

## SERMON FROM SUNDAY SERVICE ON 8 MAY 2011

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The meal that the disciples shared with Jesus we now call communion in the Church of Scotland. Some people call it the Eucharist, others the Mass. Of course we are divided by theology and all of it complex and most of it man-made and I do mean that in its most literal sense. It is never Christ that divides, for we are perfectly capable of dividing ourselves quite without his help. We worship the one God and the one Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord. We break the one bread and share the one cup but only in many of our hearts, not in fact and in any concrete sense. And yet all of us regardless of the theology we espouse would claim to encounter Christ in this act. To recognise Jesus Christ himself as we remember him in bread and wine. When the bread is broken he is revealed to us in a new way. Suddenly it can all become clear.

Many of our services of communion mirror the journey that Cleopas and his companion took. They walked together for a while and then, encouraged by Jesus' questioning, they unburden themselves and in that moment they tell Jesus, as we do in our prayers for others, of all the things that have been difficult for them in the past week. They told him their concerns and he responded by taking time to teach them and remind them of things they would all have learnt as children. (The prophecies of the Jewish scriptures.) He revealed to them the truth about the stories of him and the manner of his coming but it was only when they invited him to take a place with them at the table and they saw him bless and break the bread that they recognised him fully. Here was the risen Lord coming to them in [bread and wine].

The sheer wonder and beauty of this sacramental meal is often lost on us as we try our best to get it right. As we make sure that all are served, that the bread and wine is correctly poured, that the communion cloths are ironed and that the servers know their places and will not make a mistake. We have certainly missed something in our constant search to explain away the mysterious or systematise and liturgies and theologise this simplest of meals. The wonder and mystery and beauty was not however lost on the poet Christina Rossetti. This work is called "After Communion"

*"Why should I call thee Lord, who art my God?  
Why should I call thee friend, who art my love?  
Or King, who art my very spouse above?  
Or call thee sceptre on my heart thy rod?  
Lo now thy banner over me is love  
All heaven flies open to me at thy nod:  
For thou hast lit thy flame in me a clod,  
Made me a nest for dwelling of thy dove.  
What wilt thou call me in our home above,  
who now hast called me friend? How will it be  
When thou for good wine settest forth thy best?  
Now thou dost bid me come and sup with thee,  
Now thou dost make me lean upon thy breast:  
How will it be with me in time of love?"*

How can we recover the sense of wonder that those early disciples felt as Jesus himself, the risen Christ, blessed and broke the bread for them after their journey was over? Perhaps this meal is more important than the one we remember in our liturgies of communion, for this meal was shared not with the man Jesus Christ, amazing though he was, but with the Jesus Christ who had passed

through the valley of death and had risen from a tomb...proving once and for all that eternal life was a possibility!

We are the fortunate ones because we can do that every time we celebrate this meal. Every time we pray over the simple products of our fields and vineyards and every time we invite Jesus to be present with us we are sharing with the risen Christ. We remember him (of course) as he instructed us to do but as we pass around the bread and wine, we are offered a foretaste of the feast we

are promised in the future. We simply have to open our eyes to the mystery of the moment so that we might recognise him in the faces of those we share this meal with.

May there come a time and may it come soon when we put aside our differences and walk the same road, sharing the same bread around the same table, passing the same cup to our friends of all shapes and sizes, of all nationalities and of all Christian persuasions. Let's not wait till we sit down together in heaven. Now that would be a funny thing!