



## GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

### 84 – What Exactly is Communion

#### Announcements:

9/6 @7:30 -

Prayer

9/7 @6:30 -

Grace Group

9/10 @8:30 -

Sunday School

9/10 @6:00 -

**FAMILY NIGHT**

Small Group

**ICE BREAKER:** When you hear “communion” what do you think of?

**READ:** Matthew 26:17-29

In his commentary on this passage Douglass O’Donnell writes this: “We come now to one of the most famous passages in Matthew’s Gospel and certainly the most infamous. It is infamous not only because there is a shadow of death and betrayal covering this otherwise lovely family meal, but also because these 14 verses have led to 14,000 divisions within the church and even persecutions of the church by the church”. And while his number of divisions is just a little bit of hyperbole, his heart I would say is right on. For better or worse, right or wrong, communion is a subject that leads to some very passionate and disparate views. The goal today is to cut through much of that as we talk about this critical subject

From the get-go we are faced with a critical question: What is Communion? More than just “a shared meal” what we are really asking here is what is the fundamental nature of what we are doing. Back in the time of the reformation this was a critical and heated topic. The reformers were universally in agreement: the Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation (short definition: the bread and the wine become LITERALLY the body and blood of Christ) is wrong. What they could not agree on was what these things were then. There are two main camps here (and I apologize in advance for the technical and dense language here, but it is important). The first is the one that Martin Luther advocated and is called consubstantiation. Here the thought is that while the bread and wine stay as bread and wine they take on a sort of “dual nature” and are, in some *real* way (hence the name “real presence”) the blood and body of Christ. The other camp, usually associated with Zwingli, is called “memorialism”. The thought here is that the bread and wine remain bread and wine and ONLY bread and wine, and the whole meal is just a memorial where Christ is present only in a spiritual sense in the heart of the believer (often called the “spiritual presence”). So where is the truth? I would say that Zwingli got it mostly right, with one important distinction (one that he would make later in life himself). The communion meal is a memorial, it is done “in remembrance” of Christ and his work, but truly he is there with us in a particular (while still spiritual) way at the table. WE should note, truly, that it is definitely different from other times. It is so particular and powerful that we can say: “We believe that the true body of Christ is eaten in the communion in a sacramental and spiritual manner by the religious, believing, and pious heart” - Huldrych Zwingli

**DISCUSS:** While names and history can be good and important, here the most important question is: what do we mean when we say that Christ is there with us when we take communion? Why is this important?

The next question, after determining what communion is, is asking: who should take it? If you get a group of pastors together and ask them about this they will use the term “fencing the table”. In other words, who do we let in and who do we keep out? This is a very important question because both sides of it come with disastrous consequences. In 1 Corinthians we read that one of the biggest mistakes that the church was making was excluding some people from the meal. So on one hand we should be careful that we are not excluding people who should take it. On the other hand, in the same letter Paul writes that when some people take it, it is “not for the better but for the worse” because they “will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord”. So churches have landed in various places. The sort of extremes are “Only members of THIS church” to “anyone, we don’t fence the table at all”. So what is the right answer?

**DISCUSS:** Who should take communion? Does knowing that Judas was there at the institution of the meal make any difference?

We could go on and on with questions about communion. How often, at what point in the service, should it only be in the evening service, should you use wine or grape juice, who can serve it, we could go on and on. And while all of these questions are important, and we should think about these things, the most important question we should ask is: how much weight should I put on all this? And here I do not have a direct answer that I can give you more than you must allow the spirit to speak to your heart on these things. Is it worth leaving a church over? I would say that it depends. The reason that we spent more time on the first two questions is that I think those are MORE important and so I would put more weight into them, but if your conscience is seared, then possibly one of the LESS (not UN) important ones weighs on your heart. No matter how we approach all of this I think two thoughts should guide you: *unity* and *love* in Christ.

**DISCUSS:** How can we operate with disagreements, not only here with these things, but in many other issues?