

(20th Sunday after Pentecost – World Communion)

Building the Bridge Between the Sea of Reeds and Mt. Sinai

Last week, we met up with Moses and the Israelites as they fled Egypt, only to be trapped against a wall of water known in Hebrew as the Sea of Reeds but mistranslated in the King James Bible as the Red Sea. I suppose if you are fleeing for your lives, with all of Pharaoh's chariots army bearing down on you, the name of the body of water blocking your escape route matters little.

Stand firm, hold fast, and behold this day the salvation of God. And with those words, the waters part, and a way forward opens up before them.

Safely across, and with the big celebration done, the Israelites with Moses at the helm, walk forward into the wilderness towards the Promise Land. But before they arrive, they make a pit stop at the mountain of God known as Sinai.

We explored this story back in June when Hugh Drennan and I shared in a sermon series on the 10 Commandments.

So here is a brief refresher in case you have forgotten them since then.

In Greek, these 10 are referred to as the Decalogue. In Hebrew it is "Debar" which translates as "Word". If we use the Hebrew translation we would know them as "the Decade of Words" or the "10 Words" of God.

We can refer to them as the "10 Words" of God or the "Decalogue" or the 10 Commandments. So there is that which we need to be mindful of, and then there is this, what is the correct order of the 10?

The Jewish, and yes, these are part of the Jewish Scriptures, the first commandment is "I am the Lord your God." If you are Catholic, Orthodox, or Lutheran the first commandment is "No other gods, and no graven images." If you are Protestant, Anglican, or Reformed, first commandment is "No other gods" and the second is "no graven images." Because of this, the other commandments, though familiar in wording, are slightly different in order.

They are a gift from God to us, so that we can learn how to live in relationship with all God's people.

In his book, *Losing Moses on the Freeway: The 10 Commandments in America*, Chris Hedges (son of a Presbyterian minister) says: "The commandments save us from false covenants and contemporary idols that promise so much and deliver so little," idols we readily worship - the state, the nation, the military, the flag, race, ethnicity, sex and money. Despite such ambiguities and complexities, the Ten Commandments are a moral compass that points us toward the true north of human health and wholeness. In neglecting them we lose our way. In this sense the Ten Commandments are promises that give life rather than prohibitions that repress.

"The commandments frame," according to Hedges, "the most important questions we can ask, like the mystery of good and evil, the meaning of living in community, the nature of integrity, the meaning of fidelity, or the necessity of honesty. In honoring the commandments, we embrace the sanctity of life, the power of love, and their function to bind us together in life-affirming community."

With that in mind, we return to Mt. Sinai waiting with the Israelites as Moses ascends the holy mountain of God.

Rev. Scott Marrese-Wheeler
World Communion Sunday
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This morning is World Communion Sunday. Started in the 1930s as an idea by Rev. Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr, minister at Sunnyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The idea was to use the common meal we share around Christ's table, as symbol of our interconnectedness and global unity as we face deep division around the world and in our own nation.

I think Dr. Kerr would agree with Parker Palmer, writer and Madisionian, who wrote in his book: *Healing the Heart of Democracy*: **"The more you know about another person's story, the less possible it is to see that person as your enemy."**

Sharing a meal together can do just that. It can break down walls that divide us, and make strangers and even enemies, friends. In sharing a meal together, we find our commonality as humans journeying through life together.

Some restaurants are now going to a communal style table set-up which allows for people who don't know each other to eat and drink together and in doing so, build new relationships.

Forging this new relationship is important though risky. It is certainly easier for us to sit with only people we know and like. To invite someone to sit with you challenges us to move out of our comfort zones, by sharing more than table space and food, we have to share something of who we are with our new table companions.

Speaking of companions, did you know the word **"Companion"** derives its meaning from the **"Old French word 'compaignon.'" It literally means 'one who breaks bread with another'. It is based on the Latin "com - 'together with' + panis 'bread.'"**

I am not sure about Cambridge, but at McFarland High School, they seek to provide new students and teachers with "companions" through the use of "Mentors".

