

## What's with All the Communion?

If you've been at morning worship the past couple of weeks, you've noticed something: we've been doing Communion every Sunday. What's up with that, anyway?

The quick answer is that it tie-in to our Lenten emphasis on community around the table. As I preach this sermon series on "Meals with Jesus," we are trying to capture that experience by sponsoring and encouraging meal-time encounters. Different small groups have met and others are yet to meet during Lent, leading up toward our church-wide potluck on March 17 (see p. 4). Celebrating Communion - worship through the mystery of the bread and cup - is a part of that, and we will continue to observe Communion each week through Lent.

For some of you, Communion every Sunday is welcome and refreshing. For many, the mystery of the sacraments - experience beyond explanation - is the heart of worship, and Communion bears the weight of glory to them in ways that a sermon never will. Others, those who think of the sermon as the heart of the worship service, may be impatient with all this symbolism and want move on to something more rational. Still others, for whom church is primarily a place of active ministry and service to others, may be even more impatient with weekly Communion. People who are looking for practicality often have little time for mystery.

Welcome to the United Methodist Church, where as a group we have no idea how we feel about Communion. John Wesley took Communion an average of four times a week and, in his eighties, published a (somewhat crotchety) sermon entitled "The Duty of Constant Communion." (Theme: "Young people these days don't take anything seriously . . .") On the other hand, a strong part of the Wesleyan tradition has to do with "Preaching Houses" and frontier parishes where lay people, including women, taught scripture and led prayer and did works of mercy and held each other accountable for their own growth in faith. Since these lay preachers were not permitted to administer sacraments, this enduring and unique part of legacy of Methodism developed without much emphasis on Communion at all.

Methodists still send conflicting messages on the sacraments. The tradition of deep respect for the mystery of Holy Communion, going back to John Wesley, continues today: a movement within Methodism is calling for all churches to serve Communion every Sunday. On the other hand, we have that deeply pragmatic strain in our DNA as well, and those who think this way would rather focus on strategies and new ministries than on rituals.

So, as in so many other areas, we play a balancing game. We aren't planning to go to weekly Communion all the time, but for the sake of those who thrive in the mystery, we are doing so for a season. And for the rest of us, it is not a bad thing to reconnect to mystery and put aside our practical sides for a time. Join us this month for Meals with Jesus, sacred feasts, Holy Communion, the Breaking of the Bread.