

HVMC LENT SERIES 2024

THE SACRAMENTS



**HOLLAND
VILLAGE
METHODIST
CHURCH**



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A Note from PIC

Dear beloved brothers and sisters,

Approaching our Lent Series this year fills my heart with great joy and profound fear (Phil 2:2,12). The Sacraments, expressions of God's invisible grace, are too often veiled in mystery. In "A Service of Word and Table I," from the ritual of the United Methodist Book of Worship, the term "this Holy Mystery" is used to describe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

But my prayer is that as we embark on this six-week journey into the study of the Sacraments, we will learn and grow together to recognise that the Sacraments are much more than ancient rituals or archaic traditions; for they are means of God's grace that intimately joins us with Christ and his body throughout time and space.

In this season of Lent, may we as a church family set aside quality time for reflection and self-examination as we dive into the Sacraments, just as we did last year with our study on the Lord's Prayer. From the waters of Baptism, signaling our rebirth, to the sacred communion in the real presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper, may this season once again unite us and draw us into the love and grace of God.

We invite you to gather with your Life Group, or join with your family to study with humility, reverence, and a hunger for spiritual growth. If you're not in a Life Group, may I encourage you to join one, even if it's just for this series. May the insights gleaned together lead us to a richer experience of faith, transforming the Sacraments from mere practice into gateways for a deeper communion with our Triune God.

May the Holy Spirit be our guide and stir our hearts with a renewed passion for a deeper life in Christ and emerge from this series with a clearer understanding of our Christian identity, a glimpse into the mysterious, and a resolute commitment to live out our lives as a sacrament to the world.

Amen.

Rev Jeremy Ong
Pastor-In-Charge

Week 1 - Introduction

The Greek word used in the early church for sacrament is *mysterion*, usually translated mystery. It indicates that through sacraments, God discloses things that are beyond human capacity to know through reason alone. In Latin, the word used is *sacramentum*, which means a vow or promise.

The sacraments were instituted by Christ and given to the church. Jesus Christ is himself the ultimate manifestation of a sacrament. In the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, God's nature and purpose were revealed and active through a human body. The Christian church is also sacramental. It was instituted to continue the work of Christ in redeeming the world.

The church is Christ's body—the visible, material instrument through which Christ continues to be made known and the divine plan is fulfilled. Holy Baptism and Holy Communion have been chosen and designated by God as special means through which divine grace comes to us. Holy Baptism is the sacrament that initiates us into the body of Christ “through water and the Spirit” (“The Baptismal Covenant I”, UMH; page 37).

In baptism, we receive our identity and mission as Christians. Holy Communion is the sacrament that sustains and nourishes us in our journey of salvation. In a sacrament, God uses tangible, material things as vehicles or instruments of grace.

Sacraments are sign-acts, which include words, actions, and physical elements. They both express and convey the gracious love of God. They make God's love both visible and effective. We might even say that sacraments are God's “show and tell”, communicating with us in a way that we, in all our brokenness and limitations, can receive and experience God's grace.

Questions for Discussion

1. What was your understanding of the sacraments? How has it changed after reading the introduction and hearing the sermon last Sunday?
2. Given the significance of the sacraments, what is our appropriate posture when we participate in the rituals of the sacraments during church service?
3. Why is Jesus Christ described as the ultimate manifestation of a sacrament, and how does His role inform the doctrine of the sacraments in Christianity?
4. In what ways does the church continue the work of Christ in redeeming the world as a sacrament?

5. How do you, as an individual member of the Body of Christ, contribute to the mission of Christ in the redemption of the world?

6. Why do Methodist and other Protestant churches recognise baptism and Holy Communion as the only sacraments?

7. Please describe your understanding of the physical elements used in sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion and how you believe these elements communicate the grace of God.

Week 2 – Sacrament Baptism Part 1

The following article conveys The United Methodist understanding of Baptism.

Baptism and Christ

The New Testament records that Jesus was baptised by John (Matthew 3:13-17), and He commanded His disciples to teach and baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the grace which baptism makes available is that of the atonement of Christ which makes possible our reconciliation with God.

Baptism as a Covenant

In the Bible, God enters into covenant relationship with His people. These covenants involve promises and responsibilities for both God and the people. They are established through ceremonies and have distinctive signs.

In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the people of Israel, promising to be their God and giving them guidelines through the Law. The sign of this covenant was the circumcision of male infants (Genesis 17:1-14, Exodus 24:1-12).

With the arrival of Jesus Christ, God fulfilled the prophecy of a new covenant and formed the Church as a servant community (Jeremiah 31:31-34, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The sign of this new covenant is baptism, which is administered to both infants and adults, regardless of gender.

