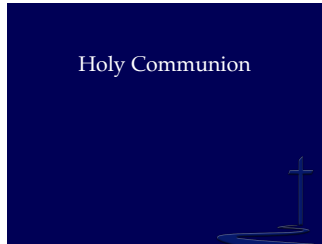


## Communion after Covid and beyond.



### Introduction

Holy Communion after Covid and beyond.

Covid has had a big and lasting impact on church around the world.

As time rolls by we are either beyond Covid or in a pause between waves.

The much-asked question about going forward from Covid relates to church and communion too.

To now focus the communion question here at St Matthew's:



Q1: Do we simply go back to how it was or do we need to reflect anew and reconsider?

That question may agitate us? You may wonder:

Q1a: What was wrong with what we had. Why ask the question?

- If it ain't broke...Why fix it?

So, with Covid now not a current issue and going forward:

A1a: How do we best do holy Communion together faithful to Jesus?

### Review

What was the communion practice here before Covid and what shaped it?

Pls correct me if I get this wrong.

For the bread it was either a shared single bun-loaf or Individual wafers – with priest wafer too?

**SHOW**

For the wine it was either:

- A cup/chalice
- Individual thimble-glasses
  - with the option of wine or grape juice
- Dipping / Intincting
- And in covid time: wine dripped on bread.
- Complete?

That is quite a menu of options for one church!

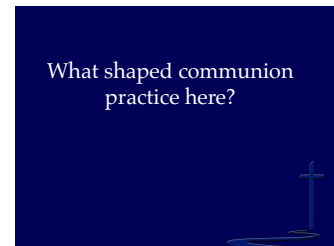
This has been the experience of communion here. I would like to reflect on this by considering the story of local practice in relation to the Jesus story - our experience in the light of Jesus.

Q:2 How do these local communion practices relate to Jesus' practice and instructions?

Let's begin by considering what shaped the St Matthew's practice of communion. After asking Arch Mattheson about this I've made up a list of what I came to as shapers of the local practice.

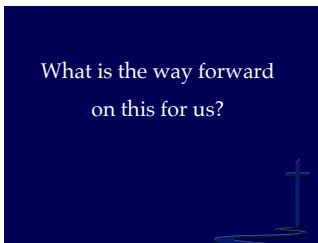
Q3: What shaped the communion practice here?

- Anglican Liturgy – the communion prayers
- 'Low church' instincts
- The mixed denominational background of leading members
- Concern about infectious diseases
- Tradition, habit & local ideas
- Architectural & liturgical space
- Vicar's ideas?
- +?



We have inherited a diversity of practices around communion from diverse influences.

Q4: So, what are our process options going forward for us?



- a) Everyone does what they want how they want - Customer focused delivery of services
- b) Congregational Vote
- c) Cast lots
- d) Have the priest decide – 'hierarchy' as was once common
- e) Study together what Jesus wanted and do that as best we can
- f) ??

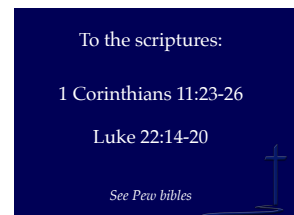
I opt for: Study together what Jesus wanted and match our experience with that to evaluate it - A reflection.

### Study.

Two places in the New Testament where the instructions and commands of the Lord Jesus are set out.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and Luke 22:14-20. <sup>1</sup>

*Turn to pew Bibles-*



The earliest source is provided by St Paul as part of this corrective teaching on the Agape Feast Communion happening in Corinth. Those he wrote to were already familiar with Communion but needed more instruction and some correction.

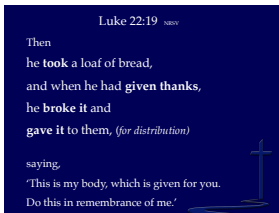
Luke's material is fuller and assumes nothing tells the foundational story in as he can fit in the space provided on a scroll of parchment.

So let's look at what the Lord Jesus tells us to do in Luke 22:14-20.

Jesus teaches and instructs by first doing and then telling people to do what he did.

<sup>1</sup> Also Matthew 26:26-29 which parallels Luke's material.

In relation to the bread, while at table we read about Jesus' actions in v.19 which leads to his instruction to, "Do this in remembrance of me."

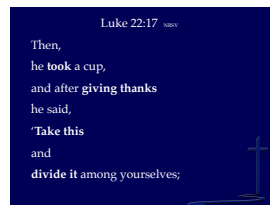


Then  
he **took** a loaf of bread,  
and when he had **given thanks**,  
he **broke it** and  
**gave it** to them, (*for distribution*)

saying,  
'This is my body, which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me

In verse 17 in relation to a first cup at this meal we read:

Then  
he **took a cup**,  
and after **giving thanks**  
he said, (*now giving instruction for action*)  
**'Take this**  
and  
-



### Observation:

In both Bread and Wine, a single source of food is taken, celebrated as a gift from God, distributed among those there while being identified with Jesus himself. It's symbolic action with explanatory comment.

