

It's finally here---the LAST in our "21 week" Ritual series. And just to be clear, a ritual is simply something we engage in that help us draw closer to God.

So far we've looked at:

Confession: the need to **come clean** with others and God.

Sabbath: this idea that we need to **disengage** and **rest** in God.

Altars: we need to **mark** the undeniable times when God has shown up.

Tithing: The acknowledgement that our income comes from God and is meant for more than us.

Meditation: **Regularly** reading God's word and putting passages in the "**crook pot**" and letting them **slow cook in our soul**.

Baptism: Following Jesus' example and announcing to the world that we are His.

And I just want to underscore that rituals aren't just "another good thing to do." Rituals are ways that we **move closer to God**. Rituals are ways for us to make this **intangible dance** with an **invisible** God, **tangible**.

Today we're talking about **communion**. I have a very visual mind. So lot's of words create very detailed images in my brain.

For me growing up outside the church and outside of the Bible, when I heard the word "communion" I would get very specific imagery in my head:

I would imagine very **well dressed, polite people, silently** passing oddly miniature "**bread packets**"—something that might look like it was an uncut **sandwich roll** meant for a Barbie Dream House.

And they would pass the **smallest** amount of grape juice in the **smallest shot glasses** I'd ever seen.

And the Barbie Dream House **bread** and the **tiny shot glasses** were passed on elaborate **silver** or **gold** serving ware—the kind you'd expect to see carried by an **uppity British butler** in **black suit** and **perfect linen crisply draped** over his forearm. "*More Barbie bread, sir?*"

And once people had their **miniature snacks**, it was followed by **60 seconds** of **bowed heads**, and **reverent organ music**.

And in all of 3-5 minutes of very **polite, well mannered** and **utter stillness**, the **well dressed, well behaved** people had taken communion.

That's what the word "communion" **conjured up** in my odd little mind when I used to hear it.

But then later, this **revelation** happened. I **read** about the **first communion** with Jesus and the apostles in the Bible. And ironically it looked **nothing** like the **politely sterile** version of communion I had in my head.

When I read the account of The Last Supper, in Luke ---which was the first communion—it looked **very different**:

First of all it was a MEAL. You know, a "meal meal"—it took some time—it wasn't just these **two little things**.

And it was a group of very **good and tight friends**. And in it there was **drama**: there was **betrayal** and then a **big argument** broke out.

"WOW—this is *interesting*...this isn't like what I imagined..."

But **before** we get into what that first communion **was**, we have to **go back**-- further in history to **understand** what was happening at the Last Supper, or this "First Communion."

I'm going to read from the book of **Exodus**, 2nd book of the Bible—2nd book in the Old Testament.

This is when Moses was called by God to return to Egypt and free the Israelites (Jewish people) from being slaves of the Egyptians. And this is somewhere around 1446 B.C. This about 1,480 years before the Last Supper.

<<< Read **Exodus 12:1-14** nlt >>> <http://tinyurl.com/yfco2wh>

So---the festival that Jesus and the apostles were observing—The Last Supper-- was Passover; this remembrance of God freeing his people from the slavery of Egypt, by **protecting** his people by the **power** of the blood of a lamb, smeared around their door--- so that God's plague of death would **pass over** their homes.

Ever heard Jesus called the "**lamb of God**?" This is where this comes from. God used the **blood of the lamb** to **save** and **deliver** the Israelites. And then the day after The Last Supper, the **Lamb of God**, Jesus, smeared His blood on a cross to save us.

God's death plague **passed over** the Israelites. And now—today-- for all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, eternal death will **pass over** us.

So the Last Supper, with Jesus and the apostles, the night before His death on the cross, they are having the **Passover meal** that God gave instructions for His people to do some 1,470 years earlier.

And speaking of rituals, Jewish people still celebrate this same Passover Festival and meal. Can you imagine what it would be like for Jews and Christians to share a Passover Meal together?

That's a **3,400 year old ritual** and part of the same heritage that Christians and Jewish people share.

So let's read Luke's account of this Last Supper, this First Communion—Jesus' last meal before his death, the next day.

<<< Read **Luke 22:14-24** niv >>> <http://tinyurl.com/yl4gfyd>

This isn't like the image I used to have in my head of communion---**polite miniature snacks** that are passed out and taken in 3 minutes by quiet people.

These are a bunch of guys who've been **hanging out together for a long time**, sitting down to have a meal **with wine**.

Jesus didn't **introduce** the bread and the wine—**bread and wine were a natural part of this meal**.

"Yeah, but 'Bible' wine isn't like wine now."

