

Community Church of Issaquah  
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Six Lessons from Communion  
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Almost every Christian denomination observes two ‘rites’ or ‘rituals.’ Those are baptism and communion. Interestingly, every church and every branch of any faith tradition observes each of those in a different way. In my earlier life as a Catholic, those rites were very, very different than when I became a Protestant, Southern Baptist. As a Catholic, I had to walk to the altar where the priest was standing, make the sign of the cross and open my mouth as he dipped a communion chip into a cup of wine and put it on my tongue. As a Baptist, I sat in my pew as the plate of communion chips was passed and then the little glass cups of grape juice were passed to every row of pews. The empty cup was placed in a little round spot on the back of the pew in front of me. Communion done.

Even though we as Christians may have a very wide variety of ways in which we do observe communion, there are some very common beliefs or lessons that we can learn from the Scriptures. Today I’d like to share six lessons I have learned over my years of both receiving and officiating during a communion portion of worship. Today’s passages of Scripture from our Bible give a great deal of detail to how Jesus created communion the first time as he dined with his disciples. Usually, as ministers administer the elements of communion, we often use the words of Jesus

we heard in the Gospel of Luke today as the base of our ritual. In our seminary education and our internship within the church, these verses are among the first we are required to memorize.

In just a few days, Ash Wednesday will begin our process of anticipation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The days of Lent are the days of preparation for what we call “The Last Supper” or the occasion of Jesus’s Passover dinner with his disciples. Many churches use Lent as a time when their members are to give up something significant as a way of daily remembrance of Jesus’s life and approaching death. As a Catholic, I always told the priest that I would give up chocolate. Little did he know that I was a strange child who did not like chocolate and never ate it anyway. For others of us, Lent is a time when we can focus on our relationship to Christ as we wait for Easter. Communion is a very important part of that time as we wait anxiously for the day of celebrating Jesus’s resurrection and return to life.

The first lesson to consider as we give our attention to the ritual which we will be observing in just a few minutes is this: Our observance of communion begins with our understanding of the word and meaning of ‘communion.’ From the Latin words cum, meaning ‘with’ and union meaning joined in relationship. We can ask ourselves, “What is my own relationship with God?” If I am to be in union with the foundation of my beliefs – the Lord – how do I assess that and determine where God and I are in our relationship. Each of us can spend time searching for that place in which we know with assurance that we are in

union with God. We have communion. We are united with Christ.

The second lesson addresses the concept of being in fellowship with the Lord. Paul said it this way in I Corinthians 1: 9, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Greek word for fellowship is “koinonia” and is one of my favorite words in the Bible. When I founded the church in Wichita, Kansas after leaving the Southern Baptists, I chose the name ‘Mission of Faith Fellowship’ and our worship services were called koinonia. It affirms for me that our relationship with God as we talked about in the first lesson is not between two strangers, but a sweet fellowship where our lives and the presence of Christ are woven into a strong tie that bind us to each other. In a new and strong way, the Lord’s will becomes our will. His affections for us become our affections. We are in fellowship or koinonia with Christ.

The third lesson for me is one that forms the foundation not only for us as individuals but for us as a church. If we are to be in communion with Christ, that must be driven by our love for Him. How did Matthew write it in his Gospel? Chapter 22 verse 37 – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” The very act of Christ offering his life for everyone is clearly the reality of His act of giving the bread and wine as a reminder of His sacrifice. He loved us enough to give his body and blood as evidence of His love for us. God loved us so much that he sent us his only son to save us and grant us an eternal life. The deeper our love for our

Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the stronger and lasting will be our communion with him, our relationship and fellowship. Bound by love.