The idea is to make the new students and staff feel welcome by showing them around the school, answering any questions they might have, and being a helpful resource to them as they make the adjustment to their new community.

Having a companion in school and in life is important for all of us.

Just ask Moses and the Israelites as they made their way through the wilderness wandering all those years. God's presence was with them in the cloud that lead them through the day and the pillar of fire that guided them by night. God also provided their "daily bread" to share in the form of manna.

Eating a meal together at table with old friends, new people, strangers, and even those who we are challenged by in our lives, is how we discover God's presence in our midst.

It is in communing together that we discover Christ in our midst, and in doing so, our true identity as the Beloved Children of God.

Rabbi Elyse Goldstein writing on the sacredness of food offers this thought: **"We eat to live, but we also eat to be together, to share with others, to experience the joy of community and family, to exchange ideas, to nourish and be nourished.... Eating is**

a symbol of the life of community. We aren't supposed to eat alone. 'Companion' is the one you break bread with."

I believe God created us to live together in community, as companions with one another (and not just companions with like minded people of the same theological, political, or social/economic tribe) and with God.

The meals we share together are sacred. They are important to our growth as followers of Christ.

I would even say each meal we eat is "Sacramental" in nature. When we break bread together, whether around a table in the school cafeteria, a table at fast food joint, our own kitchen table, or the communion table in a church, we are doing so with God, whose loving presence is made known to us in the food we eat and in the companionship we keep.

Margaret Visser, author of the book, "The Rituals of Dinner", says, "**None of us would want to live by bread alone, even if that were possible.**" Just as the body needs bread to live, so we need to be nourished by the bread of companionship. We hunger for it, in some cases, starved for it. I believe that is why more people are organizing community meals and planting community gardens. I feel it is why restaurants are serving patrons at "community" tables. For me, these are all signs of the in-breaking of God's kingdom.

This is why World Communion Sunday is one of my favorite celebrations in the church. The table has long been the place that I have most experienced the grace-filled, loving, welcoming, and healing presence of Christ, our host.

At Christ's table, regardless of who we are or where we are in our faith journey, we are welcomed by Christ, our companion, who invites to scoot over and make more room at the table.

For me, this is a sacramental sign of the radical hospitality Christ lived out in his life as witnessed to and shared by the Gospel writers and lived out in churches and in our lives.

This is the table you are being invited to sit and share together, bring the fullness of our lives, our joys and hopes and celebrations, and also our hurts and sorrows, our broken places, our spiritual and emotional wounds, our shattered dreams, our fears and share them with each other around this table.

Each time we do, I believe someone's eyes are opened to the risen Christ's presence, and our lives are transformed.

Henry Nouwen offers us this thought: "**We all need to eat and drink to stay alive...A meal together is one of the most intimate and sacred human events. Around the table we become vulnerable, filling one another's plates and cups and encouraging one another to eat and drink. Much more happens at a meal than satisfying hunger and quenching thirst. Around the table we become (companions) family, friends, community, yes, (even with those who we have seen as our enemies and those who have viewed us in the same way) one new body... Strange as it may sound, the table is the place where we want to become food for one another. Every breakfast, lunch, or dinner can become a time of growing communion with one another.**" (Henry Nouwen, Bread for the Journey, February 15 & 16)

In our gathering around the table of Christ's this morning, know that it is a table where all are welcomed by God, no matter who we are, no matter our skin color, our age, our

education, our financial income, our sexuality, our political preferences, or creeds. There is no secret handshake or specific creed required to dine at his holy meal.

It is not your table or my table. It is not a Republican table or Democrat table. It is not a conservative or liberal table. It is not an American table. It is the table of Jesus. The risen Christ is the host and invites us to meet him here.

And when we come together to share our lives as we share in this sacred meal – I believe our eyes our opened anew as we discover again and again, the presence of Christ in our midst.

And in that moment, we are changed, transformed, healed, made new again – and it is a holy thing we call Worldwide Communion.

Amen.