

## Why We Do Communion the Way We Do

This weekend is a Communion weekend at MRBC. Our church has been doing Communion for 104 years now. That number is eclipsed by the fact that the Christian church has been doing it for over 2000 years! Through the millennia, the practice of Communion has looked very different. Throughout our history as a church, it has morphed several times. These days we are trying a new and different form of Communion in our service. This has sparked some conversations in the church. Some people like it. Some people do not. It has led me to ask the question: *How would Jesus want us to take Communion?* The truth is, we don't really know. In Luke 22:19 Jesus is in the midst of the first Communion service. He says, "Do this in remembrance of me..." What is 'this' that Jesus was talking about? Jesus said it in an Upper Room in Jerusalem with 12 other people over a Passover meal. That's pretty hard to replicate. Fast forward now to the year 2016 in Maple Ridge: *How do you do the "this" with 650 at our church on a regular basis?* Can Jesus' idea of "this" be flexible to various contexts and cultures?

Judging from church history, it must be. Communion has been both celebrated and debated ever since Jesus gave us the gift of this sacrament that night in the famous Upper Room. Today Communion looks very different from church to church. Level-headed Christians will tell you that it is the *content* of Communion that matters most. The meaning is found not in the bread/crackers and juice/wine but taking the time to commune with God through remembering what Jesus has done for us. This is what we are celebrating and reflecting on during communion. Whatever form it takes in the church, as long as Communion is Jesus-centred and grace-filled, I believe it is pleasing to God. We could argue that one form is better than another. Most people's arguments are not anchored in a chapter and verse of the Bible but more about personal preference for how they'd like to see it done.

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During this season at MRBC, we have researched, discussed and decided on a method of celebrating Communion differently than we have in previous years. We are asking our people to come forward to take the elements of the holy symbols (still gluten free Chex and grape juice - some things never change!). There are a few reasons for why we are doing this:

1. It has been and still is the practice for much of church history for hundreds of years to come forward to receive the elements. Passing the elements along the pews is actually a very recent practice given Christianity's long history. Anyone from an Anglican, Presbyterian, Reformed or Catholic (and many Mennonite Brethren) background visiting our church will likely be comfortable with coming forward for Communion.
2. Coming forward allows people to have space to stay seated for a time of reflection and prayer before taking the elements. Paul tells us to take Communion soberly. "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Corinthians 10:28).
3. It does not force unbelieving church attenders to have to take the elements if they are not following Jesus. They are perfectly fine to sit in their seat and reflect while Communion is taking place.
4. It causes us all to actively participate more in the service. We must get up, come forward and receive the elements.
5. There is a public accountability in coming forward. We are visible to others; others who often know whether our hearts are right to take Communion or not. Paul warns us to make sure we do not take Communion in an unworthy manner. That's why we are trying it for awhile. Our hope is that it will produce a more meaningful, accountable and smoother Communion service at MRBC.

Thanks for your patience and understanding as we seek to serve our people and bring glory to Jesus at MRBC.

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