

## The Lord's Supper

On my study wall there's a photo of a fifteen year old sitting in a clump of bushes sketching with great concentration – working on his school certificate art folio. It is a photo of our son, Lindsay. He died the following year. It's near forty years, but it still stops me in my tracks.

It brings back a whole cluster of happenings – painful and warm, bitter/sweet. Shock, then the way the grace of the Holy Spirit brought a young lad's faith into blossom, into spiritual maturity that could only be gift. I see the quiet confidence which attracted his year 12 classmates to visit our home day after day.

I remember his growing appreciation of the Psalms. The favourite - Psalm 46 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of need."

His aside – "These guys knew all about it."

When I see the photo, I'm there. It's current. No effort of memory. When I look at that picture my mood, whatever it has been, is transformed – to reflective. To a fresh awareness of the vast love of God - who holds me, and all those I love, in the palm of his hands, under the shelter of his wings – His is a love that will never let me go.

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The night he was betrayed Jesus said, **remember** -

**"Do this in remembrance of me."**

When we come to take part in the Lord's Supper we're back in the Upper Room with Jesus and the twelve - the night he was betrayed.

Our Lord knew that his time had come, that the confrontation with the forces of evil was reaching its climax – so he gave his friends something that would bless them for all time.

Not a doctrine

A meal.

They had eaten- together – and with others so often. It was their way. Jesus was known for it. Accused by those who wanted to discredit Him. "Eats and drinks with publicans and sinners."

He spoke so much about God's new kingdom, called it a banquet. Where invitations would go to all the respectables. If they make excuses, scouts will go to bring in the poor and disabled, - the unlikelies. And still there will be room.

You don't have to be a scholar to stay close to Jesus. You don't have to have Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic to know him. You don't even have to be good. Neither is fellowship with Jesus limited to those who lived in first century Palestine.

It's gift to all in any age, who put their trust in him. He's with us as he promised he would be – now - Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Here today in this room.

*"The Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, this is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." 1 Cor.11:24f*

### **"In remembrance of me".**

There's something special about the way the bible speaks of memory, God's, memory. It's different from yours and mine.

For you and me memory has to do with our calling to mind past events – we remember our childhood, we remember a special holiday.

It may be a joyful memory, it may be a bitter-sweet memory.

"Do this in remembrance of me" - is much, much more than looking at a photograph - looking back at the cross.

It's an acknowledgment of the power and transforming impact of that event in the now.

The way God remembers, past and present are not separated.

Take for example how –

God remembered Noah and delivered him from the flood. Gen.8:1

God remembered Rachel and allowed her to have children. Gen.30:22

God hadn't in any way forgotten them. His care for them was endless

God's presence is not just a memory. He was there, and he is here.

So, moving to the N.T. the writer to the Hebrews can confidently say –

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Heb.13:8))

Almost beyond our comprehension?

There's always more to be found when celebrating The Lord's Supper.

**Have you been to a wedding lately?** As an invited guest stayed for the breakfast? You arrange your calendar to be there. Priority . You'll travel. There because you received an invitation - because you're part of the family, sharing in the joy of the occasion. There's food, refreshments – joy, laughter – catching up with old friends, making new ones. Celebration!

When we come to Communion, we're here to celebrate! To celebrate what God has done in the past, what he is doing right now today with us and with the others, and what he has in store for the future.

Does your experience go back to entering any Presbyterian church on communion Sunday, **when what hit you from the door was a vast expanse of white?** Starched white clothes stretching along the back of every pew. A continuation of the cloth on the communion table – that's the idea of it. It took my breath away to enter the Kohi church last year and see it still happening - all that white.

Impracticable? Perhaps. But what a statement!

**To welcome the King of Kings. -**

And I'm invited. You are too. Praise God!

Don't let anything get in the way. Don't miss out. Oh no!

**While he was still active our friend Peter Bisset gave me a little book. It has** extracts from a soldier's letters home. In 1940 Percy Titchener left his theological studies at Knox College, Dunedin, and enlisted as a regular soldier. He felt called to be alongside his contemporaries who were in the thick of it. - being with them as a combat soldier, sharing their hardships and dangers, he would be able to offer Christian friendship.

