

Who doesn't love a good mystery?

Whether it's a novel; or whether it's a movie; or maybe it's the sock that mysteriously disappears in the washing machine.... What happened to that sock? It's a mystery...

The first time I pulled our washing machine apart to repair it, I was fully prepared to discover 6 or 7 missing socks in there somewhere... But alas, I get into the gizzards of the washing machine, and not a sock to be found.

The mystery remains...

Now, when it comes to the things that we Christians do, something that remains for me, quite a mystery, is this thing we call "communion"...

So, if you're looking for a person to answer all your questions, you probably need to ask somebody else, ,, For me: it remains "a mystery"...

Some folk want to try and define everything and explain it all, but me: I've learned to be content for it to remain a mystery. And I am delighted, that when (as a church), we take the bread and the wine together, and we experience mysterious communion.

Communion with:

- One another; and
- Our Lord Jesus Christ; and
- Other Disciples of Jesus, who aren't even here...

What a mystery this is.

What a mystery this is, that it is a sign, and a symbol – that it is a commemoration (remembering what Jesus has done); but also, Jesus mysteriously meets **with** us in that moment. And the mystery deepens because not only is it a physical reminder – it is a spiritual encounter...

And what a mystery it is, that it is a time, where we experience the grace and mercy of God,,,, But in this moment of grace and mercy, if our hearts aren't right, and we do it in an unworthy manner, we come under the judgment of God. ... What a mystery this is. (that it can be a moment of grace and mercy, or of judgment)

So, some call it:

- Communion;
 - Holy Communion;
 - The Eucharist;
 - The Mass;
 - The Last Supper;
 - The Lord's supper;
 - The sacrament;
 - The breaking of Bread;
 - Table fellowship.
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- And there's probably a few names that I've never heard.

But what we call it, doesn't matter, as long as we do it. BTW, it doesn't matter how often we do it, either. Some churches do it every week; Some churches only do it once a year. We do

it once a month, but there's no biblical reason why... We just do...

Anyway, we learn different things about communion, from different parts of the Bible, and today we're focusing on Luke...

And a really important thing, to help us to understand what communion is about, is the fact that Jesus did the very first communion, at the Passover meal.

Luke sets the scene for us:

The Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover was drawing near. And the religious leaders (the Chief Priests and the Scribes) were wanting to put Jesus to death. And Jesus happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover, and so this was their perfect opportunity. But because Jesus was popular with the crowds, they were scared to go and arrest Him in public.

And so Satan solved their problem. Alright, so we are in no doubt here – it was an expression of Satanic evil, that Satan entered into Judas (one of Jesus' own disciples, and not just a disciple – one of the 12, who were named as Apostles – one of Jesus' 'inner circle').

So, Satan entered Judas, and Judas sought out the religious leaders, and negotiated an arrangement with them. He, would seek out an opportunity, where he would be able to hand Jesus over to them (in a spot where there were no crowds), in exchange for money...

And so, in Luke, this negotiated betrayal of Jesus for money, overshadows the Passover celebration for Jesus and His disciples, and sets the tone, for the Last Supper.

But, before we go too far, what is Passover?

Passover, is one of the most solemn Holy Feast Days, on the Jewish calendar. It was a celebration of freedom. But more than that, it was a celebration of salvation. It was a reminder and a celebration that God saved them, from their captivity and enslavement in Egypt.

Let's talk about the very first Passover:

The Lord looked down, and He saw the great suffering of His people. They were slaves in Egypt, and their suffering was bitter. And The Lord called Moses. And He sent Moses to Pharaoh, with the message, "Let my people go". ... Nup.

And God did amazing signs and wonders and plagues through Moses, to try and convince Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go, and he kept on refusing.

And the final warning was given, as to what the final bitter sign – the 10th Plague, would be. The Angel of Death, would go through Egypt, ^{Exodus 11:5} and every firstborn in the land of Egypt [would] die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn

of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle.

