

# 40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

## DAY 34 – The Eucharist and Worship

*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John Calvin was not a particularly happy-go-lucky kind of chap. He certainly is not known for his frolics. I'm always surprised that a nation that produced William Wallace, Robert the Bruce and deep-fried Mars bars would also develop the Presbyterian Church centred in Calvinistic teaching.

So, it was a very strange union, the union of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches that formed the Uniting Church in 1977. I reckon if you had told either John Wesley or John Knox that their traditions would find harmony together, they both might have burned you alive...even if would only be Wesley's strangely warned heart. And maybe the union is not as harmonious as we think? After all, the UCA came into being with two distinct understandings of baptism and even more different practices of the Eucharist (when, how, why etc).

Anyway, the place of the Eucharist in the worship of the church has long dogged the UCA. For many people, while communion holds a significant place in their hearts, they have become so indoctrinated in "how" and "when" communion should be done that they very rarely understand "why" it should be done. So let's go right to the heart of the matter.

According to John Calvin in the "*Short Treaties on the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1540), "*Now what is said of the word also belongs to the sacrament of the supper. By these means, our Lord lead to the communion with himself. For seeing that we're so foolish that we cannot receive with him true confidence of heart when he is presented to us by simple preaching and reading the word; of his great mercy, not of all disdain to condescend to our miserable weakness, attaches to his word the visible sign by which he represents the substance of his promises, to confirm and fortify us and deliver us from all doubt and uncertainty. For this reason for the Lord instituted the sacraments, in order to be signed and sealed in us, of the promises contained in the gospel concerning our being partakers of his body and life and to give us certainty and assurance that in this consists out true spiritual life.*"

What Calvin is saying here, albeit in his best dismal condescending way, is this, "Humanity can be so stupid and dumb that they don't comprehend even the simplest sermons and therefore miss God's grace. So in order that we get something, Jesus gave us the Eucharist because it bypasses our dull-witted humanity." But, in the giving us of this sacrament, Jesus assures us, irrespective of our confused thinking, that we are made very members incorporate in his mystical body.

So we cannot think of a service of worship that does not include word *and* sacrament. Word *and* sacrament belong together. They are both aspects of the one in which Christ accommodates himself to us in order to unite us to himself. In the Protestant tradition, these have become separated because of historical reasons. Mainly, it was because of the Protestant obsession and opposition to the Catholic mass. But in terms of the apostolic witness, and in terms of the reformers understanding of Christ's purpose for the church, we cannot conceive the service of worship that separates word and sacrament.

### PRAYER

Lord,  
As you broke bread with your disciples,  
So too do you invite us to break bread.  
Because as Paul rightly proclaims,  
For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup,  
We proclaim You.  
So come to us Lord Jesus in the bread and the wine  
That we might know Your Grace fully and clearly. Amen.

BTW. A good precis of the baptism controversy in the UCA can be found at <https://ameliakoh-butler.blogspot.com/p/baptism-in-uniting-church-in-australia.html>