In one of his last letters dated July 1941, he wrote from Egypt –

"There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that **the celebration of Holy Communion is the most significant part of our Christian life...**there is nowhere else one finds the strength to carry on, the sense of meeting with God in Christ"

**So I ask myself the question -**

Have we been taking full advantage of this essential resource for Christian living?

It is so easy to get stuck in our own way of doing things.

**Sometimes it takes members of other Christian fellowships to remind us of what we may have been overlooking.**

When I was first introduced to hospital ministry we offered **bedside communions**. Before the wards got busy, round 6am, all robed up, we would circulate, spending a few minutes with each communicant. The night staff would have screened the bed, cleared the locker, put a white cloth on it. It was the Anglicans who asked for communion. Presbyterians often seemed surprised at the idea; - they were likely though, to have a bible close at hand. At a Pastoral Care breakfast last year the Rev Bob Driver shared how people with severe dementia at Caughey- Preston become alert with the service of bread and wine.

**What a blessing to have seen Presbyterian churches move from only four celebrations a year to twelve.** Some even offer a short celebration before every service.

Because Communion is central. Communion is indispensable food for Christians.

**Communion is forever going to be way beyond description - in words.** Yes it is real, and tangible,. It's a meal.

**A meal overlaid, filled full, with divine richness,- completely dependent on the living, moving, empowering Spirit of God.**

We always pray for the Holy Spirit to move through the celebration – To bless the elements of bread and wine – to do his work of glorifying Christ.

Except in extraordinary circumstances communion is celebrated in a **visible fellowship of Christian believers** – a fellowship of those who are of one heart and one mind. It was sometimes called the “love feast”.

If this is not the case, and there is disunity, hurt, un-forgiveness then hear the Lord - Mat.5:23/24

*“If you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”*

And St Paul speaks of “examining yourself” before you come to the table.

**In communion we look back.**

**Jesus and his disciples were meeting for Passover, that night on which he was betrayed.**

Celebrating deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The sacrifice of a lamb without blemish. The mark on the lintel of the door so that the angel of death would pass-over.

Our looking back includes that deliverance but that, caught up and fulfilled in the deliverance Christ has brought through his death.

His setting men and women free from the bondage of sin and death.

**Now the Passover lamb has been replaced by the spotless Lamb of God.**

*1 Cor.5:7 Christ our Pascal Lamb has been sacrificed for us.*

**Looking *back* AND looking forward – to the end of the age.**

To that great day when we shall by his grace gather around the throne of God. At that great banquet in the kingdom of heaven. Where there will be no more tears, no more partings, - joy, celebration. Home with our loving Heavenly Father.

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**So now – we are celebrating somewhere at a midway point – between that meal where Jesus celebrated in the upper room – and that gathering on the Last Day in the new, Kingdom.**

We meet with hope, anticipation, joy. –

In communion the Holy Spirit fuses these times - past, present and future.

We receive the bread and wine in the radiant prospect of that final redemption Yet we do so still in the shadow of the cross. – Jesus' cross, our cross as we take up cross and follow him.

**There's an urgency about what we are doing today.** Remember how the Israelites were told to celebrate Passover. With their sandals on – boots and full kit. Ready for the call that might come any moment. Seize the moment. Respond to Christ's call now.

In one of the last scenes in the film, **Of God's and Men** (a true story) we are shown a group of catholic monks in Algeria, gathered for what was to be their last communion. That night the monastery would be attacked and they would, all but one, who managed to hide, be taken out to their death. Despite earlier threats, and the authorities pressing them to leave, they'd stayed on at their mission.

Now we see them, as the evening drew in, having reached agreement following strong debate as to whether to go or stay, we see them gathered around the Holy Table. Unhurried, with love and quiet acceptance, they passed the bread and the wine. They said the words. Peace, radiance. They were already experiencing the peace of the kingdom of God. Glory, glory through the cross. United with Christ in his dying and rising.

They had come to understand they were called to follow their Lord, even if it lead to death. They had a quiet joy. Joy, because of their communion with their risen Lord – He who had passed through death into life.

For them it was true - the stronger the shadow - the brighter the radiance.

Let us come to the Table and share in the feast.

O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the one who trusts in him.