Communion – as often as you do this.

May 7, 2023

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BIG IDEA – Eating together is an act of fellowship.

scripture focus - 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 MSG

"Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you. The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me. After supper, he did the same thing with the cup: This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you. **Each time you drink this cup, remember me.** What you must solemnly realize is that **every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master.** You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt."

Obviously, things that were done in the first century of the Church have drastically changed today. And, for the most part that's okay. Today we are celebrating and participating in Communion. As a church we have chosen to do this on the first Sunday of each month and have highlighted different aspects of why Communion was important then and why it is so important still today. I have, the church has defined Communion as a "sacrament." That's just a fancy way to say it is a regular practice or observance that we believe is a priority because **Jesus said to keep doing this together until we share this practice again with him in person.**

We are in trouble, every one of us. On May 3, 2023, the Surgeon General just announced we are in an "Epidemic of Ioneliness and isolation." Pastors are calling it the "Friend Recession." There has been a devastating impact of the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in the United States. **The church was designed from the very** beginning to be family, to be a coherent body, working, playing, laughing, learning, and loving together.

Jesus telling us that we should keep doing this together until He comes again is not just a good idea, <u>it's a GOD idea for the quality of</u> our individual and cooperate health.

We get the promise from Matthew, Mark's books, when Jesus told his disciples, "Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." Matthew 26:29 NLT

But it was Luke's **additional words** that Jesus said after giving them pieces of the bread that **told us we should continue this practice**.

TAKE NOTE

"He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19 NLT

Plus, Matthew and Mark have Jesus giving the bread first, while Luke has Jesus offer one cup of wine first, then the bread, then another cup of wine.

TAKE NOTE

Here's the three in comparison.

Mathew: "As they were eating, **Jesus took some bread** and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body." Matthew 26:26 NLT

Mark: "As they were eating, **Jesus took some bread** and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take it, for this is my body." Mark 14:22 NLT

Luke: "Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves." Luke 22:17 NLT Luke: "After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you." Luke 22:20 NLT

Why am I telling you this? Because I want you to know why we share communion together and why it's important to do so in many more ways than we do now, once a month.

The early church celebrated communion often not only because of Jesus' words to "do this in remembrance," but also because the Apostle Paul wrote more about it. **Paul was the author of 13 books or 28% of the New Testament**. He received the practice from the other Apostles and from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit about how communion should be continued and why it is important.

However, a lot has changed since Paul wrote his **correctional and** inspirational correspondence to Corinth.

It's interesting that we get much of our communion theology from Corinth Christians that were, uh, not behaving well at all.

TAKE NOTE

He writes, "**But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together.** First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have God's approval will be recognized! When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this!" 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 NLT

Well, that's a fun open letter to read in Church that Sunday!

I am not going into all the reasons that communion/agape (love) feast got so offtrack so quickly, other than to say this: We often polarize our behaviors into **too progressive or too controlling** categories.

Paul's correction didn't hold, and the early church kept having wild, drunken social gatherings while trying to carve out a spiritual communion as they partied.

It got so bad that the church, via the church leaders known as Bishops had to reel things in to stop the chaotic slide into perversion!

As noted, During the second and third centuries, the agape was eventually separated from the Eucharist[communion]. Churches began celebrating the Eucharist in the morning and hosting the love feast in the evening. **The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity offers this observation:** "Eventually, abuses, coupled with imperial rescripts forbidding the meals of secret societies, brought about the separation of the fraternal meal (agape) and Eucharist, but not everywhere and not at once.*

The separation of the two wasn't Jesus' fault, nor Paul's it was ours in not being able to maintain our behaviors when there was lots of food and an abundance of wine.

It was a loss for the church. Sometime after 250 AD, Church leadership took control of both the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. At some point the Bishop was the only one who could administer these practices.

I reminded what Paul originally wrote to the churches in Corinth, it was the breakdown of fellowship both with God and obviously with each other that was at loss – fellowship which was the purpose of gathering together and celebrating both the agape feast and the Lord's Supper.



1 Corinthians 11:23-26 MSG

"Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you. The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me. After supper, he did the same thing with the cup: This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you. **Each time you drink this cup, remember me.** What you must solemnly realize is that **every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master.** You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt."