Really? Ok---so what about Noah getting drunk on wine (Gen 9:21), Proverbs telling us it will make us "stagger like a sailor tossed at sea"(Prov 23:34), Romans cautions not to drink it if it causes a brother to stumble? (Rom 14:21)

I'm not trying to give us the wrong idea—**not suggesting in the least**-- that these guys were intoxicated!

Rhetorical question:

But anyone here ever share a meal with some very close friends and have a glass of wine or two with the meal? (*DON'T ANSWER—this is a very conservative part of the country! ;-)*)

Does wine with a meal make you **tense** and **tight-lipped**, or does it make you **less inhibited** and more **free-flowing** with your **interaction** with people—especially your best friends?

I'm just trying to **draw us into** the picture: they're **sharing a meal** and **wine with their best buddies on the planet** and Jesus says, "By the way—someone here is going to betray me."

If you're sitting around a dinner party with your best friends, and the guy in the room everyone most respects says something like that, how do you respond? What do you feel?...

It doesn't feel like the polite picture of communion I used to have in my head. What is going on?

And the guys **respond** to the betrayal and their conversations **quickly deteriorate** into an **argument** –not a "discussion" it says **argument!** And they're arguing over **who would be the greatest among them!!!**

What?? Get out!! They're with JESUS—having a Passover meal & THIS is what they're doing?!!

With utmost respect for the apostles I say this: But these aren't the greatest theological minds of the day that Jesus had chosen.

They were "**unschooled ordinary men**" (Acts 4:13). **Ordinary people** like **you** and me, having Passover meal and wine with their best friends.

Why did I tell us this? Why did I bring out the grittier "less together" aspect of the Last Supper?

Because communion is a **ritual** where **normal, ordinary, everyday Christians** come to the table.

And maybe you and I didn't sell out Jesus like Judas—but maybe you and I **betray** our faith and our savior in our "less than shining moments..." (Maybe I'm the only one who has those.)

Maybe we don't **argue** that we are the **greatest** disciple of Christ--- but maybe like me, there are times that we posture and think and make a bit too much of ourselves. Maybe we "**argue**" in **sly ways** for attention we think we deserve.

The communion table is a place where people like the **real** apostles, and people like you and me-- betrayers, arguers, people who make mistakes—come to eat and drink together.

(selah)

So what is communion exactly?

It's got different names that mean the same: Communion. The Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper. In some circles it's called the Eucharist which comes from the Greek word "eucharisteo" which means "Give thanks."

Communion is a **memory ritual**. It's **remembering** that our life in Christ **today** and our **eternal** life in heaven were paid for with the **battered body** and **pierce-induced blood** of the **only innocent person to ever walk this planet**.

It's the **one** ritual that points us to the **hinge pin of our faith**—it points us to the **one thing** that sets this faith **apart from all others**.

In no other religion, does the Creator give Himself to die for the people He wants to commune with and lead.

This ritual points us to **how** and **why** we have life: **because Christ gave His up**.

Jesus and his apostles **returned to Jerusalem** (for the Last Supper) because the Passover celebration was a **pilgrimage** (a journey).

Jewish law required that all male Jews **return to Jerusalem**, where the Jewish Temple was, to remember how God delivered them from Egypt. And many hoped that God would again deliver them from Rome—like He had from Egypt.

God wanted them to **return and remember**. And so when you and I come to share in communion—it's also a **pilgrimage**.

We **return to the foot of the cross**. We **come home** to the place that we find **rescue** from all the **trials of this earthly world**.

Communion is **our pilgrimage back to the foot of the cross**. To look up on that cross and see the price He's paid.

(Selah)

Are you **like me**?

Do you have days where you're **running here and there**, and your **concerned about this**, and trying to get **that** done, and you're helping the kids with **this** assignment, and you **get to the end of the day** and only feel like a **human-doing** instead of a human **being**?

Do you have days like that too--- when **Christ on the cross** never came to mind?

Are you like me?

Do you spend lots of **mental energy worrying** about your **job** and **work** and life and your self-esteem?

Or do wonder if a **younger version of yourself** would knock on your door tonight—would he/she be **excited** or **disappointed** with what your life is?

Do you spend **time, money and energy** trying to be **happy**? Getting the next "**thing**" and making sure you and your family are **secure & safe**?

Do you **sing worships songs** about how "**God is enough**" but the way we mentally answered all those questions I just asked--- makes us wonder if God **really is enough**?

These questions I asked. The questions that **nag** us.

The **uncertainties** in this **uncertain world** that **un-nerve** us.

The **fear** that **intimidates** us. The **insecurities** that make us **posers**...

