

**6/1/25      Can One Meal Really Change Everything?      Matthew 26:26-30**  
**Pastor Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

Do you believe that one meal can change your life? I do. Jill and I still remember our first meal together, 40 years ago, at a restaurant in Waterville, Maine, called “The Last Unicorn”. We had no idea that it would be the first of thousands we'd share. You probably have a story like that, too — of a meal that changed your life. Maybe it was with a friend, a spouse, a mentor, or at a significant holiday or event, or in a special place you visited. Meals often mark important moments that shape us. I can recall many memorable meals, and I hope you can, too.

Last Sunday, Pastor David spoke about sharing our stories, and how Jesus often spent time praying, listening, and eating with others. Jesus spent a lot of time eating with people — with his disciples, in the homes of devout religious men called Pharisees, with tax collectors and outcasts, and everyone in between. Thinking about those stories inspired a new sermon series we're calling “Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?”, which we'll explore this summer. But today, our focus is on the most important meal Jesus ever shared — the one we remember more than any other. We call it The Lord's Supper. Listen to **Matthew 26:26-30**.

“While they were eating, Jesus **took** a loaf of bread, and after **blessing** it he **broke** it, **gave** it to the disciples, and said, ‘**Take, eat; this is my body.**’ Then he took a cup, **and after giving thanks** he gave it to them, saying, ‘*Drink from it, **all of you**; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the **forgiveness** of sins. I tell you, 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.*’ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Have you ever been in a place where you didn't understand the language? It doesn't have to be a foreign country. For some of us, going to a garage where a mechanic explains what's wrong with our car is like someone speaking another language. Listening to someone in the military can sound like another language. “After leaving the HQ in our BDUs with our LMRs we're going to the BX.” If you don't know baseball, you might have trouble knowing what someone meant when he said a pitcher had no cheese but a nasty Uncle Charlie that led to batters stepping in the bucket.

There are also times when we know the place and language so well that we forget what it's like to be new, or to feel like an outsider. This can happen not only in repair shops, the military, or sports, but in churches. Sometimes, those of us familiar with church life forget how strange it can seem to outsiders, especially things like The Lord's Supper. Today, I want to help us understand what this sacred act means — and how to explain it to others when they ask, "What's with the bread and juice?"

First, listen to two other passages of scripture. **Luke 24:30-31, 35**, "*When he was at table with them, he **took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him... he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.***" **Acts 2:42** says, "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, **to the breaking of bread** and the prayers.*" These stories show how sharing a meal with Jesus reveals something powerful. In Matthew, it's a farewell before the cross. In *Luke 24*, it's a resurrection encounter on Easter Sunday. In *Acts 2*, it's foundational to Christian life, since the early church's identity came from focusing on Jesus in all their teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. This is why The Lord's Supper matters — it connects us to Jesus across time and circumstance.

**First, why do we call what we do at the table The Lord's Supper?** We call it the Lord's Supper because Jesus invites us. It's not our table, it's his. And it's open to all who trust and follow him, regardless of background, denomination, or past mistakes. It's an inclusive meal because all who share in it — in this church and around the world are brothers and sisters in the same family. There are no strangers at this Supper. That's part of why Jesus says in Matthew, "*Drink from it, **all** of you.*" Even the ones who would betray, deny, and forsake him were invited and allowed to drink. Richard Rohr writes that at the table, "*we are one, we are equal in dignity, we all eat of the same divine food, and Jesus still and always "eats with sinners," just as he did when on Earth.*"

It's **The Lord's Supper** because the Lord issued the invitation, and because, as our Host, he is with us. **Jesus is both the Host and the Meal.** The elements — bread and juice — are simple, but rich with meaning. They symbolize his body broken and blood poured out for our forgiveness. What we share and eat is bread and juice — in our tradition we don't use wine, in part, out of respect and concern for those for whom

addiction to alcohol is a struggle. Bread and juice are ordinary things of little earthly value, yet they communicate the deepest spiritual realities. In the beginning of Christianity, The Lord's Supper was a meal shared in a home among sisters and brothers in Christ. There were no church buildings for, perhaps, the first 100 years, as the Way of Jesus grew and spread. Over time, it became a symbolic act in church buildings. But its purpose remains: to remember Jesus and share in his grace.

