

# **BROKEN FOR ME, BROKEN FOR YOU**

*(Mark 14.12-26 and 1 Corinthians 11.23-30)*

It was quite a day. Oh, it started quite normally. It was Passover Day. What were they going to do about the Passover feast, wondered the disciples. OK, *let's ask the boss* was the decision. So, they did. Then it all became anything but normal. What did the boss tell them?

*Drive into Stockton and park up. From the car park you will see a chap carrying a small beer barrel on his shoulder. Don't speak to him, just follow him at a distance but keeping him in sight. He will go up to a house in Yarm Lane near the town centre and use a key to get in. Then you go to the same house and ring the bell. A man (not the one you have been following) will answer the door. Tell him that your boss wants to know where the festival celebration will be. He will show you a big upstairs room, all clean and tidy and laid out for you to make the final preparations.*

And that's what happened – except it was in Jerusalem, not Stockton on Tees!

Back in Jerusalem, the Passover meal took place normally until, halfway though Jesus tells them that one of them is a traitor. Another surprise – a shock even! They each (including the one he is talking about) ask him whether he is talking about them and he gives them a clue about who it is.

Then Jesus picks up the bread and says thank you to God. Back to normality? Not so, as he breaks it, he tells them that that bread is his body and hands each of them part of it. *What is he on about?* they ask themselves.

The same happens with the big cup of wine. As it is passed round, so they can all drink from it, Jesus tells them that it represents his own blood which is poured out for lots of people. *Whatever does he mean?*

Still more bafflingly he says he will not have any more wine until he drinks it in a new way in God's kingdom.

The disciples' day may have started normally but they were to be astonished and puzzled by - have you been counting?- no fewer than four happenings which were anything but normal – the business about finding the room, the

business about the betrayal, the episode of the bread and the episode of the wine.

What would we have made of them had we been in the sandals of the disciples? What do we make now of the last two?

We need to remember that, although Jesus words were unique and very special, the meal and the action of breaking the bread and sharing it with thanks to God and the passing of the wine cup with thanks to God were nothing out of the ordinary.

It was a Passover meal celebrating God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and that is what was done and is still done by those of the Jewish faith. What was radically different were those four short words *This is my body* and those four short words

*This is my blood* and, of course and importantly, *I will not drink wine again until I drink it anew in the Kingdom of God.*

Jesus had told his disciples time and again what was going to happen to him and they did not take it in. Here again is the reference to his coming death – broken body and spilt blood. Here again is the reference to his resurrection – drinking wine again, only now in God's kingdom.

The difference now is that in a matter of hours he will be tortured and crucified and three days later would be back among them in a recognisable but new body.

Did you pick up on that word *covenant*? *This is my blood of the covenant* - some versions of the Bible say **new** covenant. Paul also talks about *the new covenant* in our passage from 1 Corinthians.

What Jesus is saying is that he is replacing the old covenant (or contract) which God had with Abraham and the Israelites in the Old Testament, and which was all about law and obedience and (more frequently **dis**obedience), with a new covenant which was, and is, all about love.

Coincidence or God at work? I had been thinking about how to develop that theme and had not got very far but, on 26th February and unusually, I

went to the informal communion service held every Wednesday at All Saints'. It started with a bible reading and study and the passage was - the episode of the bread and wine from St. Luke's gospel. After it had been read, John Lambert, who was leading, asked people what Communion meant to them and the answers moved my thoughts forward.

Before I give you the answers to John Lambert's question which show that taking Communion is not the same for everyone, we do need to be clear that those words of Jesus *This is my body: this is my blood* are not to be taken literally. As someone once said: *We do not need to understand the chemistry of bread in order to digest it and be nourished by it.*

So, to the different answers to the question:

- It brings about a huge feeling of being together – all of us sharing the same experience.
- It brings forcibly to mind what Jesus did for us all 'This is my body'; 'This is my blood' He, without sin, was going to a cruel death instead of us who are compulsive sinners.
- It connects us directly to Jesus as nothing else does.
- It is the most holy moment of any service.
- In our bowing or kneeling to receive communion, we recognise the significance and solemnity of what we are involved in.

How would you answer the question, *What does taking Communion mean to you?* Would it be one of those? Would it be something different?

We heard St. Paul's answer in our first reading from chapter 11 of his first letter to the Christians in Corinth. It's at verse 26. *Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Before we move on it is worth remembering two important things about this passage which is about an early Communion service and the casual way some of the Corinthians involved treated it:

The letter predates the earliest of the gospels. It was written before any of them and is the very first time we are told of the words of Jesus. It is the biblical justification for our Communion Service.

I've just mentioned the casual attitude of some of the Corinthian people to the Communion meal. Paul tells them off, in pretty strong language. *You are, he says, sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.*

What he is NOT saying is that, to take Communion, we must be perfect. What he IS saying is that we should come to Jesus' table understanding and appreciating what he has done for us – what he did for us so soon after he spoke those words: *This is my body; this is my blood.*

A few minutes ago, we sang the title of this talk - the worship song *Broken for me, broken for you*. Sometimes we sing hymns and songs, especially those we know well, without really thinking of the words and their meaning.

We've looked at those answers to John Lambert's question about what Communion means to us. We've heard this morning what St. Paul said about it. That song, *Broken for me, broken for you* gives us some more food for thought.

Let us look at some of those words which will help us when we come to the Communion rail:

*Jesus was broken – why? So we could be whole – put right with a righteous but loving God.*

*Eat it remembering – keeping at the forefront of our minds.*

*I died for you – my death was the means of your having an eternal life with God.*

*For your forgiveness, making you new – it's as if your wrongdoing had never happened.*

*Come to my table and with me dine – a generous undeserved invitation from Jesus himself to meet him at that Communion rail.*

We have looked at Jesus' words and actions at that Passover meal with his friends just before he went out to his death. We have looked at some of the approaches and attitudes to what we do as we re-enact that occasion. Whatever they are, they must, MUST, reflect what Jesus did for us on the cross on which he hung and died.

It might help us if I end with a prayer. It's a prayer which immediately follows the taking of Communion in the All Saints' Lent Communion service and it

may help us to come to Jesus' table in the right state of mind. If you feel you can go along with it, I invite you to say Amen after it.

Lord God, you have renewed us with the living bread from heaven.  
By it you nourish our faith, increase our hope and strengthen our love.  
Teach us always to hunger for him who is the true and living bread,  
and enable us to live by every word that proceeds from out of your mouth.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**