

# What do we call this meal?

Message for Sunday, October 2, 2016  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:26-28

## Children's Message:

2 Thessalonians 2:15, New Revised Standard Version:

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

In my family when I was growing up, one of our traditions was to have the best meal of the whole week on Sunday evening. Then, as a family, we'd watch some of our favourite TV shows.

Do you have any traditions in your family?

The word "tradition" is interesting. It comes from a Latin word which means "handing over." So a tradition is a habit or custom *handed over* from one generation to the next.

Can you think of some of the traditions we have in church? (Reading from the Bible, praying, singing.) Later on in today's service, we'll keep another tradition: communion, where we remember Jesus giving his life for us. And you can be part of that tradition.

(Idea from Philip Johnson, in *More Celebrating the Seasons with Children*).

**Message:** "What do we call this meal?"

## 1) A meal of thanksgiving and joy

Tony Campolo tells a story about a communion service:

Sitting with my parents at a Communion service when I was very young, perhaps six or seven years old, I became aware of a young woman in the pew in front of us who was sobbing and shaking. The minister had just finished reading the passage of Scripture written by Paul that says, "Whosoever shall eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27). As the Communion plate with its small pieces of bread was passed to the crying woman before me, she waved it away and then lowered her head in despair. It was then that my

Sicilian father leaned over her shoulder and, in his broken English, said sternly, "Take it, girl! It was meant for you. Do you hear me?"

She raised her head and nodded—and then she took the bread and ate it. I knew that at that moment some kind of heavy burden was lifted from her heart and mind. Since then, I have always known that a church that could offer Communion to hurting people was a special gift from God.

That's what we are doing here today: we are all hurting people, and we need this assurance of God's forgiveness and love. Sharing in this meal is a cause for celebration.

Here is what Jesus said at the last supper he had with his disciples.

Matthew 26:26-28, New International Version:  
While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Now isn't that odd? Jesus is preparing to face false accusations and torture from those who hate him. Yet it says he "gave thanks." Beyond the shadows of death, Jesus saw that which enabled him to be thankful.

That's what gives us one of the names for this meal: *eucharist*. We don't use that word a lot in the United Church, but it's very common in many other churches.

This word *eucharist* comes from the Greek of original New Testament. In that passage where Jesus "gave thanks," the Greek word *eucharistesas*. So the word "eucharist" basically means "thanksgiving."

Eucharist is the church saying, "Thank-you." It reminds us that we are attending a feast, not a funeral. We meet, not on the day when Jesus died, but when he rose.

This idea of giving thanks, of celebrating together in worship, carried on in the church.

Acts 2:46-47, New International Version:  
Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.

And that tradition of thanksgiving and joy in worship, particularly as we have this meal, continues still today. Someone put it this way:

Do not come to this table to grieve over your sins; come here to celebrate your forgiveness.

That's what Tony Campolo's father was telling the young woman who was in the seat ahead of them that Sunday.

Let me tell another story to get across the idea that worship is a time of thanksgiving and celebration. This is told by a man named J. Granger, in a book *Sons: A Father's Love*.

When my son Scott called and asked to talk to me, I didn't want to take the call. My wife, our other children, and I had been through years of ups and downs with him and his drug abuse. We'd heard a thousand promises and seen them broken twice as many times. Scott had stolen from us, manipulated us, and failed us. He had broken my wife's heart and turned my optimism into cynicism. It had been a relief not to hear from him for two years. Now he was on the phone, and he was just the last person on earth I wanted to hear from.

"Get his number and tell him I'll call back," I told my secretary, wanting time to think....When finally, I got myself to place the call, I was surprised when the woman who answered said, "Oakridge Christian Center."

"Could I speak to Scott Granger, please?"

"Who's calling?"

"His father, returning his call." There was a brief pause, and then I heard Scott's voice.

"Hi, Dad. Thanks for calling me back."

So began the most amazing conversation I've ever had. Scott told me that he had been through another rehab program a year and a half ago, but this one had provided something

no other program had offered. "I met Jesus Christ," he explained.

"What does that mean?" I asked wondering if he'd really lost his mind this time.

"It means that I've been forgiven for my past, that Jesus died for all my sins, and that He's given me a new life. And I ask you and Mom to forgive me, too.

He went on to tell me that he was actually working for the church, helping other addicts get their lives straightened out. I was speechless, torn between the hope that he was really straightened out this time, fearful that he had become some kind of a religious fanatic, and cynical with the cold, bitter thought, "Right. Here we go again."

The young man who had arrived at the airport two weeks later looked like a stranger to me...but he quickly and spontaneously took his mother in his arms, and they both began to cry.

In the days that followed, Scott told us his story. In the midst of a drug withdrawal, he had seen a vision of Jesus Christ on the cross and had cried out to Him for help. His withdrawal symptoms had ended instantly, and the experience had led him to a church. "I asked Jesus to be my Lord," he quietly explained. And my life has never been the same since."

My wife and I had never really been churchgoers, but the change in Scott was too dramatic to ignore. And when he showed us the story in the New Testament about the prodigal son, we discovered that just as we had welcomed Scott home, God was waiting with open arms to welcome us home, too. Today, ten years later, our family is a Christian family. Jesus has taught us about forgiveness, new life, and renewed hope. He has given us back the son we had lost.

And He has given us the same new life he gave to our prodigal son.

Philip Yancey described worship like this:

Like a victorious locker room, church is a place to exult, to give thanks, to celebrate the great news that all is forgiven, that God is love, that victory is certain.

Let us come and share this meal with Jesus, and joyfully give thanks!

**Next Steps:**

- Experience God's love. Know that he says to you, "I know all about it. No, it's not OK. It wasn't OK then, and it's not OK now. But I love you just the same. I forgive you for what you did. That is past, and now we celebrate together."
- With thanksgiving and joy, receive the bread and juice as signs of Jesus giving himself for you in love. Welcome him into your life.
- Commit to following Jesus from here on.