

A String of Pearls

Sourcesheet 6: Eucharist

Giving thanks is a central feature of worship throughout the Bible. The history of the relationship between God and the world (creation) in the Old Testament includes a series of 'acts of God' for which people expressed their thanks. Most prominently the Passover of course but also the rescue of Noah and family, Jacob's meeting with God – right up to the intertestamental story of Hannukah. An example of thanksgiving is found in 2 Chronicles...

...all the levitical singers ... arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with one hundred twenty priests who were trumpeters. It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,"

(2 Chronicles 5: 11-13)

Thanksgiving is not restricted to stories from the ancient past, there is much in our present lives that we can be thankful for. On some occasions we find opportunities for people to share stories of what they are thankful for.

In our journey through the service, we have come to the communion or eucharist. 'Eucharist' is a Greek word and *means* thanksgiving. It is still used in modern Greek to say thank you, though the pronunciation is not quite the same.

This passage from 1 Corinthians is the oldest account of the Lord's Supper we have – 1 Corinthians was written before any of the gospels.

... the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed 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." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(1 Corinthians 11: 23-26)

The Eucharist combines words and actions, Paul seems to be suggesting that the eating and drinking themselves proclaim '...the Lord's death...'. This combination of words and actions has been seen before in the service, the offertory is an action, as is reading from the lectern and the sharing of the Peace. However, the actions in the Eucharist are more strongly associated with the purpose of remembering and thanking. A famous expression of the idea of the importance of actions was made by Gregory Dix who identified four actions of the Eucharist: taking, giving thanks (blessing), breaking and sharing. We can look at other places in the gospels to find these actions, such as Jesus' actions at the feeding of the five thousand.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

(Matt 14: 15-21 (Mk 6: 30-44, Lk 9: 12-17, Jn 6: 1-14))

The Eucharist is a sacrament, an 'outward sign of an inward grace' as St Augustine said. The bread and the wine are signs in themselves but so is the way in which they are blessed and shared. Look at the story of the Emmaus walk in Luke

The Lord's Prayer comes between the Eucharistic prayer and the breaking of the bread. This is not what happens in the Book of Common Prayer Communion.

The Lord's prayer is found in Matthew and Luke. Neither version is quite like the one that we use in our service...

The Lord's Prayer is not just a way of praying it is a prayer in itself which summarises many of the essential features of the Christian life such as an intimate relationship with God, supplication for our material and spiritual need, and our responsibilities towards each other, the kingdom and the world.

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
Do not bring us to the time of trial,
But rescue us from the evil one.
(Matthew 6:9-13)*

*Father, hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
For we ourselves forgive
Everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to
The time of trial.
(Luke 11:2-4)*

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Talksheet 5 —Eucharist

Matthew 26:17-30

6

WELCOME – Breaking the ice (Aim for 10 mins)

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,

To start the session read Psalm 100 together. After a moments' stillness read it again and think especially of the line—

'Give thanks to him, bless his name.'

Why should we give thanks to God?

How do we *bless* God's name?

WORD – Applying the truth (Aim for 45 mins)

In Matthew 26 the hostility that began early in Jesus' ministry approaches a violent end. Yet although he awaits his arrest and crucifixion, he is magnificently in control. He plans the last meal. He knows who will betray him. He offers himself as a sacrifice. When we – like Jesus – are doing the Father's will, even the inevitabilities of sin, suffering and death lose their power to imprison us. Here the victim is the one who is most free! **Read Matthew 26:17-30**

1. Classical art and modern communications services have probably influenced your picture of this event. Now that you have the text fresh in your mind, how would you describe the setting of this passage?

2. What was the significance of the "Passover" (v.17; see Exodus 12:1-29)?

3. What irony do you see in the disciples making preparation for Jesus to eat the Passover (v. 17; see Mark 14:12; 1 Corinthians 5:7)?

4. Jesus is often portrayed as a wonderful teacher but an ultimately helpless martyr. What words and acts show him to be very much in control (vv. 18-25; see also Mark 14:13-16)?

How did he show extraordinary knowledge and insight?

5. Describe what happened when Jesus told the disciples that one of them would betray him (v.22).

6. Do you ever wonder if you are going to betray Jesus – or if you will rise up to meet the crisis? Explain.

7. What does verse 24 tell us about God's will and human responsibility?

8. What does the Lord's Supper teach us about the meaning of Jesus' death (vv.26 – 29)?

9. What can we infer from the Lord's Supper about the kind of response we need to make in order to benefit from his death?

10. It is a wonderful privilege to be able to re-create this event with other believers. When have you found the Lord's Supper particularly meaningful?

What are the particular elements that make it meaningful?

11. How can sharing the Lord's Supper together make us ready to face the crises of life?

12. How is the spiritual practice of Holy Communion similar to or different from the ways of the world?
Eg Remembrance Sunday

13. How can we use the spiritual practice of remembering in our ordinary everyday, Monday to Saturday lives?

WITNESS – Reaching out to others

(Aim for 20 – 30 minutes)

Giving Thanks to God

Thank God for what Holy Communion means to you.

Praying for one another

Ask everyone to share something they would like prayer for.

Then go round the room and pray for the person to your right,

Praying for those who don't yet know God

How is your friendship with your five going?