(Selah)

The **antidote** for these things of this world that **grapple with us** are found in the **blood of the Lamb!**

Literally some 3,400 years ago, **blood of lambs painted around doors, rescued God's people.**

Literally some 2,010 years ago, the **Lamb of God—Jesus**—painted His blood with a broken body on a cross atop a hill between two thieves—to save **everyone!**

Communion has a price. Our **salvation** has a price.

The price was a sinless Man's body.

His motivation was God's **love for us**, the kind of love none of us can truly fathom.

The price of communion—the price of salvation--- was a **brutal, hideous, slow death.** And it was **revolutionary, unmerited, unlimited love for us...**

(setup song)

<<< (song: *How Deep the Father's Love*) >>> <http://tinyurl.com/at3u2e>

Bow your heads ---pray—thank God...---lead thru:

1. Do you believe Jesus is who He said He is? The sinless son of God?
(Tell Him that.)
2. Do you believe Jesus' death on the cross paid for your sins?
(Thank Him for that.)
3. Would like Jesus to forgive your sins and lead your life?
(Ask Him to do that.)

Thank God...Amen.

If you responded positively to God as I led you through that prayer—then you're "saved" you're "in a relationship with Christ" you're a "Christian" a "Christ follower.

If you **honestly responded** to God during that prayer, or **ever** honestly asked God to forgive and lead your life, we'd love for you to **join us** in taking communion.

Whether this **is** or **is not** your church, if you're in a relationship with Christ, please feel free to share communion with us.

And if you're not in a relationship with Christ—I am just so glad you're here and putting up with me. But I ask you to simply **pass** the bread and the cup down the line and **not** take it. (Not Oakbrook's rule—that's God's.)

(pass elements)

I'm going to read Paul's instructions to the church in Corinth as instructions to us about how to take this. How **fitting** to read Paul's 2,000 year old **instructions** about a **ritual** started 2,000 years ago.

1 Corinthians 11:23-34 The Message

“Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you. The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said,

This is my body, broken for you.
Do this to remember me.
After supper, he did the same thing with the cup:
This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you.
Each time you drink this cup, remember me.

What you must **solemnly realize** is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must **never let familiarity breed contempt**.

Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Master **irreverently** is like part of the crowd that jeered and spit on him at his death. Is that the kind of "remembrance" you want to be part of? Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in **holy awe**.

If you give no thought (or worse, don't care) about the broken body of the Master when you eat and drink, you're running the risk of **serious consequences**. That's why so many of you even now are listless and sick, and others have gone to an early grave. If we get this straight now, we won't have to be straightened out later on. Better to be confronted by the Master now than to face a fiery confrontation later.

So, my friends, when you come together to the Lord's Table, be **reverent** and **courteous** with one another. If you're so hungry that you can't wait to be served, go home and get a sandwich. But by no means risk turning this Meal into an eating and drinking **binge** or a family **squabble**.
It is a spiritual meal—a love feast.”

Communion is a “love feast.” Communion is a **memory ritual**—a **pilgrimage** back to the roots, power, and love source of our faith: **Christ's body—broken. Christ's blood spilled**. That **paid** for our sins. That **ransomed** us from the evil one. That **adopted** us into God's eternal family.

(take elements)

Lord, we thank You for this bread which represents Your body which was broken for us.
(take bread)

Lord, this is the cup that represents your blood—it represents the new covenant—the new promise that your blood covers our sins once and for all.
(take cup)

And part of communion is **celebration**. We celebrate at communion, this New Covenant (promise--agreement).

Before Christ the “Old Covenant” was a **sacrificial system**; it was the blood of animals or different offerings that had to “pay” for sins.

But Christ’s death on the cross is the heart of the New Covenant. A new promise—that once and for all THIS is the **last sacrifice**—sinless Christ on the cross.

So we REMEMBER what **Christ did for us**. And we **celebrate** that His death makes a **new, more alive life** available **on this earth** and that extends **beyond our mortal lives**.

We can see this new covenant in Ephesians 2:8-10. Let’s stand and read this together.

“God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.”

That’s worth celebrating. And we’re going to celebrate through song in a second.

But let me leave you with a challenge:

What if you got together with your small group. Or got together with some good friends in the Faith. And you had meal together—I mean a **real meal**.

You sat around the table and enjoyed each other. Maybe you told stories of how you came to Christ. Or what God has done in your life.

And maybe after an hour of this great meal with friends—your broke some bread—and you shared a cup. And you shared communion in a way that looked more like the first communion.

You don’t need Mark or me some hired gun to take communion. You need some Christ followers, Jesus, some bread, and a cup. I dare you to do it!....now let’s celebrate!!

(3 worship songs)