

## 1 Cor 10.16-17: LET'S BREAK BREAD

[Chelmsford 14 March 2010]

“To believe God is to worship God”, declared Martin Luther.

Alas, sometimes we have reduced the worship of God to a banality. The American author John MacArthur has written: “*Worship services in many churches today are like a merry-go-round. You drop a token in the collection box; it’s good for the ride. There’s music and lots of motion up and down. The ride is carefully timed and seldom varies in length. Lots of good feelings are generated, and it is the one ride you can be sure will never be the least bit threatening or challenging. But though you spend the whole time feeling as if you’re moving forward, you get off exactly where you got on*”.

Wow – what a travesty – and yet so true.

Worship should never leave us where we are – but should inspire us to go out and serve the Lord all the more.

The term ‘worship’ is derived from an Anglo-Saxon word, ‘worthship’.

In worship we acknowledge God’s supreme worth – we give him the glory as we celebrate who he is and what he has done.

Every service begins with worship – but this morning’s service will also climax with worship. For this morning we shall be celebrating the Lord’s Supper – we shall focus on God’s love for us in Jesus.

And to help us focus on his love Jesus has told us to break bread and drink wine.

The older I get the more I tire of sermons. “*Words, words, words*”, said Eliza Doolittle, “*I am sick of words*”. And let’s face it some sermons are incredibly wordy. But I never tire of the Lord’s Supper – for there we focus on the Word made flesh, we focus on God’s great declaration of love in Jesus. *‘Hallelujah! What a Saviour!’*

But what precisely are we doing when we eat bread and drink wine? For many people this central rite of the Christian faith is a mystery: it’s all “*hocus pocus*”.

This Latin phrase ‘*hocus pocus*’ is actually a Protestant skit on the RC mass.

“*Hoc est corpus meum*” are the Latin words for the words of Jesus ‘**This is my body**’. When we hear those words we hear Jesus saying ‘This represents my body’ – the broken bread symbolizes the broken body of Jesus.

But RCs believe that the bread actually becomes the body of Jesus – that in essence is the doctrine of transubstantiation. Nonsense, said Protestants of old: you might just as well say “*Hoc est porcus*” i.e. this is the pig – it’s all “*hocus pocus*”.

Sadly, for many Christians today the Lord’s Supper is still a bit of ‘hocus pocus’.

They eat bread and drink wine, but what it is all about, they have scarcely a clue.

This morning I want to help deepen your understanding of the Lord’s Supper.

On the basis of two verses from 1 Cor 10, I want to suggest that when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we thank God for Jesus; we share afresh in the death of Christ; and we commit ourselves afresh to one another.

## 1. WE THANK GOD FOR JESUS

That's what Paul says here in 1 Cor 10.16: "**We give thanks to God**".

We celebrate God's goodness to us in Jesus.

As we take bread and drink wine we don't confess our sins (hopefully we've done that earlier in the service) – we don't pray for ourselves and for others (we will do that later in the service) – we thank God.

That's what it says in my order of service.

'Words of institution – followed by a *Prayer of Thanksgiving* led by a deacon'.

Then as the bread and wine are served, we all quietly praise God in our hearts.

Paul in 1 Cor 11 writes of how "**the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, [and] broke it**".

Jesus gave thanks, we give thanks.

Let me give you a short Greek lesson: the Greek word used for thanking God in 1 Cor 11 as also in the Gospel accounts is the word '*eucharisteo*' – from which our English word 'Eucharist' is derived.

The Eucharist – that is the word that many Anglicans today like to use for the Lord's Supper. It means 'thanksgiving'.

When we eat bread and wine we thank God.

Interestingly in 1 Cor 10 Paul uses a different word for thanking God.

When he says "**the cup for which we give thanks to God**", he uses the Greek word "*eulogeo*", from which we get our word "eulogy".

A eulogy literally means an occasion for speaking good words – for speaking well of a person – for praising a person's achievements.

That's the word we find here in 1 Cor 10.

When we eat bread and drink wine we 'eulogise' God.

Why does Paul use this particular word – because the Passover cup over which Jesus initially thanked God was known as '*the cup of blessing*', i.e. 'the cup of eulogy'.

The GNB speaks of the "**cup for which we give thanks to God**".

But the NRSV has the more literal translation: "**The cup of blessing that we bless**".

Remember, the Last Supper, at which Jesus instituted what we call the Lord's Supper or the Anglicans call the Eucharist, was a Passover Supper.

In the context of the Passover cup there were four occasions when a special cup was passed around the table – and each cup had a special name.

1. *The cup of consecration* – the 1<sup>st</sup> cup marked the beginning of the meal when everybody tucked into the starters, viz. green herbs & bitter herbs served with a bitter puree
2. *The cup of proclamation* – was drunk after the head of the family had told the story of God saving his people from their enemies. That was followed by a grace said as the head of the family broke bread.
3. *The cup of blessing* – when everybody had finished eating the roast lamb, there was a second grace which was spoken over this cup
4. *The cup of praising* – marked the end of the meal – our equivalent of passing the port or finishing up with coffee!

Precisely because the Apostle Paul uses the technical term ‘**the cup of blessing**’ (*poterion tes eulogias*), we know at what stage Jesus took a cup and said “**This cup is God’s new covenant, sealed with my blood**”.

Jesus did this just after they had eaten the main course.

He had broken bread and said “**This is my body which is for you**”, just before the main course – at the point at which grace was said.

It was at the point of the second grace that he said “**This cup is God’s new covenant**”

Jesus took the ‘**cup of blessing**’.

