

**Friday March 26**

**1 Corinthians 11:17-26 – the hope-filled meal**

**17** In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

**18** In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

**19** No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

**20** When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,

**21** for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

**22** Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

**23** For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

**24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

**25** In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

**26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Many of us have felt a keen sense of loss at not being able to gather together at Holy Communion this past year. Christians have been doing it since the earliest days of the church; Paul's description in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 is our earliest record, earlier even than the written accounts in the gospels. So let's revisit exactly what it is we do at a Holy Communion service. I suggest that when we concentrate just on receiving the bread and the wine, and what they signify, we can lose sight of two important elements.

One of them is that we are gathering *together* at the Holy Communion table. It originates in the supper that Jesus had with his disciples before He was taken from them, and we do it because He told us to. "Do this in remembrance of me". It's a family meal rather than a private encounter between you and your Lord. That's why Paul gave the Christians in Corinth a telling off in 1 Corinthians chapter 11; everyone was doing their own thing. So when we gather at Holy Communion together, we receive the bread and the wine together, because we are all in need of the salvation that Jesus offers us through His death on the cross. All the distinctions we think are important vanish at the Lord's Table: unionist and nationalist, male and female, young and old, rich and poor, academic high flyer and bottom half of the class at school, one whose relationship with the Lord brings constant joy and the one who struggles with faith – we are in equal need of the grace of God and we express this when we gather *together* at the Holy Communion table.

But listen also to what Paul tells the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper. It's all about the theme of this group of reflections - HOPE: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*." Or remember the words we say together during the Prayer of Consecration: "Christ has died; Christ is risen; *Christ will come again*". Easy to overlook this dimension of Christian hope, even if we believe that death is not the end but the gateway to what we call heaven, where in the Father's house are many mansions which Christ has gone before to prepare for us.

Tomorrow I shall suggest that our vision of what Christ is still doing and will one day bring to glorious completion is limited; what we call 'heaven' is far bigger than our imaginations can cope with. But it's still something which we ought not to forget, especially at a time when the pandemic has taken so many and so much from us, perhaps even HOPE itself.