Coming right back to this little phrase that Luke records, "Do this in remembrance of me."

Paul expands this to encompass how we do communion today, using the phrase, "as often as you drink it," and "for every time you…"

TAKE NOTE

"In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. **Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it. For every time you** eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again." 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 NLT

Since our communion practice is still separated from the agape feast of gathering around a shared meal, I offer this.

We should be sharing far more meals around our tables than we currently do. And I mean with each other, not just our primary family members. I'll probably say this a thousand times over, our spirituality, our health, our growth is not just measured in vertical means, it is measured horizontally as well.

Being a disciple and making disciples is done together with each other. It is gathering together, it is eating and fellowshipping together, it is serving together. The active word here is **TOGETHER**!

As often as you do agape feasts and communion... should be the major plans of how we do life!

NOTES

Scriptures

1 Corinthians 11:23-28 MSG

"Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you. The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me. After supper, he did the same thing with the cup: This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you. **Each time you drink this cup**, remember me. What you must solemnly realize is that **every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup**, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt. Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Master irreverently is like part of the crowd that jeered and spit on him at his death. Is that the kind of "remembrance" you want to be part of? Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in holy awe."

NIV - whenever you drink it NLT, ESC, NKJV - as often as you drink it KJV - as oft as ye drink it MSG – every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup TPT - and whenever you drink this

We formalized and formulated communion down to its least common denominator and least effective results in our lives. We made it a sacrament, which is admirable and rememberable, but powerless to what it holds us accountable for. Paul, under the influence of the Holy Spirit goes off on the churches in Corinth about there selfish, misguided attempts to party instead of focusing on the reason Christ gave us the template for known as the Last Supper.

The last supper was the last time the followers of Jesus would experience the passover as prescribed in Exodus.

Gather, eat quickly and stay together for the night of death as it passes over your family.

But Jesus shifted the significance of that Holy remembrance to gather, eat slowly and do so often. By why? For what? A frat party? A FOMO party? A bragfest?

Paul, in the middle of a sexual conversation, drops a truth bomb about communion and the ancient practice of the passover!

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 NLT

"Get rid of the old "yeast" by removing this wicked person from among you. Then you will **be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast**, which is what you really are. **Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. So let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth.**"

The "new bread" has new ingredients: sincerity and truth! It's like serving sweet bread instead of bitter bread! Have you noticed that our taste buds change as we age. When I was younger, I couldn't stand brown bread, or healthy bread. I for sure would never eat "rye bread" because it tasted so weird. I don't even remember "Sourdough" or when it came into my life like a greek friend introducing me to baklava! I love all those breads now! I'm carbaholic!

Paul also goes off the fundamental trail of theology when he goes on a tirade over meat offered to idols! Remember the Apostles in Acts 15 wanted Paul and Barnabas to hold to the decency in preference to the Jewish Pharisees by "not eating meat offered to idols!"

Acts 15:20-21 NLT "Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations."

1 Corinthians 10:14-24 NLT

"So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. You are reasonable people. Decide for yourselves if what I am saying is true. When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body. Think about the people of Israel. Weren't they united by eating the sacrifices at the altar? What am I trying to say? Am I saying that food offered to idols has some significance, or that idols are real gods? No, not at all. I am saying that these sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God. And I don't want you to participate with demons. You cannot drink from the cup of the Lord and from the cup of demons, too. You cannot eat at the Lord's Table and at the table of demons, too. What? Do we dare to rouse the Lord's jealousy? Do you think we are stronger than he is? You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is beneficial. Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others."

However, he releases the church from being bound by religiosity as a matter of conscience, **1 Corinthians 10:25-26 NLT** "So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

Then Paul re-emphasized the point; "<u>Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the</u> <u>church of God</u>." 1 Corinthians 10:32 NLT

Questions

Q: Did you ever wonder about the way we do communion today verses how it was done then?

- Q: I What are some of the differences? Can you name a few?
- Q: What do think about this little phrase that Luke recorded, "do this in remembrance of me?"
- Q: How do you feel about our current communion practices?
- Q: Are you okay with our theology coming out of Paul's corrections?
- Q: What are areas you feel the church has been too progressive or too controlling in?
- Q: What do you think about the separation of agape feasts from communion?

COMMENTARY REFERENCES

Barnes Notes on the Bible

As oft as ye drink it - Not prescribing any time; and not even specifying the frequency with which it was to be done; but leaving it to themselves to determine how often they would partake of it. The time of the Passover had been fixed by positive statute; the more mild and gentle system of Christianity left it to the followers of the Redeemer themselves to determine how often they would celebrate his death. It was commanded them to do it; it was presumed that their love to him would be so strong as to secure a frequent observance; it was permitted to them, as in prayer, to celebrate it on any occasion of affliction, trial, or deep interest when they would be for the edification of the Church.

Bengal's Gnomen

1 Corinthians 11:25. Μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, after supper) Therefore you, Corinthians, ought to separate common meals from the Lord's Supper.—ὑσἀκις, as often as) As often as is not a command, but it is implied that we should often eat and drink.—πίνητε, you may drink) this cup, 1 Corinthians 11:26.—είς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνἁμνησιν, in remembrance of me) This is presupposed by Matthew and Mark. Luke uses it once, Paul twice, because it is very suitable to his purpose. The old sacrifices were useful in bringing sins to remembrance, Hebrews 10:3; the sacrifice of the body of Christ, accomplished once for all, is revived by the remembrance of forgiveness.

The Lexham Bible Dictionary

LORD'S SUPPER (also commonly called Communion or Eucharist). Memorial rite involving wine and bread; one of the two universally acknowledged sacraments of the Christian Church (along with baptism). There are numerous views of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, as well as disagreements about its practice and even the elements involved (some Christians use juice or water instead of wine).

This article focuses on the sacrament's origins and development, from the historical Jesus to the middle of the second century. For its theological significance, see this article: Lord's Supper, Theological Issues.

Historicity of the Last Supper

The Synoptic Gospels all record a final meal in which Jesus, the night before His death, takes bread and wine, offers them to His disciples, and imbues these actions with theological meaning—an event that the Church eventually called "the Last Supper." Significant differences exist among the original sources that describe this event, making it difficult to determine the historical details. Although the Church universally accepts the historicity of the Last Supper, modern biblical criticism has questioned whether such an event took place as

recorded in the Gospels. The majority of scholars still argue for a historical core to the tradition, even as other possibilities have been suggested (Bradshaw, Eucharistic Origins, 1–2; Koenig, Feast, 5–9).

Most interpreters find continuity between the Last Supper and traditions about Jesus' meals with others throughout His ministry, highlighting the probability of an event like this. Furthermore, the early witness of Paul (1 Cor 11:23–26, written in the early 50s; see below) argues for a likely remembrance of some meal memorializing Jesus' last days. Paul likely learned this tradition in one his early trips to Jerusalem after his commissioning as an apostle, which took place at most only a few years after the death of Jesus. Therefore, if Jesus Himself did not institute a meal like the one found in the Gospel accounts, the tradition must have originated with the earliest Jerusalem church (Koenig, Feast, 10–12).

The Lord's Supper in the Late First and Early Second Centuries

In the early church, the practice of the Lord's Supper gradually changed from a communal meal to a ritual involving just bread and wine. **The covenant and eschatological elements of the ceremony were slowly eclipsed by an understanding of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice performed by professional clergy.**

The Lord's Supper became a universal practice of the earliest Christians. By virtue of its connection with Jesus' Last Supper, it was likely practiced in the context of a full meal. That is, the early Christians would gather for a communal meal, usually on Sunday night, and the specifically ritualistic aspects concerning the bread and cup would occur in this context. **Over the next few decades this link between meal and ritual was weakened and finally broken so that the Lord's Supper became entirely a sacral rite.** Alongside this development, the understanding of the Eucharist shifted from a covenant-establishing event that anticipated the reign of God to a bloodless sacrifice, although the belief of the rite as in some way allowing one to commune with the present Lord never fully disappeared.

Eerdmans Companion to the Bible

1 Corinthians 11:17–34 (ECB): 11:17–34 The Lord's Supper

Paul chastises the Corinthian church for making a mockery of the Lord's Supper by maintaining disunity even in their congregational gatherings. The apostle has already corrected them for theological divisions (1:10ff.), and now he adds an **indictment for practical separateness in a forum meant to foster fellowship**. Early comers to Corinthian church meals are consuming too much food and drinking till drunk, without leaving enough to nourish later arrivers who keep longer working hours. Paul exhorts the reverent observation of the Lord's Supper—a communal commemoration of Christ's death, not a feast to satisfy the stomach. He warns that approaching the Lord's table too casually, without selfexamination for repentance from sins, invites divine judgment on the partaker. The words of institution quoted by Paul and attributed directly to Christ come from a tradition that predates the formulas recorded in the synoptic Gospels (vv. 24–25; cf. Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:17–20).

Systematic Theology – Augustus Hopkins Strong

4. Erroneous views of the Lord's Supper

The Romanist view,—that the bread and wine are changed by priestly consecration into the very body and blood of Christ; that this consecration is a new offering of Christ's sacrifice; and that, by a physical partaking of the elements, the communicant receives saving grace from God. This is the doctrine of "transubstantiation" in the Catholic Church.

Dictionary of Bible Themes

Lord's Supper

The commemoration and remembrance of Jesus Christ's last supper, and all the benefits that result to believers. Other terms have been used subsequently by Christians, including "Communion" and "Eucharist".

Terms for the Lord's Supper in the NT

Ac 2:42 "breaking of bread" could mean both eating together and also celebrating the Lord's Supper; 1Co 10:16 The Greek word "koinonia", here translated "participation", is traditionally translated "communion": hence the term "Holy Communion"; 1Co 11:20 the Lord's Supper; 1Co 11:24 Underlying "had given thanks" is the Greek "eucharisteo", from which comes the term "Eucharist".

Jesus Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper

1Co 11:23-25 pp Mt 26:26-28 pp Mk 14:22-24 pp Lk 22:17-20

Celebrating the Lord's Supper in the NT

As part of an ordinary meal 1Co 11:21 The church was not necessarily wrong to include the sacrament in an ordinary meal; this should have been conducted in a charitable way.

On the Lord's day Ac 20:7 See also Jn 20:26

The fourfold formula for breaking bread: taking, giving thanks, breaking, giving Mt 26:26 pp Mk 14:22 pp Lk 22:19 See also Lk 24:30; Jn 6:11; 1Co 11:24

The sharing of the cup 1Co 11:25 pp Mt 26:27-28 pp Mk 14:23-24 pp Lk 22:20

Themes connected with the Lord's Supper

The Passover 1Co 5:7-8 See also Jn 11:50 Caiaphas' words may have an unintended Passover significance; Jn 13:1; 19:14,33,36; Ex 12:46; Nu 9:12

The new covenant 1Co 11:25 pp Mt 26:27-28 pp Mk 14:23-24 pp Lk 22:20 The reference to the (new) covenant implies a personal relationship with God and sins forgiven.

Remembrance 1Co 11:24 pp Lk 22:19

Thanksgiving, fellowship and unity 1Co 10:16 See also Mt 26:26-27 pp Mk 14:22-23 pp Lk 22:19; 1Co 11:20-21

The Lord's return 1Co 11:26 See also Mt 26:29 pp Mk 14:25 pp Lk 22:16; 1Co 16:22; Rev 22:20

Separation from sin 1Co 10:21 Paul is referring to feasts in heathen temples. See also 1Co 11:27-32

A foretaste of heaven Mt 26:29 pp Mk 14:25

See also

- covenant, the new
- Christ, second coming
- forgiveness
- unity
- fellowship
- love feast
- separation
- thankfulness
- self-examination
- remembering
- Messianic banquet
- Heaven

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

The Practice of the Early Church. In Acts 2:42, after the record of what happened at Pentecost, it says that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Further, "day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46). Two questions are raised about these words and the practice that lay behind them. Do they mean that the Christians simply shared fellowship meals together? Acts 2:46 seems to speak of breaking bread and partaking of food as two separate actions. Moreover Acts 20:7 in speaking of Christians at Troas "on the first day of the week ... gathered together to break bread" seems clearly to allude to a Christian service and not just a meal. From 1 Corinthians 10 and perhaps from the reference to "love feasts" in Jude 12, we may reasonably deduce that a meal in Christian fellowship and the celebration of the Lord's Supper often took place together. A second question is whether the earliest "breaking of bread," as in the Jerusalem church, may have been a different rite from that with the bread and wine, the former recalling the fellowship of the disciples with the risen Lord, the latter especially recalling his sacrificial death. There is no direct evidence to support such a view. The Lord's Supper to which the Gospels bear witness involved the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup in remembrance of the blood of Christ "poured out for many." We may assume too that the tradition that the apostle Paul received, followed, and passed on to others went back to his earliest years as a Christian, and so involved the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup "in remembrance" of Christ, and thus proclaiming the Lord's death until his return.

Body of Christ. Scriptural phrase referring to (1) the physical body of Jesus Christ, (2) his broken body and shed blood viewed symbolically and memorially in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, and (3) both the local and universal church viewed metaphorically.

The Body of Christ in the Lord's Supper. At the last supper (Mt 26:26–29; Mk 14:22–25; Lk 22:15–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26), which accompanied the Passover supper, Jesus held up a loaf of bread and said, "This is my body"; then he picked up a cup of wine and said, "This is my blood of the covenant" (Mt 26:28). Jesus meant that the bread symbolized his body, which would be broken when he was beaten at his trial and pierced at his crucifixion (Lk 23:33; Jn 19:1, 2). The apostle Paul said that "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7), meaning that **the Passover lamb in the OT was an object lesson pointing to "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" (Jn 1:29).

For Christians, the body of Christ is viewed symbolically as a broken body (Mt 8:17; 1 Pt 2:24; cf. Is 53:4, 5) in the breaking of the bread at the Lord's Supper. The cup is a sign of his blood poured out, viewed as the central factor in God's covenant of grace with his people. Jesus referred to "the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20). The whole ceremony of the Lord's Supper was also to be a memorial (1 Cor 11:25, 26). In the ceremony believers are reminded that Christ died for sinners, that is, for the forgiveness of their sins (Mt 26:28). They are also reminded that they are **participating in the body of Christ in that they are united with him** (Rom 6:1–11; 1 Cor 10:16; Gal 2:20; Phil 3:10).

Introduction to the History of Christianity by Tim Dowley

I write in my book, **The Pharisee Factory**, the beauty of communion, experienced as a togetherness meal, was reduced to a more individualized sacrament because of continued abuses.

"The love feast, or agape meal, had become an occasion for selfishness and drunkenness; **Paul pointed to the breakdown of fellowship –which it was the purpose of both the agape and the Lord's Supper to promote.** Paul believed the Lord's Supper served both to unite Christians with the Lord in his death and risen life, and to join believers in a bond of union as 'one body' in Christ. The excesses at Corinth destroyed both aims. By their greed and drunkenness, they were turning the meal into an orgy; by their superstitious attitude to the bread and wine, they were undermining Paul's teaching on the need for a personal receiving of Christ by faith and in love (1 Corinthians 11)." <u>https://a.co/60hmazj</u>

"In fact, continuing abuse of the love feast led to its gradual disappearance in its original form, while the solemn meal of 'holy communion' was given more and more significance as a sacrament." <u>https://a.co/hvdZHfY</u>

Ignatius, the value of the Eucharist, calling it a "medicine of immortality" (Ignatius to the Ephesians 20:2)

"Now the bishop became the basis and criterion of the church's life; being in the church was made dependent upon communion with the bishop." <u>https://a.co/bqUMhCG</u>

Baptism and Communion were highly regulated, and only administered through the Bishop. "Cyprian wrote his most important work, The Unity of the Catholic Church . From ad 255 Cyprian defiantly opposed Stephen, Bishop of Rome, over the question whether Christian baptism could be received outside the catholic (mainstream) church. Cyprian believed that the Spirit's gifts of life and salvation were restricted to the Catholic Church. Unlike Stephen, he demanded that people baptized in separatist groups who entered the church should be rebaptized." <u>https://a.co/cvX9dQc</u>

Internet Links

What is Communion and Why is it Celebrated Differently?

https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-communion-and-why-isit-celebrated-differently.html

Agape Feasts

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agape_feast#External_links

https://earlychurch.com/love-feast/