

Fourfold Action in the Eucharistic Narratives of the New Testament

There is a distinctive, fourfold pattern of action that can be seen each time Jesus shares a meal with his disciples: taking, blessing (or giving thanks), breaking, and giving. This eucharistic pattern of action is evident in a variety of contexts—not only in the passover meal before Jesus' death, but in the accounts of him feeding the multitude and in the meals he shared after his resurrection from the dead.

This pattern of action extended into the life of the early church, as we can see from accounts of the Lord's Supper in Acts 27 and 1 Corinthians 11. Furthermore, it has given shape to the eucharistic liturgies of the church that have been handed down for two thousand years. We may use somewhat different terminology—Offering, Great Thanksgiving, Breaking the Bread, Communion of the People—but we are repeating the same actions Jesus modeled when he said "Do this, remembering me."

You can see this pattern of action clearly through the verbs that are used in the Greek New Testament accounts of Jesus' meals with the disciples. Examine the following passages, noting the repeated sequence of verbs in each text. Consider these verses in their broader context of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then explore the following questions:

- *How are these stories similar? How are they different?*
- *What does this fourfold action reveal about who Jesus is? What does it suggest about what he came to do, in and for the world?*
- *In light of this consistent pattern of action, think about the eucharistic liturgy in your congregation. Is this what you do when you celebrate the Lord's Supper?*
- *What it might mean to pattern your life—and the mission and ministry of the church—in this way? What does it mean to do these things remembering Christ?*

The Feeding of 5000 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking [λαμβανω] the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed [ευλογεω] and broke [κλαω] the loaves, and gave [διδωμι] them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. (Matthew 14:19)

The Feeding of 4000 Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took [λαμβανω] the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks [ευχαριστεω] he broke [κλαω] them and gave [διδωμι] them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. (Matthew 15:35-36)

The Passover Meal* While they were eating, Jesus took [λαμβανω] a loaf of bread, and after blessing [ευλογεω] it he broke [κλαω] it, gave [διδωμι] it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." (Matthew 26:26)

The Feeding of 5000 Taking [λαμβανω] the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed [ευλογεω] and broke [κατακλαω] the loaves, and gave [διδωμι] them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. (Mark 6:41)

The Feeding of 4000 Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took [λαμβανω] the seven loaves, and after giving thanks [ευχαριστεω] he broke [κλαω] them and gave [διδωμι] them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. (Mark 8:6)

The Passover Meal* While they were eating, he took [λαμβανω] a loaf of bread, and after blessing [ευλογεω] it he broke [κλαω] it, gave [διδωμι] it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." (Mark 14:22)

The Feeding of 5000 And taking [λαμβανω] the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed [ευλογεω] and broke [κατακλαω] them, and gave [διδωμι] them to the disciples to set before the crowd. (Luke 9:16)

The Passover Meal* Then he took [λαμβανω] a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks [ευχαριστεω], he broke [κλαω] it and gave [διδωμι] it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19)

Resurrection Appearance (Road to Emmaus) When he was at the table with them, he took [λαμβανω] bread, blessed [ευλογεω] and broke [κλαω] it, and gave [επιδιδωμι] it to them. (Luke 24:30)

The Feeding of 5000 Then Jesus took [λαμβανω] the loaves, and when he had given thanks [ευχαριστεω], he distributed [διαδιδωμι] them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. (John 6:11)

Resurrection Appearance (Breakfast on the Beach) Jesus came and took [λαμβανω] the bread and gave [διδωμι] it to them, and did the same with the fish. (John 21:13)

Paul Breaks Bread at Sea After he had said this, he took [λαμβανω] bread; and giving thanks [ευχαριστεω] to God in the presence of all, he broke [κλαω] it and began to eat. (Acts 27:35)

Paul’s Instructions to the Corinthians* For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took [λαμβανω] a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks [ευχαριστεω], he broke [κλαω] it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-24)

	TAKE	BLESS or GIVE THANKS	BREAK	GIVE
Matt. 14:19	λαμβανω	ευλογεω	κλαω	διδωμι
Matt. 15:35-36	λαμβανω	ευχαριστεω	κλαω	διδωμι
Matt. 26:26*	λαμβανω	ευλογεω	κλαω	διδωμι
Mark 6:41	λαμβανω	ευλογεω	κατακλαω	διδωμι
Mark 8:6	λαμβανω	ευχαριστεω	κλαω	διδωμι
Mark 14:22*	λαμβανω	ευλογεω	κλαω	διδωμι
Luke 9:16	λαμβανω	ευλογεω	κατακλαω	διδωμι
Luke 22:19*	λαμβανω	ευχαριστεω	κλαω	διδωμι
Luke 24:30	λαμβανω	ευλογεω	κλαω	επιδιδωμι
John 6:11	λαμβανω	ευχαριστεω	--	διαδιδωμι
John 21:13	λαμβανω	--	--	διδωμι
Acts 27:35	λαμβανω	ευχαριστεω	κλαω	--
1 Cor. 11:23-24*	λαμβανω	ευχαριστεω	κλαω	--

* Suitable Words of Institution; see Directory for Worship W-3.3612, W-3.3613, W-3.3614, W-3.3615