

Spiritual Communion

In these days of social distancing and self-isolation, many Methodists feel the lack of being able to share together at the Lord's Table. Holy Communion is the central act of Christian worship and as Methodists we understand it, along with many other Christians, to be a means of grace, through which we encounter the love and power of God. John Wesley taught about several means of grace including prayer as well as reading, hearing and meditating on the Scriptures. Our Roman Catholic friends as well as other Christians have a tradition of "Spiritual Communion" as a means of grace for those times when they are not able physically to receive this sacrament. In the unprecedented circumstances in which we find ourselves today, it may be that this is a tradition in which Methodists too may experience God's grace.

Spiritual Communion is a practice where we entrust ourselves to God in prayer, pledging ourselves to God once more as disciples and praying that God might give us spiritually the same grace we share when we physically receive Holy Communion. In his sermon on the means of grace, John Wesley taught that God can give us grace with or without physical means: God can work through anything or indeed nothing. Wesley argued that we should make the fullest use of the means of grace we can, but in times when that is not possible, his acknowledgement that God is more than able to work in other ways is a comfort to us. We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or in the bread and wine received in the Lord's supper; but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the Author of all grace; that the whole power is of Him, whereby, through any of these, there is any blessing conveyed to our souls. We know, likewise, that He is able to give the same grace, though there were no means on the face of the earth. In this sense, we may affirm, that, with regard to God, there is no such thing as means; seeing He is equally able to work whatsoever pleaseth Him, by any, or by none at all.

In this short act of worship, we pray that God's purposes may be fulfilled in us, even though we cannot at this time gather at the Lord's Table. We remember God's mighty acts of creating the world, redeeming it and sustaining it. We proclaim that Christ has died, is risen and will come again. In our prayer, we are in fellowship and communion with Christians in every time and place. Even when we cannot gather physically we are profoundly connected to and in communion with one another: we are united in the communion of saints; we are united in the body of Christ.

Prepare a prayerful space. You might find it helpful to place a cross or candle there or to have an icon, image or symbol. You might like to place your open Bible in front of you.

An act of spiritual communion

Pray: Loving God, I have come to worship you. Help me to remember that you are here with me. May I pray to you in faith, praise you with gratitude, and read your word with eagerness; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Spend some time in reflection on the day and on people who are on your mind: What are you thankful for? Where in our lives do we seek (or need) God's forgiveness? What can you leave to God?

Pray: Eternal God, in Christ you make yourself a guest. Amid all my cares and concerns make me attentive to your voice and alert to your presence, that I may know your love surpasses all else; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Read a passage of scripture. It could be today's reading from the Prayer Handbook (see www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/a-word-in-time/), one you have chosen, or *Matthew 14:22-27: Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'*

Pray for the church, the world and all people in need.

Say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection on Jesus' life, death and resurrection, before praying:

Jesus my brother, who brought divine Life out of human death, you are meeting me here and now in this place, in this moment. I pause to remember that the one thing I desire above all others is for you to be with me. Though I cannot receive you in bread and wine today, come into my heart and show me you were already there within me, by your love lighting my darkness from within. Open my eyes to your sacred presence in each thing you have created and in every moment you give. As each of your followers does their part where they are, may we all grow together in love and in richer, fuller communion. Make us one with you and with all who love you in every time and place. Help us to feel and to know that we are united as members of your body. With all your people, may I share your risen life, which renews all creation. I offer myself to you in service, as an act of spiritual worship. Amen. Loving God, be with me and all your people in these days when we cannot gather in person and help us to hope in that great day when we will all gather at your heavenly banquet; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.**