

Communion

You can hardly miss it. It's in the middle (usually) of every Sunday service at Lakeshore. The pattern is usually as follows.

- **Singing** - which reflects on the greatness and goodness of God, the sacrificial life of Jesus and the operative activity of the Holy Spirit who makes us one.
- **Devotional** - which recalls various aspects of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus which provides the basis for cleansing and access to the God of the universe.
- **Response** - sometimes the whole congregation is invited to respond with spontaneous prayers or other expressions of praise, thanksgiving and worship.
- **Invitation** - explaining the meaning of communion, who should participate and the necessity of examining one's self before eating and drinking.
- **Prayer** - of thanksgiving for the blessings that flow from the God of heaven and earth to sinners who respond to the love of God expressed through the death and life of His Son.
- **Communion** - eating and drinking together with devotedness and reverence, remembering all our Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ has done for us.

Why so important?

A dominant series of themes related to communion emerge in both Old and New Testaments.

- God is holy, awesome and merciful.
- People have a noble "made after the image of God streak" - but since Adam they have been getting into trouble with one another and their Creator.
- Human efforts at resolution are futile
- God has taken effective measures to bring people into fellowship with Himself.

Jesus said to His followers, "do this in remembrance of me". I Corinthians 11:23-25

What are its benefits?

1. Every believer is brought to the same level. Personal achievements, spiritual gifts and social standing make no difference when we are reminded of what it took to save us. It inspires unity among us when we see our brothers and sisters at the foot of the cross receiving the same cleansing.
2. Every time we celebrate the Lord's supper we are confronted with the amazing mystery of God's grace. As we consider His holiness and our struggles with sin, we are moved toward awe and worship!
3. As we prepare for, and share in, the Lord's supper we are reminded of our cleansing and receive a good conscience with God and fresh start.
4. When we remember, we consider who it was that saved us. He is central to everything since He first loved us. In communion we remember that it is not our performance but His that counts!

5. Jesus shared many meals with His disciples. When we eat and drink together we identify as family with Him and with His people.
6. Those who eat and drink appropriately share an intimacy with Christ when they "eat His flesh and drink His blood." There is a sense in which we are taking the symbols of His very life into our innermost being.
7. In the Lord's supper all the great teachings of Scripture converge -
 - The attributes of God
 - The nature of people
 - The beauty of God's holiness, mercy, sovereignty, power, wisdom
 - The workings of God with Israel as seen in the Passover
 - The mystery of the church
 - The doctrine of "last things".
8. In participating in the Lord's supper we are obeying our Lord's loving command: "do this in remembrance of me." There is nothing like obedience to enhance our walk with God.

How often?

It's clear that the church of the New Testament celebrated it often. Its benefits demanded it. The book of Acts suggests they did it daily in the beginning and probably on a weekly basis later on (Acts 20:7). According to I Corinthians 11 it continued to be done often. Vs 17-22 do not sound like the description of a monthly or quarterly event. Although frequency is not specifically spelled out in Scripture, there are reasonable indications that it was celebrated on a weekly basis.

How should it be celebrated?

The Scriptures give surprisingly little attention to this question. The primary issues for the Lord was "Do you love me?" We may have personal opinions, strong feelings and nostalgic memories, but these are not the matters closest to the heart of the Lord. His searching questions are - do you love me? Do you trust me? Do you love the people I love - the way I love them?

Who should participate?

Everyone who has experienced the new life, which Jesus gives to those who trust Him is welcomed to eat and drink in loving remembrance. Whether one is a regular attendee or member of Lakeshore is not a requirement. If a person is "in Christ" they are welcome to participate in communion at Lakeshore. Neither do we insist that believers be baptized before taking part.

What about younger children?

This is a difficult question to answer from the Bible since it does not comment on it directly.

It is our conviction that the practice of baptism and the participation in the Lord's supper (in that order) should be withheld until children reach an age where an "independent" decision is made.

The following are factors to consider.

- ◆ Children are by nature followers and imitators. When one participates, many will wish to follow. Their understanding may differ greatly.
- ◆ Some children may have an advanced grasp of truth and be more mature than others their own age. To explain this to less mature children is awkward for parents and difficult for children to appreciate.
- ◆ It seems better to wait until such distinctions between children can be better appreciated by them.

Another caution; parents have concerns regarding the conduct of their children. Should they bar a child from participation from time to time they could slip into the role of becoming that child's conscience. An impression of legalism might result.

It seems preferable to us, in spite of the possible disappointment to some of our children, that all wait until approximately their teen years to participate. We believe this will be in the interest of the church as a whole.

Where children are very keen to participate, an occasional remembrance of the Lord as a family may be appropriate. Should parents see this issue differently and/or feel very strongly, the Lakeshore Leadership Team does not forbid their children's participation.

What should I be thinking about during communion?

We can't imagine covering all the possibilities but here are a few. Reflect on the enormity of his love for you and for the other believers sitting around you. Consider the extent of His sacrifice on the cross for you. Think about how little you deserve it and how amazing and different his love is from all other loves. Let your mind be filled with gladness at the cleansing and assurance that are yours because of His gift of love. Consider too that He is alive, waiting to hear your expressions of love to Him. And look ahead to a time when you will be seated with Him in heaven at the ultimate banquet of the ages! And think of others who should get in on this wonderful privilege!

What about those stern warnings related to communion?

The Bible is very clear about the fact that anyone who participates in a thoughtless or careless manner invites the judgment of God on himself or herself, (I Corinthians 11:27-32). The instruction is to examine one's self and then eat. Not to examine one's self and not eat!

Nevertheless, if we are living in known and unaddressed sin we should not gloss it over by eating and drinking as if all were well. Possible examples might include: relational discord, financial dishonesty, sex outside of marriage, living common-law, drunkenness etc.

Communion is a place for honesty with ourselves and with God. It is a place of remembering, cleansing and new beginnings.

The Psalmist said:

If you O Lord, kept a record of sins,
O Lord, Who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness;
Therefore you are feared.
Psalm 130:4,5

For a fuller discussion of this subject see *A Discussion of Communion At Lakeshore*