

A meditation on Matthew 26: 26-30, by Kat Wagner

Today is a special day. This evening we will share Communion together.

We will re-enact Jesus' last supper with his disciples: the Passover meal where Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and shared it among the disciples, saying "Take and eat; this is my body". Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

This moment, this meal, this table is one of the most important images that Jesus left us to remember him and his teaching. Blessed, broken bread to eat. And wine to drink.

This was not a mealtime for debating, for analysing, for 'head work'. This is a meal for receiving, sharing, chewing, tasting, swallowing, digesting. Real, incarnational 'body work'.

The few words, just two sentences, that Jesus spoke as he shared out the bread and wine are full of deep significance. But the fact that he used actual food and drink, to be consumed, was also very significant.

Communion is not just a holy symbol to observe with your eyes. Or a religious position to grapple with your mind. The bread and wine were part of a meal *to eat*.

I would therefore like to focus on the *substance* and *actions* of this Communion meal.

The first action: **Jesus took bread**. Normal bread. Bread baked by someone, bought by someone. Bread that he called "my body". Christ's body. Jesus could have chosen any object to represent his body – maybe something worth a lot of money, to show just how precious it was; he could have chosen a golden object full of precious stones, for example. But instead, he chose something as common and accessible as bread. Something that is within everyone's reach, part of everyone's 'everyday'. Our daily bread.

Paul writes, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12: 27).

The body of Christ: extraordinarily normal bread.
The body of Christ: normal, extraordinary people.

The second action: after taking the bread, **Jesus gave thanks**. Did you know that the Last Supper is sometimes called the Eucharist, which literally means thanksgiving or gratitude? We can also use this moment to pause, to think of everything we can be thankful for, and to give our thanks to God.

Thank you God for giving us our daily bread. Thank you Father God for our family here, our Peace Church sisters and brothers and our brothers and sisters in your whole Church around the world. Thank you God for making us a part of Christ's body.

Thirdly, after taking the bread and giving thanks, **Jesus broke the bread**. The one bread was broken into pieces – the body of Christ made of many parts. Breaking bread is a potentially crumbly, crumby action. As we open ourselves to God and to each other, it can sometimes be a bit messy. But this is often the way God works, through our broken lives.

And as we see the broken lives of our sisters and brothers, of our neighbours, we are called to be Christ's hands and feet to them: to love, to heal, to pray. St. Augustine said that "the faithful know the Body of Christ if they do not neglect to *be* the body of Christ". The modern mystic Thomas Merton follows this by saying: "As long as our love for Jesus in the Sacrament of his love is a love only for the Head, without sincere and warm affection for our brothers [and sisters], without interest in the spiritual or physical needs of His members, our spiritual life will remain stunted and incomplete".

But we do not need to love others out of our own strength. In Communion, we can ponder on the fact that in order to make the bread and the wine, the grains and grapes have already been crushed. As Isaiah 53 prophesied about Jesus: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities."

Fourthly, after taking the bread, giving thanks and breaking the bread, **Jesus gave the bread to the disciples to eat**. Chew on it! Taste it. Chew on it for long enough that the carbohydrate of the bread breaks down into sugar. These pieces of bread are broken down further by teeth and tongue and stomach. The goodness of the bread becomes a part of us. We are a part of the body of Christ, just as Christ's body is now a part of us. Chew on it until you taste a sweetness, until you *know* with your tastebuds, with your physical reality, that you are the body of Christ. And if this truth is too hard

to swallow right now, we have Communion as a recurrent reminder that we are full of God's goodness.

And finally, who is at the table? Jesus' friends who he shared the Passover meal with would all, in one form or another, very soon betray him, abandon him or deny him. "This is my blood of the covenant", he said, "which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins". And so it is even more significant to see that the forgiveness that Jesus gave with his words, was also physically carried in their bellies as the disciples went out from that room to the Mount of Olives and beyond.

This is Communion. While they were eating, Jesus makes the ordinary extraordinary:

Bread. The body of Christ, broken for us.

Wine. The blood of Christ, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus took bread,
gave thanks,
broke it
and gave it to them to eat...

I will pray to close:

Dear God, as we often pray, give us today our daily bread. And so we ask not just for food to live, but also to be reminded of the sweetness, the miraculous ordinary extraordinariness, of being part of Christ's body. May we encounter your very presence in this meal. And with your Spirit in us, may we live as Christ lived: to serve others. Amen