Why a Table?

Understanding Communion in Our Church

The Core Difference: A Place of Sacrifice vs. A Place for a Meal

At the heart of this discussion is the fundamental difference in meaning between an "altar" and a "table." The words themselves carry profound theological weight, and understanding them is the first step in understanding our worship space.

The Altar	The Table
Historically, an **altar** (*altare* in Latin) is a raised platform where sacrifices are offered to God. Its primary function is connected to a sacrificial rite.	A **table** (*mensa* in Latin) is a place for a shared meal. Its primary function is connected to fellowship, community, and receiving nourishment.

This basic distinction points to the profound theological reason for our choice. We use a table because we believe the Lord's Supper is a meal to be received, not a sacrifice to be offered.

+ The Decisive Reason: Christ's Finished Work on the Cross

The central theological principle for using a table is the belief that Jesus's sacrifice on the cross was a once-for-all event. The author of Hebrews in the Bible teaches that Christ, through His one offering, has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. His work is complete, final, and unrepeatable.

This belief creates a stark contrast in how we view the furniture at the front of the church:

- An **altar** can imply that a sacrifice needs to be repeated or re-presented. The focus is on an offering being made to God.
- A **table** signifies that the sacrifice is complete. We gather not to re-offer Christ, but to thankfully receive the spiritual nourishment He provides through the Lord's Supper, remembering His finished work.

This leads to the principle of **sola fide**—by faith alone. The table physically represents a crucial shift from an action performed by us to a gift received from God. The Lord's Supper is not a work we do for God to earn favor; it is a divine gift given by Christ to His people to nourish and strengthen their faith. The blessing is received through the open hands of faith, as we trust in the promises of God declared in the gospel.

What the Bible Teaches Us

Our practice of using a communion table is not a recent invention but is grounded in the teachings and patterns we find in Scripture.

3.1. The First Lord's Supper

When Jesus first instituted this sacrament, the setting was clear. He and His disciples were gathered in an upper room to celebrate the Passover feast. They were seated at a table, sharing a meal together. In this intimate, communal setting, Jesus took bread and wine and gave them to His disciples. His command was to "partake" and "do this in remembrance of me," not to "offer" a new sacrifice. The very institution of the sacrament points to a meal, not a sacrificial rite.

3.2. Pictures from the Old Testament

The Old Testament contains many "types" or symbolic pictures that point forward to the person and work of Jesus Christ. When we look at the sacred furniture in the Tabernacle, we see a crucial distinction that informs our understanding of communion.

- **The Altar of Sacrifice:** This brazen altar stood in the outer court, and it was where animal sacrifices for sin were offered. It clearly pointed to Christ's necessary and bloody sacrifice on the cross. Furthermore, there is a fascinating detail in the Old Testament law that makes this distinction even clearer. Leviticus 6:30 explicitly states that the sin offering was consumed by fire and was never to be eaten. This presents a profound theological and legal contradiction to any view that sees communion as a literal re-sacrifice of Christ (the ultimate sin offering) which is then eaten.
- **The Table of Showbread:** This table stood inside the Holy Place. On it were twelve loaves of bread, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. This "Bread of the Presence" was a picture of God's constant fellowship, presence, and provision for His people. This is the proper Old Testament picture for the Lord's Supper, which is about communion with God and receiving the spiritual nourishment He provides in Christ, the true Bread of Life.

These biblical and theological convictions led to a major, visible change in the church during a pivotal moment in history.

A Visible Symbol of the Reformation

During the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the passion for these biblical truths was so strong that it physically reshaped churches across Europe. Church leaders like Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich, John Calvin in Geneva, and John Knox in Scotland insisted on replacing stone altars with simple, wooden tables. Zwingli's reforms led to a "radical purification" of worship spaces by decree in 1530. In Scotland, John Knox's impassioned preaching often incited popular riots that resulted in the physical destruction of altars and other "monuments of idolatory." This was not vandalism, but a life-or-death theological conviction made visible.

This action was meant to physically demonstrate a monumental shift in understanding. It was a clear, unambiguous statement that the Lord's Supper was not a sacrifice performed by a priest, but a communal meal administered by a minister to the people of God. This also redefined the role of the church leader.

- The focus moved from a priest offering a sacrifice on behalf of the people to a pastor feeding the people of God with the Word and sacrament, sharing in the meal with the congregation.

The table became a powerful symbol of this rediscovered understanding of the gospel and worship.

How the Table Shapes Our Worship Space

Church architecture is never neutral; it is designed to teach and shape our understanding of God. The choice of a table over an altar has two significant consequences for the layout of our sanctuary.

- **The Pulpit is Central:** In our tradition, the pulpit—the place from which the Bible is read and preached—is given the central or most prominent position. This physically represents the principle of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone), which teaches that the preached Word of God is the primary means of grace. The sermon explains God's Word, and God's Word, in turn, explains the meaning of the sacrament we celebrate at the table.
- **The Table is Approachable:** Unlike a massive stone altar, often fixed against a far wall, our communion table is typically a simple, wooden structure. Historically, these tables were often movable, sometimes brought into the main area of the church only for communion services to underscore their function as furniture for a meal, not a permanent object of veneration. This design is intentional. It removes the physical and symbolic barrier of an altar, powerfully illustrating the truth that through Christ's High Priesthood, all believers have secured greater and more direct access to God. We come to the table not as distant observers but as welcome children.

This arrangement of pulpit and table teaches us every week where our hope lies: in the Word of God and the finished work of Christ it proclaims.

Conclusion: Welcome to the Table

The Communion Table in our church is far more than just furniture. It is a profound statement of our most cherished beliefs. It declares:

- The completeness of Christ's one-time sacrifice on the cross.
- The nature of communion as a spiritual, family meal of remembrance and fellowship.
- The blessing of direct access to God and communion with Him and one another.

We hope this explanation helps you see the table not just as an object, but as an invitation. It is a place of welcome, grace, and remembrance for all who trust in Christ alone for their salvation.