Baptism by Water and the Holy Spirit

Since the Apostolic Age, baptism by water and baptism of the Holy Spirit have been connected (Acts 19:17). Christians are baptised with both, sometimes by different sign-actions. Water is administered in the name of the triune God (specified in the ritual as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) by an authorised person and the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands, in the presence of the congregation. Water provides the central symbolism for baptism.

The use of water in baptism also symbolises cleansing from sin, death to old life, and rising to begin new life in Christ. In United Methodist tradition, the water of baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.

Baptism as Incorporation into the Body of Christ

Christ constitutes the Church as his Body by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13, 27). The Church draws new persons into itself as it seeks to remain faithful to its commission to proclaim and exemplify the Gospel. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and incorporation into the Body of Christ. An infant, child, or adult who is baptised becomes a member of the catholic (universal) Church, of the denomination and of the local congregation.

Baptism as Forgiveness of Sin

In baptism, God offers and we accept the forgiveness of our sin (Acts 2:38). With the pardoning of sin which has separated us

from God, we are justified - freed from the guilt and penalty of sin and restored to right relationship with God. Our reconciliation is possible through Christ's atonement and the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. We respond by confessing, repenting, and affirming our faith in Jesus Christ's complete work for our salvation. Faith is crucial for justification, and in baptism, we profess this faith.

Questions for Discussion

1. Which of the five points about baptism discussed in this section resonates with you the most, and what is the reason for its significance to you?

2. How does the New Testament link baptism to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

3. What are the key elements of a covenant, and how do they apply to God's covenants with His people in the Old and New Testaments?

(See the Covenant God made with His people: Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:11), Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3, also see Genesis 15:8-13; 17:1-14), Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19-24), New Covenant (Matthew 26:27-29; Mark 14:24-25; Luke 22:20).

4. Who is eligible to receive baptism? Why?

5. As someone who has been initiated into the Body of Christ through baptism, what role do you play for the holistic wellbeing of the community?

6. Considering the question raised in number 5, what advantages or benefits do you believe an individual can experience as a member of the community?

7. As we profess in the baptism ritual, what is the right way for us to respond to God's offer of forgiveness for our sins?

Week 3 – Sacrament Baptism Part 2

Baptism and New Life

Baptism is the sacramental sign of new life through and in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We die to our old nature which was dominated by sin and enter into the very life of Christ who transforms us. Baptism is the means of entry into new life in Christ (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), but new birth may not always coincide with the moment of the administration of water or the laying on of hands.

Baptism and Holy Living

New birth into life in Christ, which is signified by baptism, is the beginning of that process of growth in grace and holiness through which God brings us into closer relationship with Jesus Christ, and shapes our lives increasingly into conformity with the divine will.

Holiness of heart and life, in the Wesleyan tradition, always involves both personal and social holiness. Baptism is the doorway to the sanctified life. Baptised believers and the community of faith are obligated to manifest to the world the new redeemed humanity which lives in loving relationship with God and strives to put an end to all human estrangements.

Baptism as God's Gift to Persons of Any Age

All persons of any age, infant, child or adult stand in need of God's saving grace. The difference between the baptism of adults and that of infants is that the Christian faith is consciously being professed by an adult who is baptised.

A baptised infant comes to profess her or his faith later in life, after having been nurtured and taught by parent(s) or other responsible adults and the community of faith. Adult baptism is the norm when the Church is in a missionary situation, reaching out to persons in a culture which is indifferent or hostile to the faith.

Infant baptism has been the historic practice of the overwhelming majority of the Church throughout the Christian centuries. While the New Testament contains no explicit mandate, there is ample evidence for the baptism of infants in Scripture (Acts 2:38-41, 16:15,33) and in early Christian doctrine and practice.

God's Faithfulness to the Baptismal Covenant

Since baptism is primarily an act of God in the Church, the sacrament is to be received by an individual only once. The claim that baptism is unrepeatable rests on the steadfast faithfulness of God. God's initiative establishes the covenant of grace into which we are incorporated in baptism. By misusing our God-given freedom, we may live in neglect or defiance of that covenant, but we cannot destroy God's love for us. When we repent and return to God, the covenant does not need to be remade, because God has always remained faithful to it. What is needed is renewal of our commitment and reaffirmation of our side of the covenant.

Questions for Discussion

1. If you have been baptised, think back to the moment of your baptism. What did you understand about baptism at that time, and what emotions did you experience during the baptism? If you have not been baptised, share with the group your reasons why.

2. “Through baptism, we symbolically put to death our old nature which was dominated by sin and enter into new life in Christ.”

As a person who has been baptised, what does this statement mean to you? If you have not been baptised, share how this statement might encourage you to go through baptism.

3. How does your understanding of baptism as a symbol of new birth into life in Christ impact the way you approach your own personal growth in grace and holiness?

