

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE, SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 24,  
2017, BY THE REVEREND HELEN GIBSON-WHITE, ASSOCIATE PRIEST**

**THIRTEENTH SERMON IN THE SERIES ABOUT THE HOLY COMMUNION  
SERVICE**

**THE BREAD AND WINE**

We all have memories from our childhood when a parent was about to have a birthday ... or it may have been at Christmas ... but it was a time when we knew that a gift was to be given. At that age we didn't have access to any money apart from a little pocket-money. So we began to conspire with the other parent to buy the gift. We were totally dependent on our parent to make the purchase possible. We didn't think about that, certainly not in a way that bothered us. So the gift was purchased, we carefully wrote out the card and presented the gift. It was an expression of our love, and so it was received with hugs and kisses and expressions of appreciation.

In the same way it is only by the gift of God that we can offer back to him our love and service. Our relationship with God is a relationship of grace, especially felt as we receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

Memories of the past and hopes for the future are gathered up in the liturgy as we acknowledge and give thanks for God's grace to us. There is imagery and association which means so much to people of the Jewish faith that are taken up into our Holy Communion or Eucharist. The Old Covenant that God made with Israel is replaced by the New Covenant. As the old covenant was sealed with the blood of lambs, so the new covenant is sealed with Jesus' blood shed on the cross. As the Jewish people give thanks at the celebration of the Passover for the delivery of Israel from slavery in Egypt, so we in the Holy Communion give thanks for what God has done in delivering us from sin and death by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Churches differ in their understanding of what happens in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Some see it simply as a re-enactment ... a remembrance of a past event. Some believe that, at the consecration, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus. Others believe that the bread and wine remain bread and wine, and that the presence of Jesus is real in his spiritual presence ... the Anglican view ... that the sacrament is "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." The outward sign is the bread and wine; the inward and spiritual grace is the body and blood of Christ.

Why do we add water to the wine? We do so because it symbolises the water and blood that came from Jesus' side when it was pierced by the spear when he was on the cross. Why the wafers and not ordinary bread? Because at the Passover Jews ate unleavened bread in haste as they prepared to flee from Egypt.

We come as the Body of Christ to receive the bread and wine, a source of spiritual nourishment for us as we seek to serve. The broken bread a sign of the healing and new life offered to us.

A couple of weeks ago, when on leave, I visited St John's Cathedral in Brisbane. The font\* there is very large, supported on stone pillars. As I looked at it, the lady who was the cathedral guide said, "I'll show you something, but we need more direct light to see it." She shone a torch on the pillars and there I could see fossils, perfectly preserved tiny creatures who lived millions of years ago, there in the pillars. It spoke to me of "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8) Yesterday ... way back to creation; today ... as we meet as Christ's body and take the bread and wine; and for ever ... on to the future as people begin their Christian lives in the waters of baptism.

There was an actual point in time when people, the first disciples, for the first time ever, took the bread and wine of Communion. For us, memories of the past, our present, and our hopes for the future are gathered up as we receive the bread and wine.

We come to receive the bread and wine as the Body of Christ, and yet it is a very personal moment for each of us, individually, as we receive those elements. Some things can only be between you and God. So at the moment of receiving, we bring our thoughts, our needs, our faith, our memories and our hopes. We are one with Jesus in the upper room. We see him break the bread, pour the wine and offer it to his disciples. We have heard him command us to continue this until the end of time. Then we are given the opportunity to join with those around that table who are now our great cloud of witnesses, to acclaim who and what we are because of this bread and wine, because of Jesus, because of who he is and what he did for us in his death and resurrection. It is our song and our story – "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again." In stating this we express our memory, our present experience and our hope as Christians.

Does it matter what we think and feel as we receive the bread and wine? We simply come as we are. We have all learned something of the grace of God over many years, and have become even more aware that Jesus gives himself to us "even while we are yet sinners" and delivers us into a reconciled relationship with God.

In a few minutes time in our service as we handle the bread and wine we will say:-  
*"The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving."*

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\*font – the large basin or bowl used to hold the water for baptisms.