And yet the people of Israel, will be unharmed.

But even though he'd been warned, Pharoh's heart was hardened, and he still wouldn't let them go.

And so, the people of Israel were told to quickly make some unleavened bread – no time for the bread to rise. And every family is to take a lamb and butcher it. And roast that lamb to eat, but the blood of the lamb, was to be painted on the two door posts, and the lintel above the door.

And they were to be ready to go. But whatever you do, don't go outside until morning. And the blood of the lamb was a sign. The Lord would pass over that door, and not allow The Destroyer to enter and kill.

And that night, the Egyptians suffered the Plague of the death of the firstborn, but The Lord Passed Over, the houses of the Israelites.

And the grief in Egypt was terrible, and so Pharoh shoed them away.

God saved His people out of slavery in Egypt. They were saved from death by the blood of the Lamb, that was sacrificed. And we'll talk more about the significance of this shortly.

So, let's come back to Luke.

On the day on which the Passover Lamb had to be sacrificed, Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare for the Passover feast. And even this comes across as being a miracle itself.

When you go into town, you'll meet a bloke carrying a jar of water. Follow him. Follow him all the way into the house that he enters, ¹¹ and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there."

Why is that a miracle? Because it's Passover. There are no spare rooms. Jerusalem in Passover, is like Sydney on Grand Final night.

But it all happened, as Jesus said it would...

And when we get to V14, Luke uses the phrase "And when the hour came". There's a note of significance here...

Jesus and the Apostles are reclining at table (they sort of lay down, around the low table (feet sticking away from the table))... You can tell they're young people. I don't think I would want to eat a feast laying down...

And He said: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

And this is the significance of Passover: A lamb has been sacrificed for the Passover. After this night:

- Jesus will not eat Passover again – not until He has suffered.
- He will not eat Passover again, until **He** is the Lamb Who has been sacrificed
- He **will not eat** [Passover again] **until** [Passover] **is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.**

Now of course, the Disciples had no idea what Jesus was talking about at this point... But we do, don't we??? The Passover – the setting free of God's people from slavery – their being saved from death by the blood of the lamb – yes, it was a real event, But the Passover itself, was still looking forward to an even **more significant** salvation...

Jesus, is the **fulfillment** of what Passover looked forward to. By the suffering and death of Jesus, death passes over those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb... Are you with me???

Why did Jesus die at Passover? Because **He** is the sacrifice by which we are saved. The people of Israel, were given freedom from slavery. But in Jesus Christ, those who have faith in Him, have freedom from sin and death.

How significant is that, hey????....

And it is in **this** context (Jesus being the fulfillment of the Passover) that Jesus leads the very first ever communion service.

First of all, He takes the cup, and He gives thanks. BTW, that's where the word "The Eucharist" comes from. The Greek word for "give thanks" is εὐχαριστέω (eucharisteō). And that's why some folk like to call "Communion" "The Eucharist" – it's giving thanks to God.

Anyway, at the Passover, there were 4 cups that were drunk.

And the First cup, was served with the pre-course, (appetisers), and with a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving to God, for His provision and for His salvation.

And Jesus hands the cup to His Disciples, and says: **"Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."**

Alright, so this is the second time that Jesus tells them that after tonight, I won't **drink of the fruit of the vine** [again] **until the kingdom of God comes.**

I wonder, is that why Jesus refused the "sour wine" that they tried to get Him to drink while He was on the cross???

And so, even at this point in the Passover, Jesus is giving us a little glimpse, that "Death is not the end". He **will** suffer; He **will be** the Passover Lamb who is sacrificed; He **will be** betrayed by one of His own, and crucified..... but that won't be the end.

He will eat the Passover again, when the Passover is fulfilled. He will drink the fruit of the vine again, after the Kingdom comes.

Alright, so that's what He said about the wine at the first cup. He'll say more about the wine later.