4. In what ways can we as believers manifest our new redeemed humanity to the world?

5. Why should we baptise infants or children?

6. In what ways can we, as parents and the community of adult believers, nurture people who are baptised as infants or children in order for them to grow in their Christian faith?

7. Why do you think we should only be baptised once? What is wrong with the repeat baptism if the intention is to renew your covenant established through baptism?

Week 4 – Sacrament Holy Communion Part 1

The following article expresses The United Methodist understanding of Holy Communion which will cover the background of the Holy Communion and the meaning of the Holy Communion.

Background

As early as the Emmaus experience on the day of Resurrection, recorded in Luke 24:13-35, Christians recognised the presence of Jesus Christ in the breaking of bread. The traditional Jewish practice of taking bread, blessing and thanking God, and breaking and sharing the bread took on new meaning for them.

When followers of Christ gathered in Jesus' name, the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup was a means of remembering his life, death, and resurrection and of encountering the living Christ.

The Meaning of Holy Communion

In the New Testament, at least six major ideas about Holy Communion are present: thanksgiving, fellowship, remembrance, sacrifice, action of the Holy Spirit, and eschatology. A brief look at each of these will help us better comprehend the meaning of the sacrament.

1. Holy Communion is Eucharist, an act of thanksgiving.

The early Christians “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.” (Acts 2:46-47a, NIV).

As we commune, we express joyful thanks for God's mighty acts throughout history—for creation, covenant, redemption, sanctification.

2. Holy Communion is the communion of the church (fellowship).

While deeply meaningful to the individuals participating, the sacrament is much more than a personal event. The first person pronouns throughout the ritual are consistently plural—we, us, our. 1 Corinthians 10:17 explains that “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” The sharing and bonding experienced at the Table exemplify the nature of the church and model the world as God would have it be.

3. Holy Communion is remembrance, commemoration, and memorial that more than simply intellectual recalling.

“Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25) is anamnesis (the biblical Greek word). This dynamic action becomes re-presentation of past gracious acts of God in the present, so powerfully as to make them truly present now. Christ is risen and is alive here and now, not just remembered for what was done in the past.

4. Holy Communion is a type of sacrifice.

It is a re-presentation, not a repetition, of the sacrifice of Christ. Hebrews 9:26 makes clear that “he has appeared once

for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Christ’s atoning life, death, and resurrection make divine grace available to us. We also present ourselves as sacrifice in union with Christ (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5) to be used by God in the work of redemption, reconciliation, and justice.

In the Great Thanksgiving, the church prays: “We offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us . . .” (UMH; page 10).

5. Holy Communion is a vehicle of God’s grace through the action of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

John 14:26 says, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” The epiclesis (biblical Greek meaning calling upon) is the part of the Great Thanksgiving that calls the Spirit: “Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine.” The church asks God to “make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

6. Holy Communion is eschatological.

It means that it has to do with the end of history, the outcome of God’s purpose for the world. We commune not only with the faithful who are physically present but with the saints of the past who join us in the sacrament.

Christ himself looked forward to this occasion and promised the disciples, “I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18).

When we eat and drink at the Table, we become partakers of the divine nature in this life and for life eternal (John 6:47-58; Revelation 3:20). We are anticipating the heavenly banquet celebrating God’s victory over sin, evil, and death (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:9; 21:1-7).

Questions for Discussion

1. Which of the six major doctrines related to the Holy Communion resonates with you the most, and what is the reason behind your choice?
2. How can you bring a sense of joyful gratitude into your Holy Communion experience by thinking about God's significant actions in history, like creation, covenant, redemption, and sanctification?
3. In what ways does your participation in Holy Communion contribute to a sense of fellowship and community within your church?
4. How can you make the experience of Holy Communion more spiritually meaningful and present in your life?

5. How does the doctrine of Holy Communion as a sacrifice, both as a re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice and as your own offering in union with Christ, contribute to redemption, reconciliation, and justice in the world?

6. How can you better understand the Holy Spirit's role in making the elements of bread and wine into Christ's presence for the church during Holy Communion, and how can you use the grace from this sacrament in your daily life and interactions with others?

7. In view of the idea that Holy Communion is eschatological, how can you approach the sacrament with the expectation of joining a heavenly feast and sharing in God's nature, both now and forever?

Week 5 – Sacrament Holy Communion Part 2

In this section, we will be looking into the experience of the presence of Christ in the Holy Communion.