Some of you grew up calling The Lord's Supper a **sacrament**, a word that means a visible sign of an invisible grace. A sign is something that reveals truth beyond itself. The miracles of Jesus are signs because they reveal something of the nature and character of the person who does them — just as any person's behavior reveals something of the nature and character of that person. Baptists refer to The Lord's Supper as an **ordinance**, which is a religious ritual instituted by Jesus for believers to observe as a sign of our faith and obedience. The Lord's Supper is a reminder that ordinary things — like bread, juice, or water — can carry extraordinary meaning. Just like a photo or keepsake in your home may have little monetary value but immense personal meaning, so does this simple meal.

Sharing in The Lord's Supper is also not optional, because Jesus said (*Luke 22:19*), *"Do this in remembrance of me."* Like baptism, participating in The Lord's Supper is part of Christian obedience. Jesus didn't say, *"This is my body, take and study it, or take and worship it."* He said, *"Take, eat; this is my body"*; he said of the cup, *"drink from it, all of you."* The bread that's broken and the fruit of the vine that's poured don't refresh us unless we consume them. In the same way, Jesus must be intentionally and personally received by faith.

We also refer to The Lord's Supper as **Communion**, which comes from the Greek word meaning partnership, as in marriage, sharing, participating, self-giving, or generosity. The word "communion" reminds us that we eat and drink in memory of Jesus, not in memory of his teaching, but in memory of him as a person. When we receive communion, it's also like a spiritual checkup. Paul tells the church in Corinth (*1 Corinthians 11:28*), *"Examine yourselves and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup."* Examining ourselves means looking at our recent behavior, confessing the areas in which we've sinned, forgiving others who have wronged us, and seeking God's forgiveness and guidance for the future. That's why we usually say a prayer of confession

before we participate in communion. We're to be at peace with God and with other people before we receive The Lord's Supper. When we neglect to do this, Paul says, communion can become a judgment on our spirit, rather than a blessing.

When we, who are individually members of the body of Christ, gather to worship, sing songs, offer prayers, share the Word, and gather around the table, we're doing it to re-member Jesus. **Re-membering means to put back together.** We meet Jesus, together, whether in person or online, in a way we don't elsewhere on our own. Unity is part of the importance of The Lord's Supper.

If you've ever been to a symphony, you know there's a time when the lead violinist will get up and play a note. Up to this point, the musicians have been warming up in their own way. Once the leader plays that note, everyone starts to play it on their instruments. Then, the conductor comes out, and the symphony begins to play — not all the same note, but the same music. In a successful orchestra that plays beautiful music, everyone follows and obeys the conductor.

The Lord's Supper reminds Christians who our conductor is, and that we're to follow his lead and obey his teaching. When we let Jesus have his rightful place as leader, the shrillness and noise of our personal tunes is changed into beautiful music as we work together, like we did this weekend in packing meals for Feed My Starving Children, or participating this afternoon in the Walk for Hope. Our task is to become increasingly in tune with Christ. At this table, we celebrate the presence of God's grace, and seek to bring our lives increasingly under grace's powerful influence and rhythm.

