

SERMON – 3/2/19**Thinking about Communion: Remembrance**

Luke 22:14-23

Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me.” (Luke 22:19)

This morning we begin a series of sermons looking at the subject of the Lord's Supper that will take us up to the quarterly celebration of communion four weeks today, although we also celebrate the sacrament at the close of the service today for those who are able to stay. Over the course of five sermons I would like to think with you about communion in terms of remembrance – that's today's theme: Do this in memory of Me – then next week about communion as a proclamation – think of the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'As often you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *proclaim* the Lord's death until He comes.' Thirdly we will look at communion as a thanksgiving – the Greek word *eucharist* which is the name given to the celebration of communion in some churches; and then the Sunday before Communion at the aspect of sharing or fellowship, before focussing on Communion Sunday itself on Jesus, the Bread of Life.

For all its simplicity, the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, communion, the eucharist has been and continues to be at the heart of many divisions within the worldwide church and is a source of puzzlement to many church members who come to the Lord's Table or who stay away from communion for a great many different reasons, and while this subject is too wide to cover even in five sermons, never mind any one of them alone, I hope that by this time next month as we prepare to gather as a congregation for communion we will come with a deeper understanding of what it is we are doing and why.

This morning we have read Luke's account of the Last Supper, which places the institution of the Lord's Supper very firmly in the context of the Jewish Passover meal that Jesus shared with His followers on the night before He died, and in fact takes us to the very point at which Judas slips away to betray the Lord into the hands of the authorities. The Passover itself was an act of remembrance, an annual calling to mind of the act of redemption, the rescue of the people of Israel from bondage to slavery in Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea, which set them on course to the Promised Land, and it is no co-incidence that the Lord Jesus chooses that

special occasion to inaugurate this new act which will be central to the people of the new covenant as we look back and remember the still greater act of redemption that He would accomplish for us upon the cross the following day.

It raises for us the question of regularity. Passover was to be celebrated once a year and there is an argument for saying that the Lord's Supper should also be a once a year event, except that Jesus does not take any of the special Passover foods like roast lamb or bitter herbs to be the focus of this new supper but bread and wine, the staples of any meal at the time. The Book of Acts tells us that early church met daily and broke bread together in their homes, proclaiming Christ's death and resurrection as often as they ate the bread and drank the cup. The Reformers intended that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly in church and it is an accident of history dating back to a time when there were very few ministers of Word and Sacrament in the early days following the Reformation that it became the custom in the Church of Scotland only to celebrate Communion a few times a year. It was never meant to be like that and over these next few weeks I hope that we can each take a good look at our practice of communion and separate what is central to it from what are mere traditions that have grown up around our practice and perhaps even obscure what is meant to be revealed through it.

There are two other things I want just to highlight from Luke's account of the Last Supper as we come to the main message for today. One you possibly didn't even notice as it was read, but Luke's account starts with Jesus taking a cup and giving thanks to God *before* breaking the bread and then taking the cup again *after* supper. In fact at the Passover meal the cup was taken four times and we cannot be sure which two Luke is referring to here. The other thing is the verse that I have taken as our text this morning: 'Do this in memory of me.' Or in the translation that is carved on our own Table, 'This do in remembrance of me.' Neither Matthew nor Mark use this phrase, and of course John does not describe the Last Supper at all, instead focussing at this point on Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet, although as we will see in the last sermon of this series John does give us Jesus' teaching about communion albeit in the context of his account of the feeding of the 5000. It is in fact the apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians who is the only other writer apart from Luke to record this

phrase, 'Do this in memory of me.' So what are we to say about the theme of Remembrance in relation to Communion?

Take a moment to reflect on other things in our experience that foster remembrance. Think about the town war memorial around which we gather on Remembrance Sunday or the memorial within the church here (or the one in the Church Centre) which record the names of those from our congregation who gave their lives in the defence of our freedom.

Particularly as we commemorate 100 years since the Armistice and as we pray on for peace in our world, these are living memorials, albeit we probably only think about them once a year. But there are many other memorials around us, most of them largely forgotten or irrelevant – the obelisk at Gairneybridge marks a significant piece of Scottish Church history but I expect that the majority here know nothing about it; there are memorials on the walls of this church and out in the churchyard and in the other cemeteries in the town which as the decades and then the centuries pass become less and less relevant to the next generation; there are streets in our community – Nan Walker Wynd, Emslie Drive, McBain Place, Burns Begg Street – that are actually memorials to individuals known to some here but now not all. At some stage through the passing of time they stop being memorials and just become names.