The Presence of Christ

Jesus Christ, who “is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Hebrews 1:3), is truly present in Holy Communion. Through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, God meets us at the Table. God, who has given the sacraments to the church, acts in and through Holy Communion. Christ is present through the community gathered in Jesus’ name (Matthew 18:20), through the Word proclaimed and enacted, and through the elements of bread and wine shared (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The divine presence is a living reality and can be experienced by participants; it is not a remembrance of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion only. Through the Holy Communion, we are reminded of what God has done for us in the past, experience what God is doing now as we partake, and anticipate what God will do in the future work of salvation.

The Invitation to the Lord’s Table

The invitation to the Table comes from the risen and present Christ. Christ invites to his Table those who love him, repent of sin, and seek to live as Christian disciples. Holy Communion is a gift of God to the church and an act of the community of faith. By responding to this invitation, we affirm and deepen our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and our commitment to membership and mission in the body of Christ.

All who respond in faith to the invitation are to be welcomed. Holy Baptism normally precedes partaking of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is a meal of the community who are in covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and the Hebrew people, baptism is the sign of the new covenant (Genesis 17:9-14; Exodus 24:1- 12; Jeremiah 31:31; Romans 6:1-11; Hebrews 9:15).

The Basic Pattern of Worship: A Service of Word and Table

The complete pattern of Christian worship for the Lord's Day is Word and Table—the gospel is proclaimed in both Word and sacrament. Word and Table are not in competition; rather they complement each other so as to constitute a whole service of worship. Their separation diminishes the fullness of life in the Spirit offered to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

Recent theology and practice of worship stress both the proclamation of the Gospel enacted through Holy Communion and the sacramental power of Christ's presence through preaching. Partaking of Holy Communion is a response to and continued participation in the Word that has been proclaimed. Those seeking to live as Christian disciples have constant need of the nourishment and sustenance made available through both the Word and the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Communion Elements

Bread - In accordance with the words of Christ and Christian tradition, the church uses bread in celebrations of Holy Communion.

Bread is used in both the Old and New Testaments to signify God's sustenance of human beings and the importance of our eating together. When God liberated the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt, they carried their bread with them. The Jews have celebrated this exodus throughout the centuries as Passover. In the New Testament, Jesus shared meals frequently with his disciples and with others (Matthew 9:9-11 and similar passages).

It is appropriate that the bread eaten in Holy Communion both look and taste like bread. The use of a whole loaf best signifies the unity of the church as the body of Christ and, when it is broken and shared, our fellowship in that body (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). The loaf should be plain bread (no frostings, nuts, raisins, artificial colouring, or other additions). Leavened or unleavened bread is equally acceptable.

Wine - In accordance with Scripture and Christian tradition, the historic and ecumenical church uses wine in celebrations of Holy Communion. Throughout the Old Testament story of God's relationship with the Hebrew people, blood was the sign of covenant ratification (Exodus 12:12-28; 24:1-8).

At his last meal with the disciples, Jesus spoke of the wine as his blood—the blood of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) between God and God's people, made possible through Christ's death and resurrection (Revelation 5:9). Jesus also spoke of the wine as a sign of the heavenly banquet that he will celebrate with the church in the future (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-29). The juice of the red grape in a common cup represents the church's covenant with Christ, established through his atoning death (Hebrews 9:15-28; 13:20-21), and fulfils Christ's commands.

The consecrated elements are to be treated with reverent respect and appreciation as gifts of God's creation that have, in the words of the Great Thanksgiving, become "for us the body and blood of Christ" (UMH; page 10).

We do not worship the consecrated elements nor reserve them for adoration. We respect the elements because God is using them for holy purposes—reconstituting the assembly as the body of Christ, conveying grace, forgiving sin, foreshadowing heaven, and strengthening the faithful for the journey of salvation. Although they have undergone no substantive (physical) change, the elements have been consecrated—set apart for sacred use.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you describe a time when someone important to you, like your grandparent, teacher, or pastor, invited you to a meal? How did you feel leading up to the meal, and how did you feel during the meal?
2. In light of the belief that Jesus Christ is present during Holy Communion, how should we spiritually prepare ourselves before partaking in the sacrament?
3. How does responding to this invitation to the table impact one's relationship with God and commitment to the Christian community?
4. How does Holy Communion help us respond to the Gospel message and support the spiritual growth of Christian disciples?

5. How does the use of bread in Holy Communion connect with the biblical narratives of sustenance and fellowship, and why is it significant for the unity of the church?

6. What is the biblical basis for using wine (or grape juice) in Holy Communion, and how does it symbolise the new covenant established through Christ's death and resurrection?

7. How can we show reverence for the consecrated elements of Holy Communion without mistakenly believe that we worship them?

References

The above articles are taken and adapted from the following books:

General Board of Discipline (2008). *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism*.

The General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church (2004). *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*.



Baptism of Jesus
by unknown artist

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Bartislava - Last Supper of Christ Scene

by Ferdinand Prinoth

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