He then took the bread, and He Eucharisto'ed again – He gave thanks again. and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "**This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.**"

Some of the great theological debates, revolve around Communion, and what actually takes place at communion. And possibly the greatest division is between the Roman

Catholic and Protestant churches, over what “**This is my body**” means.

As far as I understand it, the RC teaching is that when the bread and the wine are consecrated, in some way, they actually become the body and blood of Jesus. Their physical form doesn't change, but they believe the “*substance*” (*the deepest reality... of the bread and wine, are changed into those of the body and blood of Christ.*ⁱ)

And so, for the RC church, “The Mass”, which is what they call “Communion”, is a very solemn moment, because when the bread is broken, and the wine is poured, this is the very substance of Jesus we are dealing with.

But for those of us who are not RC, we understand it more as a Metaphor. Just as Jesus said “I am the door”; “I am the gate”; “I am the Lamb”.... It's another metaphor – this is my body.

And He told His Apostles, and He's telling us: **Do this in remembrance of me.**

We are not re-sacrificing Jesus. It is an aid to remembrance. It's not so much the bread, as the breaking. And it's not so much the wine, as the pouring. As we break the bread, we are reminded of the body of Jesus being broken. As we pour the wine, we are reminded of the blood of Jesus running down the cross, and darkening the ground below...

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

Now, we're not told, but I suspect that the breaking of the bread was in the main part of the meal of unleavened bread and roast mutton and bitter herbs. And after this comes the third cup.

And after they had eaten, Jesus takes the cup again (this would be the 3rd cup). And He said: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²² For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"

What we now refer to as "the Old Covenant", is the covenant that God made with Moses, after the Passover Exodus. I will be your God. You will be My people, and you will live like this...

But here, Jesus is doing something new. It is a new covenant in His blood. Jesus' blood, is poured out, to create a new covenant...

What would the disciples have thought on that night? They would have had no idea... And it wasn't until Jesus was raised from the dead, that they began to understand...

But even at this most Solemn moment, there is one there, who will betray Him... Yes, it is God's will, that Jesus would suffer and die.... But even so, woe to the one who betrays Jesus....

It's a horrible thing, "betrayal" – when those who are closest to you, turn against you...

When we chop the Bible up into little bits, we miss things like this, but only one chapter earlier, and only a matter of days earlier, Jesus had told His Disciples about the persecutions that were to come. And He said: ¹⁶ **You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.** ¹⁷ **You will be hated by all for my name's sake.** ¹⁸ **But not a hair of your head will perish.** ¹⁹ **By your endurance you will gain your lives.**

And the original Greek word here for "delivered up", is pretty much the same word that is translated here as "betrayed"...

Delivered up – handed over to... That's what happened to Jesus. And that's what will happen to people who follow Jesus. They also will be handed over/delivered/betrayed (even unto death)... But we endure. Because by our endurance, we gain our lives.

And what an encouragement this is, for the persecuted church... *Yes, I may be betrayed, by those who are closest to me... But so was Jesus...*

And because Jesus was betrayed unto death,,,, And Yet He has risen, and He lives... What a joy that is...

And because Jesus is our Passover lamb, death passes over us. We may physically die. We may even be betrayed unto death for following Jesus (maybe by those who are closest to us)....

18 But not a hair of your head will perish.

Death passes over, and in Christ we live.

This, is the mystery of Communion. We meet at the table, with our Lord. And we remember.

- We break the bread
And we remember His broken body.
- We pour the wine
and we remember His blood, shed for us
- We remember, Jesus is the fulfillment of what Passover looked forward to. The sacrificial lamb, by which we are saved, and set free, from sin and death.

To conclude today, we're going to sing a song.

When I was at Bible college, I had to do an assignment on the sacrament of Communion. And I asked my lecturer if I could write a communion song, and write a commentary on what it means. And he agreed.

We're going to sing that song now, and then we're going to share in communion.

ⁱ Richardson A & Bowden J. A New Dictionary of Christian Theology. SCM Press: 1983.
Article: Transubstantiation. P.579.