

# Worship and Holy Communion

Chris Cottee

It would be a strange thing if celebrating Communion created problems with worship! We would expect this 'remembrance' of the sacrifice of the cross, which Jesus Himself told us to do, to fit naturally into worship, to follow on from worship and to lead to worship. And, rightly handled, so it does. To begin at the beginning, there are two 'sacraments' which Jesus deliberately left us – baptism and Communion (also called 'The Eucharist' and 'The Lord's Supper'). They both symbolise essentially the same things, but in different ways. Basically, both symbolise the wondrous fact that through Jesus' death and resurrection, we receive total forgiveness and cleansing, and a fresh start which is so 'new' that it is called being 'born again' and is eternal life as children of the Father, here and now.

The difference is that baptism symbolises the fact that this is received once, in all its glorious completeness, at the moment we first come to Christ. This is why the Church of England discourages repeat baptism – because part of the symbolism of baptism is that the gift of Christ is received only once. We cannot be born again again! Once we have accepted Jesus we are His and He is ours, forever. We are made the Father's children, given a place at His table in heaven, washed clean of all sin and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, and sealed as God's possession by the Holy Spirit. All this, from that moment of our turning to Christ, as a gift from God, permanently, completely, because on the cross our salvation was bought, paid for and completed by Jesus, who cried out, "It is finished!"

But Holy Communion is meant to be repeated. It speaks of the same wonderful gifts of God, but refreshed in us again and again. It is the Father's wonderful reassurance that we are forgiven, that we are His, that He loves us still, and that our place at His dinner-table is waiting for us.

I find the most helpful way of introducing Communion is to focus on Jesus as the one who gives us the bread and the wine. To encourage the realisation that just as He gave it to those first disciples, so He gives it to each one as they receive the 'elements'. I often suggest that as we receive we listen for His words of reassurance, 'Of course I still love you! Of course I still forgive you! Of course you're still mine! I love you today as much as I did the first day you came to me. You are precious to me.'

There are many other ways of introducing Communion and, I am beginning to suspect, an infinite number of helpful, challenging, uplifting and strengthening meanings buried within it! Not least of these is the reminder that the basis of our faith is what Jesus has done – achieved, completed. It all depends on that, not on my current feelings. This can be enormously helpful for those (there are always some!) who in the midst of a right royal knees-up of worship are feeling, 'What's wrong with me? Why aren't I jumping up and down?' Our salvation and our place in God's heart are settled by what Jesus achieved, and don't depend on the feelings of the moment. In that sense Communion always takes us back to the reliable, objective truths of our faith, and is an encouragement to all those who, for whatever reason, aren't feeling 'up for it!' Even taking as a basic pattern the idea of receiving it as from Jesus Himself, there are many different ways that it can bless us. And that links to the worship most naturally by the band playing songs that focus on the cross itself during the time people are receiving the Communion, leading on to expressions of love and devotion afterwards. Indeed, we have often found at Soul Survivor Watford, that Communion leads into a wonderfully refreshing time of praise and rejoicing in the Father's presence. At other times, less often, it has led to stillness and wonder, with quieter singing and silence. Sometimes, it has led to expressions of our commitment to serve and follow where Jesus leads.

When I introduce Communion at Soul Survivor, I always try to link it to what's been said in the talk. And as I don't know what the talk will be about beforehand, and the band don't know how I will link it in, there is a need for some flexibility in what we sing next, as the way the worship progresses hasn't been planned in advance (hallelujah!). To give themselves time to adjust, the band can safely assume that anything about the cross will be fine during Communion, and that period of worship allows thought and prayer about what to move on to and sing afterwards. Let the Spirit lead!