Do notice that he did not bless the cup. No Jew would have done that. Instead there was a set prayer which was always said by the head of the family used: "*Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast created the fruit of the vine*".

Likewise, when in the Lord’s Supper, we take the cup – the focus is not on the cup, but on God. We don’t bless the cup, so that the wine becomes something special – we bless God – i.e. we thank God.

Alas, in some church traditions the focus appears to be not on God, but on what happens to the bread and the wine.

Hence the reason why in RC & Anglican churches only a priest can say the prayer of thanksgiving – indeed, the prayer of thanksgiving becomes a prayer of consecration – the bread and wine become changed into the body and blood of Jesus.

For that reason there is no way in which any bread or wine left over can be thrown away – because the elements have changed into something sacred and special. So the priest has to finish up the left-over wine – you can get pretty woozy if you are doing a number of communions on a Sunday.

But such an understanding of the Lord’s Supper is not rooted in Scripture.

The focus is on God. The prayer of thanksgiving does not have to be taken by a priest – for the focus is on God and on his salvation.

Goodness, I feel that I have made something which is very simple, very complex.

Sadly, the truth is that down through the centuries the church has made something which is very simple into something very complex – with the result that you can wade through tomes about trans-substantiation, con-substantiation and goodness knows what.

At the Lord’s Table we come to give thanks. We take bread and wine and “**we give thanks to God**”.

## 2. WE SHARE AFRESH IN THE DEATH OF JESUS

But we don't just give thanks to God. We share afresh in the death of Jesus. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "**The cup we use in the Lord's Supper and for which we give thanks to God: when we drink from it, we are sharing in the blood of Christ. And the bread we break: when we eat it, we are sharing in the body of Christ** (1 Cor 10.16-17).

Or to use the words of the old 1611 King James version (the AV): "**The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ**".

Notice the word "*communion*" – this is another word for the Lord's Supper. Anglicans who don't use the word "Eucharist" will often use the word "Holy Communion".

What does the word communion mean? It means a "**sharing in**".

**"When we drink from [the cup of blessing] we are sharing in the blood of Christ".**

We acknowledge again that there on the Cross Jesus died for us – we remember again that Jesus, "**the Son of God, loved me and gave himself for me**".

We "**remember**" Jesus died for us– and as we remember, we find ourselves there at the foot of the Cross and see him there suffering for us.

We don't just recall that Jesus died for us – we experience afresh his death.

The past becomes present. We share afresh in his death.

With the centurion we are again amazed and exclaim "**This man was really the Son of God**" (Mk 15.39).

This is no mere memorial meal in which we coldly confess our faith.

As we remember, we receive again the benefits won from the death of Christ.

As we drink the wine, we experience the truth of that Scripture that "**the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from every sin**" (1 John 1.7).

Rightly understood, celebrating Lord's Supper is an intensely emotional experience.

When we think of all Jesus has done for us, we are overwhelmed by his love for us.

And as we do so, we renew our vows of love and loyalty to our Lord.

*"Lord Jesus, if you gave your all for me, I in turn give my all for you".*

Or in the words of 'When I survey the wondrous cross', the hymn which Philip Joy and Bernard Treeby are going to play for as the wine is served, we say:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small,  
Love so amazing, so divine  
Demands my soul, my life, my all*

### 3. WE COMMIT OURSELVES AFRESH TO ONE ANOTHER

Any celebration of the Lord's Supper is an intensely personal experience. But it is also a corporate experience. **"The bread we break: when we eat it, we are sharing in the body of Christ. Because there is the one loaf of bread, all of us, though many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf"** (v16b,17).

As we eat bread and drink wine, not only do we share in the body of Christ broken for us on the Cross, but we also share in the body of Christ, his church. The very **"bread"** or **"loaf"** that we break not only reminds us of the body of Christ broken, it also reminds us of our oneness in Christ.

**"All of us, though many, are one body"**.

I never cease to marvel at our oneness in Christ.

Here we are this morning – an exceedingly motley crew.

We are all so different – some of us are into art, some of us couldn't tell a Reubens from a Van Gogh; some of us are into football with a vengeance, some of us couldn't care less; some of us are into contemporary music, others of us haven't graduated from Bach; some of us adore dogs and cats, others of us would happily put down every four-legged creature.

And so I could go on enumerating the differences. Age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, social class - you name it, we've got it.

But we are one – and we are one because of Jesus

**"When we eat the bread, we are sharing in the body of Christ"**.

In the first instance, the body of Christ is Jesus himself, but the very word 'sharing' (*koinonia*) reminds us of the body of Christ, the church.. For the Greek word *koinonia*, which can be translated 'fellowship', is a synonym for the church.

**"All of us though many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf"**

Just as to be baptised is not only to be baptised into Christ, but also to be baptised into his body; so also when we eat bread and drink wine, we not only identify ourselves with our Lord, but also with his people.

Yes, here at this Table we come closer not just to our Lord, but also to one another. And the result is that not only do we commit ourselves to Christ afresh, we also commit ourselves to one another afresh.

After this sermon we shall be welcoming into church membership nine new members: Lizzie Bateman, Spencer & Julia Byford, Jonathan & Alison Stokes, Jack Titchard, Steven Turner, Susie & Richard Williams. These nine will be committing themselves to us – but we in turn will be committing ourselves to them.

Before I give the right hand of fellowship I shall remind you that *"In a Baptist church membership involves entering into a dynamic covenant relationship with one another - a relationship in which we commit ourselves not only to work together to extend Christ's Kingdom, but also to love one another and stand by one another whatever the cost"*.

Every time we eat bread and drink wine, we realize afresh our oneness Jesus – and as we do so we renew our commitment to one another.