

LET'S CELEBRATE: A SERMON PREACHED ON 16 MARCH 2014 AT PAUL BEASLEY-MURRAY'S LAST COMMUNION SERVICE AS SENIOR MINISTER OF CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH, CHELMSFORD

I love parties – and I am so glad you have put on a church party on this last Sunday. So why end this party with communion? It suddenly makes church all very serious! Or does it? Rightly understood, a communion is a celebration – it's like a special party.

When the first Christians remembered Jesus, they did so by having a meal together. The host would begin the meal by taking a loaf of bread, breaking it and in this way remind everybody that the body of Jesus had been broken for them. Then, probably at the end of the meal, he would pour wine into a large cup and have what we would call a toast – reminding everybody that Jesus had poured out his life for them. In-between the breaking of bread and the drinking from the cup there was proper meal for the friends of Jesus, with all the buzz and excitement that you would expect when friends meet. According to Luke, every meal was “**a celebration**”, and they were “**exuberant and joyful as they praised God**” (Acts 2.46 *The Message*). It was a party in which they celebrated the difference that Jesus had made to their lives

Today we have done away with the meal. We just have some bread to eat and some grape juice to drink. But it is still a party where we can celebrate

1. LET'S CELEBRATE THAT JESUS IS ALIVE

Yes, we remember, Jesus died for us – and that makes us sad. But a communion service is not a funeral service. We remember not just a loved one who died – but a Saviour who rose from the dead! Every communion service I have taken in this church has ended on a note of celebration. We have ended not by singing of the resurrection, and not just of the cross. So today, let's celebrate the Jesus us alive

2. LET'S CELEBRATE THAT JESUS HAS INVITED US TO THE GREATEST PARTY EVER

At the Last Supper, Jesus said that the next time he would be drinking wine would be at the greatest of all parties – the party God is going to hold in heaven for all those who love him. For, Jesus – like any good Jew – thought of heaven in terms of a massive party. John in the last book of the Bible took up this party theme, and likened heaven to a wedding reception that goes on and on for every – it would he said ‘the Marriage Feast of the Lamb’ (Rev 19.9). It is going to be the greatest of all parties – with millions of people celebrating Jesus' victory over sin and death. The Bible says there will be “no more grief or crying or pain” (Rev 21.4). What a wonderful thought. Wrongs will be righted – justice will reign supreme. Let's celebrate that Jesus has invited us to the greatest party ever

3, LET'S CELEBRATE THAT JESUS HAS ALREADY MADE US FAMILY

Paul once wrote, **“Because there is one loaf of bread, all of us, though many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf”** (1 Cor 10.17). We are not just friends – we are brothers and sisters to one another. I guess this is why I wanted to end with this family meal that we call communion. It is true that for a while at least Caroline and I will no longer be part of the church family here. Time is needed to help us all to adjust to the fact that I will no longer be your pastor. But I trust that this farewell will not be a final goodbye – but simply au-revoir. And that in due course we can come back and be family again.