

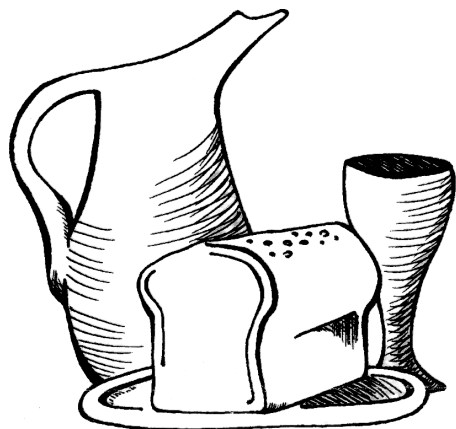
Some Thoughts about Agape Meals

My dictionary defines the word *Communion* in two ways. Capitalized, it means “a Christian sacrament that commemorates Jesus Christ’s Last Supper, with the priest or minister consecrating bread and wine that is consumed by the congregation (also called *Eucharist*).” Not capitalized, it is defined as “a feeling of emotional or spiritual closeness.”

Sister Margaret Basso, a spiritual retreat leader, once said, “When the bread is broken open for us, that is Eucharist. When we break ourselves open to each other, that is also Eucharist.”

Perhaps that is why something remarkable happens when people sit down to eat together. We share food and conversation. We become a part of each other’s lives. We break ourselves open to one another.

We don’t know a great deal about the early Christian agape meal (also referred to as a love feast). In the Letter



liturgy for an agape meal

by Katie Cook

Before the meal, place a loaf of bread and a cup of juice or wine on each table. When the time comes for communion, each table may want to choose a leader to break the bread.

Blessing of the Meal

LEADER: Welcome to this meal, in the name of Christ. We come to share in God’s love.

PEOPLE: We come to share our food and our lives.

LEADER: We come to break bread together, and to break ourselves open to each other.

PEOPLE: We come to express our faith and our thanks.

LEADER: May God bless this food and this fellowship.

PEOPLE: As we share our food, we give thanks for this abundance, and we remember those who do not have enough.

LEADER: May God give food to those who are hungry.

PEOPLE: May God give us a hunger for justice, and a determination to serve those who hunger for food.

The Meal

The Communion

LEADER: People of God, we have eaten our fill. We have quenched our thirst. We have shared our stories with each other.

PEOPLE: Now it is time to share bread as Jesus shared it with his friends.

LEADER: *(Takes the nearest loaf and breaks it)* Jesus took the bread that was on the table after their meal. He broke it and blessed it, saying, “This is my body that is given for you.” *(Someone at each table breaks the loaf at that table.)*

LEADER: Let us now break the bread for each other. *(Each person at the table passes the bread to the next person, breaking off a piece for that person, saying, “Take this bread; it is the bread of life.” The people hold their pieces of bread.)*

LEADER: Now it is time to share the cup as Jesus did. *(Takes the nearest cup and raises it up.)* That night he took a cup from the table, gave thanks for it, and said, “Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant.” *(Someone at each table takes the cup.)*

LEADER: Let us now pass the cup, in remembrance of the life that Jesus gave for us. *(The leader at each table passes the cup, and each person holds the cup for the next, allowing him or her to dip the bread into the cup, saying, “Take this cup; it is the gift of Christ.” Each one then says, “We give thanks” and eats the bread.)*

The Commission

LEADER: The scripture says that, as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the life and death of Christ until he comes.

PEOPLE: We have received the bread and the cup, the body and blood of Christ. We are filled with his love and life.

LEADER: As we proclaim the life and death of Christ, we also proclaim his teachings.

PEOPLE: May we always remember and follow his way.

LEADER: Jesus told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” *(Someone from each table brings the fragments to a central table.)*

Benediction

LEADER: Behold, the fragments of our feast. Our meal is ended, but God’s banquet continues as we go from this place.

PEOPLE: Let us take the banquet into the world and never give up until all people are fed.

LEADER: May the peace of Christ be upon you, and may you be channels of peace and justice.

ALL: Amen.



of Jude we find a reference to love feasts.

The writer, in verse 12, admonishes a group of Christians for abusing the meals. These people were called to care for others, but they only fed themselves.

The writer has a good many choice descriptions for these people and for their fate. The passage is a strong indictment against such practices, but they have been repeated many times throughout the Church’s history.

We in today’s Church often only feed ourselves while ignoring the needs of the world outside our doors.

We are called, by this passage, and by thousands of other verses of scripture, to care for others.

From the first Pauline letter to the Corinthians, we learn that communion was celebrated in the early Church in connection with a common meal. They used the bread and cup already on the table, as Jesus did during the last supper before his death. We should encourage each other, now and then, to return the Lord’s Supper to the tables where we eat together. And, as we share this meal, we should remember the ones outside our doors.

Agape is the New Testament word for the love God showed us in Christ, the love we share in Christ, and the love that is the reason for our meals together. Let us enter into communion with each other over this meal. —lkc

*The art on the side panels is by Erin Kennedy Mayer.
The art in the center panel is by Susan Daily.*