

Communion at the Peace Table

2026 09 06 Toronto United Mennonite Church

[1 Cor 11:17-34](#) - Paul gives instructions

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you proceeds to eat your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have households to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that 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." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Peter Haresnape

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

This summer the Peace Table has gathered us together. We have thought about the times people gather around a table to negotiate peace or advocate for their rights. We have thought about the work that goes into preparing the table to receive guests, strangers, even enemies. We have heard stories of pilgrims who have brought the blessing of peace to their hosts, and pondered how creation itself participates with God in creating this world, our home. We even had a little tea party. Today at the Peace Table we remember one particular meal, sometimes called the Lord's Supper, or the Last Supper.

I am convinced that this table is important. All four gospels describe the institution of the Lord's Supper, and Paul's writings make it clear that it was important from the earliest days of the church, and I think it is just as important today. This table is a sign of God's intention for our world - for harmony, right relationships, communication, and peace. It is at this table that Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another. We are still trying to do this, God help us. God meets us at the table to help us glimpse the vision and nourish us for all the work ahead.

Bob Carty sings:

<i>It was a table, long ago.</i>	<i>Took off our dusty shoes</i>
<i>You got up, put down your robe</i>	<i>You washed our skin. Our sin.</i>
<i>A towel at your waist you tied</i>	<i>You washed our feet.</i>
<i>Water basin by your side</i>	
<i>You knelt to those who follow</i>	
<i>you</i>	

In this congregation we remember with John's gospel, that as the disciples arrived, Jesus took the role of a servant, and washed their feet. And he said to them 'I am

Peter Haresnape

giving you an example, that you should do just as I have done for you' ([John 13:15](#)). In washing their feet Jesus took away their pride and self-importance. These twelve men were called not to be kings, but servants.

Peter invites a volunteer to have their hands sanitized, and then sit at the table.

The communion meal quickly became an important remembrance among the early Christian communities. Paul was taught to remember Jesus in this way, and he taught others to do so, and felt strongly enough to write to the Corinthians with his criticism and concerns.

He first describes hearing that the church has divisions. Paul doesn't seem to mind these divisions, so long as people treat each other with respect and care. He even writes that different factions can be useful in finding out the truth. This week, we learned that the Meserate Kristos church, the Mennonite Church in Ethiopia and Eritria, has left Mennonite World Conference after a complex process of discernment. The Meserate Kristos no longer wishes to be in communion with a global body which includes congregations which welcomes queer and trans people into full membership and leadership.

Meserate Kristos is the largest church in Mennonite World Conference. Theirs is a denomination which has known severe persecution and has held onto its calling. And I want to acknowledge that the Meserate Kristos church faces tremendous pressure from other religious and secular groups. Even while tolerated, they live and minister in an ongoing hostility. It seems very likely that external pressures played a role in driving a wedge between our siblings in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the global Mennonite gathering. But however we understand it, this is a loss. The church loses wisdom and vitality when we withdraw from each other.

Others are invited to the table - who grew up in a different denomination, faith, or in no faith - or born into another culture or country.

The divisions that Paul writes about to the faithful in Corinth do not appear to be matters of conviction. He has heard of problems when they gather at the peace table. Their worship service likely takes place in the evening after the day's work. Some are arriving from days of hard labour, others have been resting in comfortable homes. Each individual or family has brought their own food to eat, and some people are going hungry while others drink to excess. It's hard to imagine that scene in a church today. It would be a breakdown of order. Maybe it is hard to imagine because Paul's letter did its job, and changed our minds about how we gather together. Maybe we are just as badly behaved, but we hide it better.

Paul describes this unworthy manner as 'eating and drinking without discerning the body' ([1 Cor 11:29](#)). The body he means is the body of believers who gather at the peace table. So when he tells us to examine ourselves, he doesn't mean our cholesterol. Each of us, in the weeks leading up to communion, should be considering if we have any sin we need to deal with, and especially to address harm that exists within our own community. Do we need to make amends, ask or give forgiveness, speak and hear the truth, seek after reconciliation?

