

The Lord's Supper when we cannot meet.

Session at its meeting on the 26/3 decided that even though we cannot meet in one place we would go ahead and share together in the Lord's Supper on Sunday 5th April.

Why celebrate the Supper?

We did this because the Lord's Supper is a powerful and tangible reminder of the gospel that we always need to remember, and particularly at this time when some are anxious and fearful, and some are feeling alone. It is a reminder to us that we are forgiven through our Lord's death for our sins, and so in our trials we're not facing the Lord's just anger but being disciplined as those He loves, those for whom He is working out His good purpose in all things. Being forgiven the supper also assures us that we can always come into our Father's presence for grace, mercy and help in our need. It is a reminder that we have a sure hope, for we eat and drink until our victorious Lord returns in glory. And when we hear the words 'This is my body given for you' it is a reminder that we are known and loved by our Lord Jesus, amongst those friends for whom He laid down His life [John 15:13-14].

And it is a tangible reminder of these things. Being able to feel the bread, to taste the wine or grape juice, reminds us that the Lord who has a human body, who suffered in a human body, loves us as embodied people. Where virtual fellowship, virtual relationship is being substituted for embodied relationship, and we are feeling how unsatisfactory that is, the tangibility of the Supper – that you can touch and taste – again gives hope of restored wholeness. His salvation is so effective that He redeems the whole person, cleanses us wholly, makes us fit to be in each other's presence and the Father's presence in our bodies.

And at this time the Lord's Supper, if we are disciplined in our celebration, is a visible expression of our unity. Despite being in enforced separation, we are one in Christ, who sustains us both individually and collectively. As such it is also a motivator to maintain that unity by loving each other – by praying for each other, talking with each other, serving each other as we can.

Our Celebration apart.

We want to share in the Supper in a way that promotes, not undermines, our unity. That means we must share in it in a way that makes the gospel clear and the response the gospel calls for clear. Our unity is in Christ, and we are joined to Christ through faith in His gospel, and faith in Jesus, expressed in baptism as our Lord commands, is the basis of our sharing in the Supper. That same gospel also gathers us into communities of the Lord's people who have a life ordered by God's word. Therefore when we share in the Supper we have to remember...

This is the church's meal, not your own. The Supper is given to all the Lord's people, and so should be celebrated conscious that the how and the who is not to be determined by each of us alone, but by the whole church. For this purpose the Lord's people, to maintain good order, have delegated that decision making to those the Lord has entrusted with oversight of His people – in our case the Elders, meeting together. So we should...

Observe the discipline of the church in sharing together. The Elders have made certain decisions consistent with the Word of God about who should share in the supper. This meal is for those who have repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, and expressed that either in baptism or, where they have been baptised as infants, profession of faith at a later date. This is because the Supper involves both faith and understanding, the need to 'discern the body' [1 Cor. 11:29] – that is to understand both what one is doing in the meal, what the bread and cup are signs of, and also to understand the consequences of what we are doing in the Supper for the way we treat each other in the family of faith. Those who are convinced that their children both believe and understand can apply to Session for permission for them to partake, and some have. But our preference is that if they believe and understand they should either be baptised, if they have not yet been baptised, or come and make a profession of faith. Both those steps become important opportunities for instruction and for the child to come to own for themselves their faith and so are valuable steps in the maturing of their faith. Children should not be admitted to the meal

on the judgment of the parents alone, for it is the meal of the family of Christ, not the possession of your own family.

We eat and drink together – at the same time. The value of the meal for expressing our unity is in our sharing in it together, conscious that we are eating and drinking in the company of others whom the Lord has welcomed to His table on the basis of their faith in Him. So if you are going to share in the meal, do it during the set service times, when your brothers and sisters are eating and drinking with you. Don't delay, turning it into a private meal to be eaten at your own convenience.

And the value of sharing in the meal in the context of the service, at the time of the service, is that ***you eat and drink in the context of the gospel being preached*** in our meeting. The supper should not be divorced from the preaching of the Word. That is why it is presided over by those who have been authorised to preach the word, those whose understanding of the gospel has been tested by others already authorised to preach and teach the gospel, the Presbytery. To divorce the celebration of the supper from the gospel of justification by faith alone by grace alone on the basis of Christ's death alone is to rapidly corrupt it into a work, not a gift.

Where we observe these guidelines our celebration should unite, not divide, and help sustain our common life until the present restrictions on gathering are lifted. Where we ignore them, and you treat the supper as your own to celebrate as you please, what is meant to unite will become a vehicle of division, both expressing and fostering division, and we will be weaker, not stronger, when the restrictions are lifted.

Every member of Christ's body has always had responsibility to maintain the well being of the whole. That distributed responsibility has never been clearer. The decisions of each one of us in our own homes will determine our strength or weakness as a community of believers, our capacity for common action together in the gospel, or our lack of such a capacity because we have started to think of ourselves as isolated individuals without relation to or responsibility for the whole.

An opportunity to teach your children.

Look upon sharing in the supper together as an opportunity to teach your children first about the death of Jesus and then about the Lord's Supper. As they see you getting the bread and the grape juice or wine ready explain to them what the bread and wine stand for. Explain to them why we bother – that this meal is given to us by Jesus for our good, so that we can remember Him in His death for our sins. Teach them that by faith we are in the Upper Room listening to Jesus address us with His promises about His death. There is an abundance of opportunities to teach the gospel in the sharing of the Supper. But don't succumb to children's pressure to let them just join in. Speak of the need for a personal faith in Jesus, and to accept personal responsibility to live as His follower. Pray about the opportunities it will give you to help them grow up as disciples of Jesus.

Practicalities.

To share together tune into your service at the time it is scheduled to meet. As the government guidelines allow and you have space and comfort, think about inviting someone else to share with, or another family, as a tangible reminder that the church is bigger than your household. All you need is bread, or some gluten free alternative, and grape juice or wine.

Have them ready so that after we have prayed and I have repeated Jesus' words of promise we can eat and drink together as we usually do. Be ready to talk with the children about it afterwards.

And as we often do, I would encourage you in the week ahead to prepare yourself. Coming up to Easter is a great time to be reading through a gospel account of Jesus' death, and reflecting on why Jesus had to die and what His death achieved. And a time of pestilence is a great time to think about our own sins and the sins of our society in which we share, and turn away from them. Be ready to come with repentant, believing hearts to hear Jesus say to us all "This is my body, given for you."