Many of us in recent weeks will have attended a Burns Supper when the memory of the national bard is kept alive two and a half centuries after he lived. Now the traditional meal of haggis, neeps and tatties doesn't actually have much particular significance to Burns himself – the real memorial is in the recitation of his poetry and in the speeches given in his immortal memory.

So in what ways is the Lord's Supper a memorial in the way that these other things are, and in what ways is it different? The clues are there in those words of Jesus that still echo down the centuries and all around the world: He said, 'Do this in memory of me.'

Firstly, He said, '*Do*.' Right from the very beginning human beings have set up stones as reminders and we are still doing it – our inclination is to try and make memories permanent even though in so doing we are liable actually to fossilise them. But this memorial that Jesus commanded was (and is) very different – far from it being something designed to endure, it is something designed to live. It is not a monument but an action. Do this

in memory of me. Yet even then people have tried to fossilise the Lord's Supper – that's not the way we used to do it. Some people even refuse to recognise it as communion unless certain specific words are said or the person leading it is wearing certain clothes. Is not Jesus speaking to *all* of us when He says 'Do this in memory of me'? Is not Paul speaking to *all* of us when he writes: 'As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.?' My friends, I don't believe that the Lord's Supper was ever meant to be fossilised as a liturgical event. The fact that Jesus took such basic things as bread and wine suggests to me that He intended us to remember Him *whenever* we eat bread and drink wine. At your breakfast, lunch and tea; in your home or out for a meal just as much as in church on a Sunday.

Secondly, Jesus said, 'Do *this*,' I say it again – the Lord's Supper is not a memorial for the historians to marvel over but an action for everyone to share in that will call Jesus and His sacrifice for us to mind in the most ordinary of circumstances. What have we made of it? Something far too complicated and remote. Do *this*, says Christ: take a piece of bread and break it; take a cup of wine and share it. Just do this simple thing and let Him take it by His Holy Spirit and make something truly remarkable out of it.

Thirdly, Jesus said, 'Do this in *memory*.' If you think about your memories, whether happy ones or painful ones, they are aspects of your past that you somehow reconstitute in the present. As you remember a time spent with friends long ago you relive that time, that experience, those emotions and for a fleeting moment they are right there with you again and you smile. Or as a memory of suffering or pain or loss stabs you, you feel that pain once more. When Jesus calls us to break a piece of bread and to pour wine into a cup, He calls us to remember that His body was broken for us and His blood shed – in fact He invites us in that act of re-remembering to allow Him to put back together again in the here and now what happened so momentously for us at the Cross so that we might truly share right now in the victory He won for us then. Re - member.

And finally, most significantly of all, Jesus said: 'Do this in memory of *Me*.' If I had a penny for the times that people have commented to me over the years about the way communion has been celebrated I would be very wealthy indeed. The tablecloth wasn't ironed properly; the bread was cut

too small or too big, the wine was alcoholic or was not alcoholic, it was a common cup or it was individual glasses, the elders weren't dressed properly, we didn't sing the right hymn, it was too long, it was too rushed, it was too noisy, it was too quiet, we shared the peace, we didn't share the peace. Should I go on? Are we not in danger of fossilising this simple act in an attempt perhaps to recapture a moment in the past when God touched us deeply at His Table? But this is now, not then. What is God trying to say to us, to you, today? Jesus says, 'Do this in memory of *me*.'

Communion is not about the people serving it or the way it is served or the kind of bread or wine that is served – it's about Jesus. It's about remembering *Him* and what *He* has done for us and while we can all have our opinions about the form of the service it is only as we ask the Holy Spirit to point us to Christ and to enable us to share in His victory that what we do is truly the Lord's Supper.

In the next few weeks we will look at the Lord's Supper from a number of different angles and I hope that you will also feel free to ask any questions that come to mind along the way and that if there is anything in particular that puzzles you about the sacrament you will get some answers. But for the moment, take this with you: in fact, bring it with you to the Table after the service. Communion is about remembrance.

Jesus said, “Do - this - in memory - of me.”