

Sermon for October 2, 2022—“Welcome Here”

27th Sunday in OT, World Communion Sunday, Year C—Texts: Philippians 2:1-18

In preparing for World Communion Sunday this week, I read something from a fellow pastor, the Rev. Cindy Maddox, that I felt I had to share. She’s telling a communion story from her childhood. It was about an older couple in their church who both had hearing problems. Neither one of them had figured out that talking to each other loudly during church meant everybody else could hear them, too. Think of Aunt Bethany and Uncle Lewis from National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation.

So, conversations during worship went something like this: “What’d he say?” “He said lying is bad!” “Oh!” and she would nod her head knowingly. She and the other kids loved to sit behind them because it often added humor to the service.

Now, at this particular church people were invited forward for communion. One pew at a time and they would kneel down at the altar to be served. One Sunday, this couple was kneeling near her waiting for the pastor to make his way down the line with the bread and cups. And she started talking to her husband.

“I hope they don’t serve grape juice again.

“I don’t like grape juice!”

“Just drink it for Jesus,” her husband said.

“I don’t want to drink it for Jesus! I don’t like grape juice.

“They should serve 7-Up. I like that stuff!”

When they stood up a few moments later the girl checked, and the woman’s little cup was still full. She didn’t “drink it for Jesus.” But this young pastor-to-be, didn’t think Jesus minded, nor did he think God was offended by an old woman’s dislike for Welch’s. Pastor Cindy goes on to talk about the first church she served. There, she recalled, communion was usually served by intinction, and the bread was left on the communion table after worship.

Well, the children discovered that the kind of bread that they used for communion was yummy, so while their parents gathered for fellowship after church, they ran back upstairs, and ate the leftover communion bread. A few adults got upset when they saw children grabbing great big chunks of the body of Christ, and shoving it in their mouths, not to mention the crumbs on the floor, or the occasional arguments over who got the biggest piece. But parents didn’t want to tell their children they couldn’t have the communion bread. So, someone came up with a great idea.

They ceremoniously carried the communion bread from the sanctuary at the end of worship, and took it to the table in the fellowship hall, where they held coffee hour. So, as it fed them in communion, it fed them in community. It was a great solution because it satisfied everyone, which is rare! But either way, believed Pastor Cindy, she didn’t think Jesus minded. She didn’t think God was bothered by children wanting to eat that which was good.

So today, as we celebrate World Communion Sunday, I’m aware of the many different ways we do it, and how important those ways are to us. Whether it’s from a common cup, or individual cups, regular bread, or wafers...

Whether it's white or whole wheat bread from Kroger...
Challah or matzah from Israel...
Naan bread from India...
Irish soda bread from Ireland...
Native American frybread...
Chapati from Sri Lanka...
Roti canai from Malaysia...
Sangak from Iran...
Focaccia from Italy...
Baguette or brioche from France...
A Mexican tortilla...
Rewena bread from New Zealand...
Maltese bread from Malta
Rugbrod from Denmark...
Chikwanga or kwanga from the Congo...
Sacomi from Togo...
Kumba from Cameroon...
Or Mancini's bread from Pittsburgh.

I don't think God is offended by any of it. It's not the form that matters, it's the substance. It's not **how** we celebrate communion, but **why**. We come to this table to **remember**; to remember Jesus; to remember his life and his death; to remember what happens to someone who breaks the rules for the sake of love; to remember that we are now—all of us—the body of Christ in the world, broken yet whole.

Our scripture reading says, “**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.**” We are to have the mind of Christ, who welcomed the outcasts, who exalted the lowly, who humbled himself—emptied himself—and gave his life, so that we might know how to live. We are to have the mind of Christ, but it's so much easier to be the hands. We know how to be God's hands in the world. We do it in countless different ways. We know how to be God's hands at work in the world. We do. We know. But it's harder to have Christ's **mind**, and even more difficult to have Christ's **heart**.

Yet that is our calling as Christians: to have the same mind that was in Christ; to have the same heart that was in Christ; to love the world even when it hurts us; to love others even when they hate us; to embrace freedom, even when it means boundaries and limits; to do justice even when it is inconvenient; to love mercy, even when it means extending it to someone who we can't stand.

We live in violently divisive times, and yet today of all days, we remember. We remember our connection with other Christians, as we come to this table, who are surely praying—like us—for peace, for healing, for wholeness. We remember all that unites us, all we have in common. I agree with Pastor Cindy in believing that God isn't offended by how we do communion, but I wonder if there are limits. I wonder if God is bothered when we eat of the broken bread, but refuse to admit our own brokenness. I wonder if God is troubled when we drink of the cup of blessing, but refuse to offer blessing to others.

I wonder if God is saddened by how we take communion in the shadow of the cross, but refuse to acknowledge the evil that's been done in its name, all the times that it's been burned. I wonder if God mourns when we walk away from the table, unchanged by it. These things I wonder—yes. But, and here, brothers and sisters, is the thing:

I have no doubt whatsoever that God meets us there anyway; that God welcomes us without hesitation, without reservation; that God gathers us in as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. I have no doubt that this is why we come, again and again, because we know we are welcome here—that all are welcome here!

Thanks be to God. Amen and amen.