

## What is happening with Holy Communion?

It has been good to begin to worship again in St. Matthias Church building at last. However, as you know, there remain limitations about how we go about that: wearing a face covering, not singing, and frequent sanitising of hands and surfaces.



We had hoped to recommence services of Holy Communion soon too, but last week, St Matthias Church Council (the 'PCC') - in the light of the most recent guidance from the Church of England, based upon the Government's instructions - understandably felt that the even more cumbersome sanitising that would be needed for this meant that we should not begin Communion services for a further month or so. This will be a great disappointment to many I know.

However, our Holy Communion services will continue online – largely as per our 'pre-lockdown' pattern – on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays, with an additional Book of Common Prayer Communion on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sundays.

**It seems a good time to consider what is the value of taking part in one of these online Communion services when we cannot receive the bread and wine ourselves?**

Whole libraries have probably been written about what it means to receive the sacraments of bread and wine in church – but theologians are in relatively new territory when it comes to online worship!

Some churches have revived some centuries old theology about what is called 'Spiritual communion' – reminding us that we can know a 'communion' with our Lord as we come afresh to him in prayer anyway – and that we do not need the bread and wine to be able to do that.<sup>1</sup> However, here at St. Matthias, we still believe there is real value about continuing to share Communion services online as we have been doing.

When we are together in church, sharing the ‘one cup’ and ‘one bread’ there are several parts to what we celebrate. Here are some of these:

**We remember Jesus** and his sacrifice on the cross for us – and God’s love for the world, and we continue to be able to do this as we take part in the online worship. The familiar words of the service help us to do that too.

**We share a fellowship meal** - which the one cup and one bread symbolise when we are in the church building together. Clearly, when we take part online, we are not able to do that. However, some people still like to have something to eat and drink at home as they take part in the online worship, so that they are engaging with the fellowship of eating together.

Paul Barton and I warmly commend this practice to you - however, as Bishop Robert rightly points out, this is not the same as **receiving that bread and wine as a ‘sacrament’** (“a visible sign of an invisible grace”) which we can really only do as we receive the bread and wine as part of a service when we are physically gathered together in one place.

So, while in taking part with an online Communion service we cannot receive all of the same benefits as doing so together in church, there are still real benefits of doing so. May God bless us as we continue to seek to honour Jesus in all that we do.

John

<sup>i</sup> Pages 5 – 8 of the latest Church of England guidance about Holy Communion have a brief discussion about these matters.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/COVID-19%20Advice%20on%20the%20Administration%20of%20Holy%20Communion%20v5.0.pdf>

There is also a short paper about ‘Spiritual Communion’ that you can find here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidance%20on%20Spiritual%20Communion%20and%20Coronavirus.pdf>