



# One Page Sermon

## By Rev. Robb McCoy

### August 18, 2024

## A story, not theology, of Communion

Recap of sermon from August 18, 2024

Scripture: John 6:51-58

‘How can this be?’

Jesus made a shocking statement that day after feeding 5,000 people with nothing but a young person’s lunch. “The bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51). Immediately, the people wondered what he meant. “[They] debated among themselves, asking, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” (John 6:52). Another translator puts it, “they got into a heated argument” over what Jesus had said. The truth is, we are still arguing over what Jesus meant by this. One of the great divides between the many denominations of Christianity is the nature of Communion. What is the bread and cup of eucharist?

The debating that started in John 6 really hasn’t ended. Since that moment, we have invented words and concepts like transubstantiation, consubstantiation, memorialization, spiritual presence, and sacramental unity. Each of these concepts describes what is happening to the bread and wine. Our own United Methodist understanding of Communion can be found online at [umc.org](http://umc.org), and the definition contains elements of several of these concepts.

I can sum up my theology of Communion in two ways: 1) I don’t know exactly what happens, but I know *something* happens; and 2) I can tell you a story of one moment when Communion—eating Jesus’ flesh—changed my life. (I don’t have room for the whole story here. The full version is at <https://fatpastor.me/2018/06/27/another-resurrection-moment>)

This story takes place at Annual Conference in June of 2018. It was in the middle of our denomination’s debate over inclusion of LGBTQ people in the church, and I was feeling for the first time like my denomination was falling apart. Our annual conference gathering was always my “home church,” but for the first time I had a feeling that many didn’t want me there because of my desire for a more inclusive church.

**So I sat through most of the proceedings with my introvert dial turned up to 11.** I avoided small talk. I sat in the corners of the giant room. I participated fully in body, but not in spirit. Then it was time for Communion with the newly ordained. Once again, I heard the vows to “take thou authority to preach the Word of God, to administer the Sacraments, and order the life of the church.” I reflected on that awesome authority to which I still submit. I thought of the people in my little congregation in Rock Island, a diverse, aging, youthful collection of hopeful and spirited people who want to love the world. By the grace of God I have been trusted with the awesome responsibility of guiding these saints to the Kingdom. I owe them more than a hard heart.

And then it was time to receive the bread and the cup. Slightly thawed by the grace of the people of Two Rivers Church, I went forward. I got in line for one of the young women who had just been ordained a deacon. As I waited for the piece of soft bread and grape juice she came to me again, I was taken back to the moment I first served Communion as someone who was newly ordained. My most vivid memory of that day was placing the bread of life into the hands of my Mother.

She was the reason I was ordained. It was her love that brought me to Christ, and her prophetic words that first called me to ministry. When I placed that bread in her hand, looked in her eye and said, “Mom, this is the body of Christ which is broken for you.” I remember her eyes above all else. I could see the tears welling up. I could see the joy in receiving this thing she had received so many times before, but never quite like this. I remember the pride in her eyes as she saw a baptized infant, a confirmed teen, a married man, a new father, and an ordained Elder all in one moment of eternity.

So I moved forward in line, approaching the bread and cup. Then the bread was placed in my hand and I dipped it into the cup. The Holy Spirit washed over me as I was forgiven by Christ’s blood and was unified by Christ’s body. The sweet and tangy grape flooded my mouth and in one moment of eternity she was there. I knew her joy in sharing this meal with me in this moment. Her pride in the pastor and father I am. Her sadness over my pain. Jesus’ grace for my sin. It was all there. His arms rested upon me. Her eyes fixed on me. **Her cool, soft, refreshing hands touched my face and I knew resurrection again. Through the locked doors of my heart, she appeared, and I wept.** (read the rest at [fatpastor.me](http://fatpastor.me))

Communion is a moment when we grasp eternity. We take the bread and cup, and we take in the flesh of Jesus. Like a good book or provocative thought, we “chew on it” for a moment. Like a spectacular view, we “drink it in.” Like taking the perfect bite of an exquisite dinner, sometimes all we can do is close our eyes and taste and see how good God is.

I’m not sure a systematic explanation of my theology of Communion, full of Biblical exegesis and citations of the Church Elders would be as helpful as this: when we come to the Table of Christ, Jesus is present. Resurrection is real. Eternity is opened, and flesh and blood as real as you and me is there in the bread and the cup.

**Next Week: Bread of Life 4 of 4**  
**“This message is difficult!”**