**Perhaps the image of Christ we think of most at Communion is the Crucified One.** The Lord's Supper is done in remembrance of the Crucified One, who bore our sins in his body on the cross. Just as the bread and the juice are broken and poured out, so was Jesus for the world. The bread and fruit of the vine are symbols of Christ's body and blood. We remember the sacrifice of Jesus, who laid down his life for his friends. Baptists believe that the primary place of Christ's presence in The Lord's Supper is not in the elements, but within our community of faith. We celebrate the forgiveness of sins and the power of life to conquer death. We believe that the Christ we meet in the bread and the cup will also meet us everywhere we go in life, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

**The Christ who comes to us and meets us at The Lord's Supper is not just the Crucified One, but the Risen One** — the first celebrations of The Lord's Supper were also about Christ's resurrection and new life for him and for all who put their trust in him. The meal is a reminder of the post-resurrection experiences of the disciples. The presence of the Risen Christ amid the faithful was repeated each time they united for this common meal. Christ comes to be with the community of believers, and the focus of his presence is not so much in the bread and juice, but in the fellowship of the table companions with one another. Jesus said, *"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). Sometimes, when we break bread together with another person, or a few people, we glimpse him again, just like his disciples long ago.

I like when we observe The Lord's Supper, when we also have a meal in between the worship services, as we do today, so we can eat, fellowship, and continue to sense the presence of Jesus in our midst — just as the first Christians did. For all Christians, whatever their tradition, The Lord's Supper is a celebration of joy that the Lord is alive in our midst and empowers us to truly live. Jesus had within himself, and he gives to others, a life that even death won't destroy.

In some traditions, The Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist. **Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving.** That's powerful, considering the first Lord's Supper took place on the eve of Jesus' death. Still, he gave thanks.

Think about the setting of the passage from Matthew; it seems like a strange time to be giving thanks. Before the night was over, Judas would betray Jesus, Peter would deny him, and all the others would forsake him. The next day, he'd be killed. Can you imagine giving thanks in a situation like that? Yet, Jesus did. Not because his situation was good, but because God is good. That's a lesson for all of us. We give thanks at this table for Jesus' love, courage, and sacrifice. When we celebrate The Lord's Supper, we participate in one of the two acts that Jesus commanded us to do — the other is baptism, which we'll talk about next week.

So, Can One Meal Change Everything? Yes, it can. The Lord's Supper is more than a ritual — it's a reminder of who Jesus is, and who we are because of him.

It celebrates:

Jesus the Crucified One, who forgives us.

Jesus the Risen One, who gives us new life.

Jesus the Abiding One, who is with us always.

Jesus the Coming One, whose return we await.

When we come to the table, we proclaim our faith, remember our Savior, and celebrate the life we've been given — together.

## **Blessing**

Loving God

### **Send us from this place**

With the light of your hope in our eyes

And the fire of your love in our hearts.

### **Send us from this place**

conscious again of the unseen cloud of witnesses who surround us,

and certain of the presence of our blessed Lord Jesus.

### **Send us from this place**

sure of the forgiveness of sins

And of life eternal, to which there is no end.

### **Send us from this place**

sure that in this life you are with us.

And that afterwards you will receive us in glory.

Give us such knowledge and love of yourself and such power and grace to tell of it

That through us others may come to know you and to love you,

In Jesus' name and for your glory. Amen.

### Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What stands out to you the most about Jesus' actions and words at The Last Supper in *Matthew 26:26–30*? How do those words shape how you view The Lord's Supper today?
2. The sermon compares Communion to a meaningful item in your home that carries emotional value. Do you have something like that? How does that help you understand the deeper meaning behind the bread and cup?
3. What does it mean to you that all are welcome at The Lord's Table — even those who betrayed, denied, or doubted Jesus? How does that shape your view of grace, forgiveness, and Christian community?
4. We're invited to "examine ourselves" before receiving Communion. What might self-examination look like in your life? How can it help you grow spiritually?
5. Jesus gave thanks during an exceedingly difficult moment — knowing betrayal, denial, and the cross were ahead. How can we learn to give thanks, even in hard circumstances, like Jesus did?
6. Why is it helpful to remember that Jesus is not only the Crucified One, but the Risen and Coming One? How does celebrating The Lord's Supper connect you to hope, joy, and the future that God promises?