

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE ON SUNDAY JUNE 18
2017 BY THE REVEREND STUART LANGSHAW - LOCUM TENENS.**

HOLY COMMUNION

Photos, souvenirs and re-enactments help us to live again the enjoyment, sometimes the disappointment, of having been in certain places at particular times with certain people. Our mind's eye sees again the location where the photo was taken or the souvenir purchased or where the actors brought to life again a scene long gone. Photos, souvenirs and re-enactments place us again in a location, at a time, with people, with actions that were – and are – important to us.

The Holy Communion helps us in this way, too. It is a ceremony that recreates for us a pivotal time in the development of the Christian church ... Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem with his followers, taking the elements of the Passover meal and giving them a new focus and a new meaning for his followers. No longer would they remember Moses and slavery in Egypt and new freedom Moses had brought to them. They would remember Jesus and the spiritual freedom that Jesus had brought to them.

Think back to when you were confirmed ... the priest who prepared you ... the Bishop who confirmed you ... the parish where you were confirmed. You may have been confirmed in a tradition other than the Anglican Church. No matter – go back in your mind and remember. In the way that things used to be done in our Church, Confirmation was the time when we were admitted to receive the Holy Communion. I wonder how many times and in how many different places you have received the Holy Communion since then? You will remember different churches, cathedrals and church camps, great and wondrous liturgies, small and informal liturgies as you received Holy Communion. You will remember some Holy Communion services that seemed for you to be the very doorstep of heaven as you were spiritually and emotionally transported onto another plane of existing. You will remember other Holy Communion services that you attended unwillingly or out of teeth-grinding duty. And yet even other Holy Communion services where you seemed to be on automatic pilot – going through the motions and hearing the words, but little effect took place within you. All those scenarios are common to us all, whoever we are.

Over the next while, Helen G-W and I are going to preach our way through the Holy Communion service as we use it here at St Andrew's. It's a treasure trove of Christian gems and gold; a kaleidoscope of surprises and delights; a mixed bag of customs and traditions, and it's a Pandora's Box of troubles and dissensions.

We have all had the experience of being on a holiday, and going to the local Church, to find that the service has not been a Communion service – and we feel vaguely unsatisfied and unfilled – such is the formative place in our Christian lives that the Communion service has. There is something basic, foundational for us in the Communion Service – it seems to connect with our spiritual, Anglican D.N.A. And yet ... and yet ... there is so much about the Holy Communion that we

still could learn – so many Eucharistic gems and gold, surprises and delights, customs and traditions. We hope that as we make our way through this series, we shall uncover some of these delights, that we shall enter into some of the theological depths of teaching that it contains, and that we shall strengthen our weekly experience of receiving the Holy Communion.

* * * * *

Maybe – hopefully – you learned the Catechism when you were knee-high to a Prayer Book. In that question-and-answer document is this question – “What meanest thou by this word Sacrament?” The answer is given, “I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.”

The Holy Communion is a sacrament – it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace ...” Bread and wine are the outward and visible signs. Such simple things ... parts of the Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with his disciples in the Upper Room. And we receive such small portions of bread and wine! But such small portions of such immense proportions! The *sermonette* from Mother Teresa in today’s Pew Sheet picks up the idea of the disproportionate immensity of the small portion. “I held the Host (the Communion wafer) with two fingers and thought: How small Jesus made Himself, in order to show us that He doesn’t expect great things of us, but rather little things with great love.”

I think there is another outward and visible sign in addition to the bread and wine. It is the people present with us in the service. During the liturgy we go to great lengths to make right, and to make sweet, our relationship with the people with us. We confess our shortcomings together. We are assured of God’s forgiveness together. We affirm the faith of our congregation together. We declare confidently together that we are the body of Christ whose Spirit is with us; we come to one another and say “Peace be with you;” we come to the Communion rail together and together we receive those disproportionately immense but small portions of bread and wine. Together ... together ... together. We must remember Jesus’ words, “Where two or three are gathered **together** in my name, there am I in the midst.” (Matthew 18:19-20). We must remember our words at the Greeting of Peace – “God’s Spirit is with us.” I am in their midst ... God’s Spirit is with us. The inward and spiritual grace.

Today – yet again – for the umpteenth time – we shall together receive the bread and wine ... the outward and visible sign, in fellowship with the other Christians here who are also the outward and visible sign. At our Holy Communion this morning, may we experience deeply and unmistakably, the inward and spiritual grace – Christ in our midst ... God’s Spirit with us ... being together. And over the next while as we go more deeply into what this service contains and means, may we be the willing and glad followers of Jesus Christ our Lord, who comes to us in this sacrament and in other ways. Christ in our midst ... Christ with us.