Jesus then commands those receiving to "Do this", That is, do what he had just done... "in memory of him" / '*anamnesis*' so he might be spiritually present within and among those gathered to receive him.

This point is central and very important:

Two single sources of nourishment -in a loaf of bread and a cup of wine- are given the significance of Christ himself and distributed among those present. The bread is designated as the physical being and existence of Christ and the cup of wine as his life-spirit. Both are processed for shared consumption by those who identify as his family, his 'body' as Paul would later say, his 'church'. Even though he knew one there was about to betray him.

The way to understand this is as a shared meal presented as Christ broken and poured out to sustain and nourish a community living in shared fellowship with him.

The one cup and the one loaf are essential symbols for this Gospel enactment.

That is what his command "Do this (*What I do*) in memory of me " -

I read Jesus saying: "Share my life represented by a single shared loaf and a single shared cup." Proclaim my death in the breaking as I instruct you, and it will be *anamnesis* – a spiritual recalling me.

We have looked at the local experience and read the scriptures. We are now ready to reflect. Before we do that and draw conclusions; Are there Questions or Comments?

Getting practical:



Jesus provides a way for his people, his church, his family to share in his life, know him and 'be him in the world.'

There are obvious differences between how Jesus did what he did and what happens in many churches today. The question to reflect on is whether those differences are circumstantial or a departure from what Jesus did and said?

It involves symbolic actions in which a loaf and a cup serve as clearly understood symbols that are then prayed over, and shared representing and conveying Christ broken and poured out for us.

Then comes 2000 years of development. People forget Jesus was a Jew. The Church goes, Greek, then Latin, Protestant and then haywire everywhere.

One tendency takes hold in places that works against the way I have been reading Luke and Paul in their texts.

The emphasis or imagination often moves from attention to what Jesus did and his command to do the same over to bread and wine delivery to larger congregations.

The focus seemed to move from the shared dynamic symbolic event as Jesus set it up to what Latins referred to as the '*substantia*' and we would term the 'stuff'.<sup>2</sup>

It's a shift from a community acting and relating as Jesus modelled to the stuff being rightly and safely delivered for individual consumption. It goes to a focus on the holy stuff as the spiritual medium. It's precious so let's make it an efficient exercise under expert control.

In my reading of scripture it's about Jesus' actions and signifying statements being received more than the bread and wine experience.

So, having reflected on our experience and what Jesus did and commanded us to do, let's get practical in 2022 and ask how can we best do this faithful to Jesus?

Getting concrete:

Let's check our symbols first.

Bread as Jesus modelled.



Q5: A single loaf, or a tray of prepared individual wafers?

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<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of Trans-substantiation is the obvious continuing example of this -still maintained the Roman Catholic Church today.

Q6: What about Gluten Free requirements? - Our first medical issue!  
Let's ask Barbara, can we be faithful to Jesus and meet your GF needs?

The Cup - Wine is not mentioned but assumed given the culture, context and "fruit of the vine".

Would a chalice/mug/cup match what Jesus modelled and commanded? **SHOW**

Q7: Would pre-filled individual small cups match Jesus' command for 'the cup'?

A7: I don't think so. **SHOW**

Then there are options such as dipping/intincting, syringing, or scooping out.<sup>3</sup>

The cup test: Does it come from the same cup assigned to depict Jesus?

Or

Has it become a personal delivery mechanism that does not represent Jesus distributed for us.

dipping/intincting, syringing, or scooping out do come from the same cup, individual glasses do not.

A new option for those needing clinical distance might be a syringe transfer before the cup is shared.



Test question:

Q8: Could Jesus offer communion with this Jesus Snack-Pack (right) or the pre-filled individual glasses with a wafer (left).

Q9: Would this communion be worship as Jesus modelled and directed?

A:8/9 I don't think so!



### Summary and Conclusion:

- Diversity of practice has developed to the point that the integrity of a shared meal or common cup as Jesus provided for and commanded is lost.
- The desire for efficiency and concerns about dietary needs or risk of infection seem to have over-ruled the command of the Lord to do what he did as we read in the Scriptures.

<sup>3</sup> The Eastern Orthodox use of spoons is also an option.

The cost of departing from the clear model using a loaf and a cup as instituted by Jesus in this is that we simply are not doing that he did and told us to do. What sort of disciple does that?

There are costs to that:

- a) The fact of disobedience
- b) Depleting what Jesus established as a Gospel sacrament.
- c) As Paul says in 1 Cor. 11: Not 'discerning the body' with possible consequences?

The symbolic items and symbolic actions matter.

They present Christ as crucified for us and must dramatically represent his life and being given for us.

#### Conclusion:

So, upon reflecting, our conclusion is that not all the options previously offered at our communion table are valid responses to Jesus' commands.

They may be efficient, hygienic and socially acceptable, but not fit for the purpose Jesus intended for them.

We need to find ways that are true and yet do not elevate risk of infection for the vulnerable.

Stay tuned.

I would welcome engagement and comment so this is more of a conversation and possibly even joint discernment.