

Rohana's Reflection

The Practice of the Sacrament of Communion

Sunday, August 19, 2012

Scripture Readings

Hebrew Scripture: Proverbs 9:1-6

In these poetic verses people are invited to eat the bread and drink the wine of Wisdom, personified as a generous hostess.

Psalm 111, VU p. 833

Ephesians 5:15-20

The congregation is asked to act wisely and to not drink too much wine. (Some congregations ate and drank too much at the communion meal.)

John 6:51-58

"Eating Jesus" sounds strange but the author of John had good intentions. He exhorted people to not only believe in Jesus, but to have such an intimate relationship with him that they become one with him through taking communion.

Today we finally get to experience communion and not just talk about it! We will be doing a very basic form of communion, combined with a simple meal, with the intention of following the way Jesus and his early followers would have broken unleavened bread together.

Protestants, since prohibition days, drink grape juice but many churches offer a choice. This is something our worship committee and new minister could consider (hint).

The sacrament or sign of God's grace was initiated by Jesus at his last supper with his followers. The ritual meal is a Christian development of Jewish Passover traditions and mealtime worship. Last week I summarized four explanations for communion: 1. It's a mystery, 2. It is a

memorial meal (Jesus said 'do this in memory of me), 3. It offers atonement for our sins (Jesus body broken and bloodshed for us) and 4. It offers believers At-one-ment: we become one with God through Jesus when we take communion.

There are many dimensions to the sacrament of communion. Let me introduce Dr. Nancy Reeves, who has been attending our church. She and her husband Bob are building a home on Garland, here on Gabriola! I recommend that you read her book: [Gifts of the Eucharist, Stories to Transform and Inspire](#). Find the details on her website by googling her name.

Empowered by their experience of the risen Christ, the early church met weekly for the proclamation of the Word and the breaking of bread. In our time we continue to enact

the history and hopes of Christians and God's care and concern for the world. Throughout his ministry Jesus ate at table with friends, outcasts and sinners. In his teachings he used the table as an image of inclusivity, hospitality, and God's in-breaking reign.

I like the way our United Church defines the breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine.

A resource called "Celebrate God's Presence" gives the following explanation:

The brokenness of our world is lifted up in the bread broken. The bloodshed of our world is remembered in the cup shared. In the gathered grain we are brought together and grounded in God's good earth. In the fruit of the vine we are united with the groaning of all creation. We do this at table to remember our identity as a covenant people of God. We receive and are sustained as, the body and blood of Christ. This is our Eucharist or thanksgiving.

There is a "Great Thanksgiving" pattern. Today I am using a very brief, concise prayer because of our informal context. In a formal communion where we receive the elements in the pews, or walk forward to receive, the prayers can be quite long and elaborate. The words can be from ancient services, in English translations, with words that seem strange to us. Or they can be in modern language with words to which we can relate.

The classical form of the prayers has Latin titles, but I will share with you the English translation. First is 1. A call and a prayer to give thanks, then 2. A Song of Creation (Santus will be familiar to many of you). 3. Then there is the remembering of Jesus, or the narrative institution, which tells parts of

the story of the Jewish and Christian history. This can go on for quite awhile, recounting biblical events such as the flood, the exodus, and the details of Jesus life and death. Fourth is a prayer of self-giving, fifth an affirmation of memory and hope, and sixth, a prayer for transformation. Seventh, there are intercessory prayers. We usually have the prayers of the People in our communion service. Eighth, is concluding praise or Doxology and 9. The Lord's Prayer.

Next time you celebrate formal communion in the sanctuary, if you pay attention to the prayers and their order you will see a basic outline of what I have just described. Today our prayers include the themes of praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, offering, invocation of the Spirit, and longing for God's reign.

You will recognize today especially the opening prayer, the call to give thanks: *God be with you, and also with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to God. Let us give thanks to God. It is right to give God thanks and praise.* If you remember, our recent baptism also began with the same prayer of thanks.

Sometimes the communion prayers are sung. In the United Church they are said, with short responsive sung prayers such as "Holy holy, holy lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory."

There can be something satisfying about saying and singing prayers that have been used by Christians for centuries. Some Christians value our traditions and love the words from the classical prayers and hymns. Others prefer modern translations and melodies. This is one area where different denominations, such as Anglicans and United Church people have different tastes,

United Church preferring the modern translations and less pomp and ceremony. There is a rich and wide spectrum of styles of worship in Christianity, from the elaborate rituals and costumes of Orthodox, Catholic and High Anglican churches, to the more informal communion such as we will experience today. In the United Church we are free to use many styles.

What I have shared with you today and my sermons of the last three Sundays, have explored some of the basics of the sacrament of communion. Now it is time for us to experience one. I hope this has been a helpful process and that it will continue for all of you who will participate in future communion services.

Let us pray:

Eternal God, we thank you that you have called us to feast at the table of Jesus. Keep us faithful to your will. God with us to the streets, to our homes, and to our places of labour and leisure—that whether we are gathered or scattered, we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

