

Understanding Episcopal Liturgy

#10. *What is the reason we have communion every Sunday?*

Less than twenty years after the 'Last Supper', the Apostle Paul described it in a letter to the Christians in Corinth: *the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me"....for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* (1 Corinthians 11 23, 24, 26)

When we study 1 Corinthians we come to understand two things:

1. These early congregations of Christians were celebrating the Lord's Supper at each of their weekly gatherings.
2. After Paul left them and went on to the next place, the Christians in Corinth were dividing themselves into different socio-economic groups even during the celebration of communion.

In the time before handwashing sinks, forks, and dishwashers, meals were some of the most segregated situations in the ancient world. Paul was upset at the way the Corinthians were replicating the divisions of the broader culture inside the church, even at the Lord's Supper. In Paul's writings and in the four Gospels we see that Christ Jesus overturned the social and economic hierarchies that divided Jews and Gentiles, the poor and the rich, women and men. One of the main ways Jesus challenged the societal expectations of segregation was by eating meals with diverse groups of people, and having close interactions with people who were considered to be 'unclean'. (Asking the Samaritan woman to give him a drink from her bucket of water is a memorable example.)

So we celebrate the Lord's Supper each week for three reasons:

1. Jesus instructed his disciples to do so.
2. Weekly celebration of the Eucharist seems to be one of the most ancient parts of Christian worship.
3. When a diverse group of people come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, we are following Jesus' example and instructions for us to be united as God's family in complete disregard of the social and economic divisions of the culture that surrounds us.