First, examine yourself, says Paul. And, he says, if you're hungry, eat at home! I remember last Sunday, when our sister congregation prepared a breakfast meal, I ran around trying to persuade people to go down and eat, but most people arrived having already eaten. I couldn't really object! I trust that we have prepared ourselves with the same diligence this week - ensuring that we are reconciled with each other before we approach the table.

If you are not ready for communion, that is okay. Perhaps you have not yet made the commitment to the way of Jesus. Perhaps you know that you need to be reconciled with one of your siblings first. Whatever your reasons, know that you are not on your own in doing this. If you need someone to pray with you, you have many willing prayer partners in this congregation. Name your need. And for whatever reason you are not taking communion, know that God loves you and welcomes you wholeheartedly.

More people are invited to the table - someone who has specifically prepared yourself to take communion, and someone who has taken communion in a different church this year.

The communion ritual for us is a sign. It shows us what God has done, in sending Jesus to be our shepherd and host. It reminds us that Jesus has love that is stronger than death. And it shows us how we can respond to God's loving peacemaking. This meal is symbolic; it will not fill your stomach, but it will nourish and heal.

Communion

Friends, neighbours, fellow creatures, this is the Peace Table, instituted by Jesus Christ and shared across time and space. If you have chosen the way of Christ in your life, you will find nourishment at this table. This table has space for everyone - peacefaring zealots, reformed collaborators, rich widows and furloughed fisherfolk, overstimulated children, and those with stories beyond imagining. However you understand God, however you make home and a family, whatever gifts you share or however empty your vessel, there is space for you at the table.

Let us pray. God, we give you thanks for the wonders that you have shown us in this fragile and splendid world. We honour the mysteries that sustain us - the grain that grows unseen, the hands and machines that harvest and process it, the human skill that makes bread, and your divine spirit which makes this bread into a sign of your presence with us.

We remember that night long ago when you gathered your friends together to teach them the hard and liberating truth of love. We tell the story, that as your hands broke the bread, you shared it saying 'take, eat, this is my body, offered to nourish you, offered to heal the world. Do this in remembrance of me'.

Peter Haresnape

We bless you, mothering God, who feeds us with your own body with all that we need, and we remember your promises of mercy and your commandment to love. Amen.

The bread is broken and distributed among those at the table.

The gospels tell us about some of the conversations during the meal. They argued about who should be in charge, and Jesus told them to love one another, serve and strengthen each other.

Peter invites those at the table to respond to some questions

- 1) What do you remember about your first experience of taking communion?
- 2) What do you find meaningful in the communion service?
- 3) What kind of preparation do you do before taking communion?
- 4) Have you ever taken communion in another church or denomination? What was it like?
- 5) What are you thinking about when you take communion? What effect does it have?

Let's pray. God, we thank you for all the ways in which you feed us, care for us, lead us, and help us to grow. We remember the wisdom of the prophets, the courage of Mary, the obedience of John, the example of your disciples down to the present day. We thank you, Holy Spirit, for enlivening us, comforting us in hard times and rejoicing with us in times of peace.

We remember that after the supper was over, you took a cup of wine as a symbol of your blood, your life, your fidelity. You offer us that cup, urging us 'drink this, all of you: this is the cup of the new covenant, a promise of eternal life that has been poured out for you and all beings. Whenever you drink it, remember.' Amen.

The cup is poured. Those at the table are served, and take the elements together.

This is the bread of life, broken for you. This is the cup of blessing, poured out for you.

Those at the table go out to serve the others gathered, and then everyone in the building and online is invited to take communion together.

God has fed us with the bread of life and cup of blessing, We are one body with Christ, joined by the Holy Spirit, set free to bring life and hope into a world that needs it sorely. Let us greet one another with the peace of Christ.

Passing the peace

VT 485 Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands