

Saturday March 13 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 – what we can't do just yet

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

19 Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything?

20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

On Sundays, I'd love to go to the church where I'm a member. But I can't. It's closed, along with all the others. Church services are something so many of us are missing. It's not all about the music, the liturgy, the preaching and the architecture. Don't misunderstand me; all those things can play their part in making worship come alive. As important as all of them are, there's something else which is just as vital: it's when we gather *together*. Think of the word 'congregation': that's about people 'congregating – coming together.

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth, he talked to them twice about what some churches now call The Lord's Supper, some Holy Communion. Others call it the Eucharist (from a Greek verb meaning 'to give thanks'). Since we're thinking this week about the importance of THANKSGIVING, let's ask the question: what exactly are we giving thanks for when we are able again to gather together for that service in church? The answer comes in two parts.

Firstly, it brings us together to give thanks for what Jesus did for us when He died on the cross. We'll be coming back to that later in Lent.

Secondly, we can give thanks for *one other*. If you read Paul's letters in the New Testament, he starts most of them with THANKSGIVING for their fellowship with him. As I look back on congregations I have belonged to since I first became a Christian more than 50 years ago, there are so many people I can think of who have encouraged me, befriended me, supported me and, on a few occasions, lovingly rebuked me.

But looking beyond our local congregations, there are all sorts of other people to give thanks for, whether we know them or not. Last spring we stood on our doorsteps, clapped, blew whistles and banged saucepan lids, to say a big 'thank you' to all the NHS staff for the work they were doing. We've long since stopped clapping, but their work goes on, with greater and greater demands made upon them. Some have died of Covid, others are off sick, exhausted, or suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress. We owe them far more than we can imagine. Then there are the people who keep stocking our supermarket shelves, driving the lorries, delivering our food, keeping buses and trains running; and so many more, often at greater risk than the rest of us because they deal face-to-face with the general public.

We mustn't forget them; and whenever and however we can, we need to say a big 'thank you' to them. Where would we have been without them? It really doesn't bear thinking about.