

## **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 pleases Him, by any, or by none at all."*

In this 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.

### **A Service of Spiritual Communion** (adapted and expanded)

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

Loving God, we have come to worship you. Help us to remember that You are with each of us where we are. May we pray to You in faith, praise You with gratitude, and hear Your word with eagerness, in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Song**

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here;  
Come bow before him now with reverence and fear:  
In him no sin is found - we stand on holy ground.  
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;  
He burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned:  
How awesome is the sight - our radiant King of light!  
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;  
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace -  
No work too hard for him. In faith receive from him.  
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

*Spend some time in reflection:*

- *What are the things for which you can specially praise and thank the Lord today? Express those to Him.*
- *Where in your life do you need God's forgiveness? Bring that to Him.*
- *What do you need to entrust to God's care? ('Cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you'. 1 Pt 5:7)*

Eternal God, thank You that You are present in our world and in our lives. Thank You for the many ways in which You bless and enrich our living.

Thank You for the forgiveness You make possible through Jesus. Thank You that through Him we can come to your throne of grace and there receive forgiveness and help.

Thank You that we can cast our cares on You, knowing that you care for us. Help us to be attentive to Your voice and alert to Your presence, that we may know that Your love surpasses all else; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Scripture reading: John 21:1-14** (New International Version)

Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> 'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered.

<sup>6</sup> He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

<sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred metres. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

*Read through the passage twice, slowly.*

The disciples have returned to their fishing. Maybe they need something familiar after the rollercoaster of the past days, which included Jesus' crucifixion and then His unexpected resurrection and His appearance to them. Struggling to make sense of everything, they decide to return to this more 'grounded' activity which they knew so well.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself on that fishing boat as one of the disciples. How are you feeling after the experiences of the past days and of a long night's fruitless fishing?

What goes through your mind as you hear John say, 'It is the Lord'?

On the shore Jesus offers you the fish and bread he has prepared. He looks at you with love and tenderness as He does so.

Now picture Jesus drawing you aside on your own. What do you think He might say to you?

What do you want to say to Him in response?

Jesus, we thus obey  
Your last and kindest word;  
Here, in Your own appointed way,  
We come to meet You, Lord.

Your presence makes the feast;  
And now our spirits feel  
The glory not to be expressed,  
The joy unspeakable.

With pure celestial bliss  
Our spirits now You cheer;  
Your house of banqueting is this,  
And You have brought us here.

Now let our souls be fed  
with manna from above,  
and over us Your banner spread  
of everlasting love.

(Charles Wesley)

Heavenly Father, You created all things and made us in Your own image. When we had fallen into sin, You gave Your only Son to be our Saviour. He shared our human nature and died on the cross. You raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to Your right hand in glory, where He lives for ever to pray for us. Through Him You have sent Your holy and life-giving Spirit, and made us Your people, a royal priesthood, to stand before You, to proclaim Your glory and celebrate Your mighty acts. Jesus our brother, who brought divine Life out of human death, You are meeting us here and now in this place, in this moment. Though I cannot receive You in bread and wine today, come into my heart and show me You were already here within me.

*In a moment of silence, open your hands as you would at the communion rail.  
Now picture Jesus putting His hands around yours, looking into your eyes and assuring you of his loving presence and of His strength for whatever lies before you.*

Lord, open our eyes to Your sacred presence in each thing You have created and in every moment You give us. 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. As each of us does our part where we are, may we all grow together in love and in richer, fuller communion. With all Your people, may we share Your risen life, which renews all creation. We now offer ourselves anew to You, to be Your instrument of loving service in the world. Amen.

### **Song**

All to Jesus, I surrender, all to Thee I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust You, in Your presence daily live.  
I surrender all, I surrender all, all to Thee, my blessed Saviour,  
I surrender all.

All to Jesus, I surrender, Lord, I give myself to Thee;  
Fill me with Your love and power; let Your blessing fall on me.  
I surrender all, I surrender all, all to Thee, my blessed Saviour,  
I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender, now I feel the sacred flame.  
O the joy of full salvation! Glory, glory, to Your Name!  
I surrender all, I surrender all, all to Thee, my blessed Saviour,  
I surrender all.

*Think of others from the past and the present who are one with you as members of Christ's body, the 'Communion of Saints'. Give thanks for them and pray for any of them who are in special need at this time.*

*Finish with this prayer:*

Loving God, thank You that You are with me and all Your people in these days, when we cannot gather in person. Help us to hope in that great day when we will all gather at Your heavenly banquet, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The King of love my Shepherd is,  
Whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am His,  
And He is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow  
My ransomed soul He leadeth,  
And, where the verdant pastures grow,  
With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,  
But yet in love He sought me,  
And on His shoulder gently laid,  
And home rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill  
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me;  
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,  
Thy Cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;  
Thy unction grace bestoweth;  
And oh, what transport of delight  
From Thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days  
Thy goodness faileth never;  
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise  
Within Thy house forever.

### **Benediction**

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