saints would sit. Back then, we used these large brass platters with these containers that had holes in them, and there were little plastic cups in each hole, with juice that had been poured in them. They weren't covered like ours are today.

My job was to hand the platter to the person closest to the aisle, and the people would take one and pass the platter down the aisle, until the usher on the other side got it and passed it to the aisle behind them, I'd receive it and repeat it all the way back. We were on the second row, so we'd just started, and the platter was full.

I handed the platter to the elderly person; she took a cup and passed it on. When it got to the third person – Mildred, I could see that the platter was kind of heavy for her, and her entire body started to lean away from me from the weight of it. It was like it happened in slow motion...."noooooo!" I tried to reach over the other two people, but Mildred kept falling away from me and sure enough – she dropped the entire platter on the lap of her neighbor. Mildred was mortified, and I felt so bad for her and her neighbor. But instead of showing compassion, her neighbor shouted, "Mildred, you idiot!" Poor Mildred just wanted to slink under the pew, and might have if it wasn't covered in grape juice. I sprinted to the kitchen and got towels and we helped clean them up and got things going again.

Unfortunately, that act of communion didn't affirm unity; it brought out a bad attitude in Mildred's neighbor. That's similar to what Paul was saying – their communion pointed out their disunity, so he's saying that communion ought to be approached in our *unity* and even *enhance our unity* – because communion is about our unity in Christ. Earlier, in chapter 10, Paul describes communion this way:

"When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body." (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, nlt)

And do you see that word, "sharing"? That is a very important word in the original Greek language: *koinonia*. The word means "fellowship," "sharing together," "partner," "partnering together," "generous toward each other," "suffering with each other" – it's all about being united *together*. Even our word "communion" is a combination of two English words, "common" and "union." There isn't *anything* about communion that is divisive. More than that, there isn't anything about communion that is private or individual. I have no idea when, along the way, we began to think of communion as a personal thing between an individual and the Lord, so that even when we do this in worship, we still think of it as a room full of individual acts. Communion is not supposed to be an individual thing. It is literally impossible, by definition, for this to be communion by yourself. That's why we eat it together in unity: it's something we do *together* with Christ who is here, present among us as we share.

It's called *communion*, not *individunion*.

Then the next part of Paul's passage teaches us...

2. Liturgy

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

You might not be familiar with that word, but it is the word to describe a repeatable *form* or *way* of worship, particularly when it comes to communion. Another word for liturgy is "sacrament," or "sacred moment." What Paul is saying next in that passage we read at the beginning is that the Lord's Supper or Communion is a worshipful and sacred act. His description of the Lord's Supper is important; let me refresh us. Listen again to what Paul said:

"For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.' In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.' For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Paul's description here is the earliest written description of the liturgy of the Lord's Supper. Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth was written in the mid-fifties, AD – before even the Gospels were written down. That's how important Communion was, and is to worship. That's how sacred the act is – it's been a part of churches and worship since the before the New Testament was completely compiled.

It's probably important here to say something about this sacred act: we believe that God is present in and among us in the liturgy as we take and eat the elements. We believe that God moves spiritually through these elements with his love and grace to work in our church as we come together. John Wesley, a great scholar and leader in our faith, called communion a "means of grace." By that he meant that through the elements and practice of communion God can infuse his grace, as we use it to acknowledge that Jesus shed his blood and gave his body for us. In Jesus' words, we "eat his flesh and drink his blood".

Jesus said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them." (John 6:56, niv)

...thus ingesting our belief in who He is and what he did for us – that as we do that, God gives grace, draws us into his grace, feeds and fills us with his grace and grows us in grace. Does that make sense? Communion really is a sacred act, a sacred moment.

That's why Paul then challenges the church to approach communion with great personal...

3. Scrutiny.

(1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

Paul is saying that because they were not approaching communion in unity, and because it is such a vital element of worship that involves the very presence of God himself, then before they actually shared it together, they ought to examine themselves to make sure they were approaching it with the right heart and mind. Remember earlier that I said communion is not an individual thing? Well, that's true, but there *is* an individual preparation *before* communion, and this is it. Before you come to the table *together*, you should take some time *alone* to make sure you are coming with the right attitude and understanding.

There should be no question whether or not Jesus is present among us as we share in these elements. Instead, the question is, in what way are *we* present to Jesus as we take these elements?⁴

That's why we say that communion is open to anyone – you do not have to be a member of our church, but you do need to prepare yourself. Now, if you are not a follower of Jesus, this won't really mean anything to you; it's just stale bread and warm juice. But if you approach it with a desire to know God, you are welcome to join us, because God can speak to you through it! He can reveal his grace to you as you participate in the spiritual reality of common union with Christ.

May we come together, and as we do, remember what Jesus has done for us. Paul said earlier in 1 Corinthians 10:

“Though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body.” (1 Corinthians 10:17, nlt)

Ushers, would you please begin to serve us. Remember, you don't have to be a member of this church to participate with us. Again, while we are being served, please prepare yourself, and hold on to the elements until we take them together.

The Communion Supper, instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is a sacrament, which proclaims His life, His sufferings, His sacrificial death, and resurrection, and the hope of His coming again. It shows forth the Lord's death until His return.

The Supper is a means of grace in which Christ is present by the Spirit. It is to be received in reverent appreciation and gratefulness for the work of Christ.

All those who are truly repentant, forsaking their sins, and believing in Christ for salvation are invited to participate in the death and resurrection of Christ. We come to the table that we may be renewed in life and salvation and be made one by the Spirit.

In unity with the Church, we confess our faith (please repeat after me): Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. And so we pray:

Holy God, we gather at this, your table, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who by your Spirit was anointed to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, set at liberty those who are oppressed. Christ healed the sick, fed the hungry, ate with sinners, and established the new covenant for forgiveness of sins. We live in the hope of His coming again.

⁴ Gordon Mikoski, "Bringing the Body to the Table," *Theology Today* (October, 2010), pp. 24-25

We have gathered as the Body of Christ to offer ourselves to you in praise and thanksgiving. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these your gifts. Make them by the power of your Spirit to be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the Body of Christ, redeemed by His blood.

By your Spirit make us one in Christ, one with each other, and one in the ministry of Christ to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, He took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, gave it to His disciples, and said: "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me." *You may take the bread.*

Likewise, when the supper was over, He took the cup, gave thanks, gave it to His disciples, and said: "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me." *You may drink the cup.*

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let's pray the prayer that Jesus taught us. It will be on the screen if you are not familiar with it:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one."

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.
(Matthew 6:9-13, niv)

Please stand. Let me ask you something: If I were to ask you what you think is the *most* significant symbol of Christ, what would you say? It's not the cross. The cross is significant, but not the *most*. It's not the bread and the cup. Communion is a significant symbol of Christ, but it's not the *most*. It is *US*. *We* are the Church – the very body of Christ himself. We are his body because of what he did on the cross, but the cross is just wood – it is not a living representation of Christ. We are united in worship as we share together in communion and take these elements, but they are not a living representation of Christ; they are bread and juice. *WE* are the body of Christ. *WE* are the visible image of the life of Christ in this world.

So we have gathered together – we have *massed*, and now it is time to be sent out – to be *de-massed*; *sent out – dismissed to go and be Christ in your world.*

Pastor Div Benediction:

From Romans 15:5-6 –

May God who gives patience, steadiness, and encouragement help you to live in complete harmony with each other—each with the attitude of Christ toward the other. And then all of us can praise the Lord together with one voice, giving glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (tlb)