

18th Sunday after Pentecost – World Communion Sunday

Psalm 80

Eternal Listener, give heed to your people, You,
who are our Guide and our Light!
You, who dwell amidst the angels,
shine forth into the heart of all nations!

Be our strength as we break down walls that separate and divide;
let not fear pluck away the gifts we would share.
Roll away the stones that become obstacles to growth,
to producing a bountiful harvest.

Receive our gratitude, O Heart of all hearts!
Look upon us and see what Love can do;
rejoice in the new birth that You create!
Be glad where your Seed has found fertile soil.
How much more the return of one healthy plant
than ten thousand useless weeds!
May those who have borne the fruit of love
radiate your Spirit into the world!
May we always walk and co-create with You;
receive the gratitude of our hearts, as we share in the Great Plan!

Restore us, O Holy One!
Let your face shine upon us, teach us to love!

This morning, we are celebrating World Communion Sunday. The first World Communion celebration occurred at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh in 1933.

At a time when the world was still in the midst of the Great Depression, and experiencing the rise of Nazism under Hitler, and the global community was headed to war, the ministers and congregation of Shadyside Presbyterian Church sought a way to bring people of faith together. And where better to symbolize this Christian unity than around Christ's table in the Sacrament of Communion.

Rev. John Buchanan, retired pastor of Fourth Presbyterian in Chicago says: **"World Communion Sunday is a yearly reminder that there is a unity, a oneness, given to us in Jesus Christ; a reminder that the Creator's will for the creation is peace, harmony; a reminder that God is always working in and through the tragic events of human history to bring about that precious peace."**

For me, this year, as we ponder the growing division over the election, wearing a mask, and the impact on the virus on our community and world; as we experience an escalation violence in our nation, our communities, and our streets; with some elected officials sowing seeds of discord and threatening violence and chaos if the election outcome does not turn out the way they want it to go; with racial injustices and continuing violence against the black community; with the growing epidemic of gun violence, armed vigilant hate groups like the Proud Boys; and with our own deep divisions within our families and faith communities over the direction our county and world is headed, this Sunday is a reminder that the peace of God is God's hope for all of us, all of God's children. And not just "God's Children" who look like and believe like we do. As we gather around this table to share a symbolic loaf of bread and a common cup, it is a symbol of our Oneness in the Heart of all hearts, God, as a global community woven together as in the richness and beauty found in people of all faiths, cultures, and nations.

One Bread, One Body, One Table, One God - who is the Creator of all, and whose sacred presence and divine spark dwells in each and every one of us.

In Acts 2: 44-46, we hear this story of the unity of the early, diverse, followers of Jesus: **"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts."**

Sadly, from there it was all downhill for those gathered in Christ's name.

Frederick Buechner writes **"when Jesus took the bread and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you,' it's hard to believe that even in his wildest dreams he foresaw the tragic and ludicrous brokenness of the church as his body."**

The Apostle Paul spent much of his time writing to the early followers of Christ, who had formed themselves into small communities, not unlike our own here in Cambridge, trying to resolve the conflict among believers, healing their brokenness and working to reconcile their deep divisions over Christ.

In Ephesians 2:17-22, Paul writes: **"So Christ came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God...."**

Then writing in Galatians 3:28-29: **"In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal."**

Nan C. Merrill, in her adaptation of Psalm 80, reminds us of our work in Christ's name as equals in the household of God: **"Be our strength as we break down walls that separate and divide; let not fear pluck away the gifts we would share... May those who have borne the fruit of love radiate your Spirit into the world! May we always walk and co-create with You..."**

The poet and author, Wendell Berry, writes: **"As every reader knows, the Gospels are overwhelmingly concerned with the conduct of human life. In the Sermon on the Mount and in other places Jesus is asking his followers to see that the way to a more abundant life is the way of love. We are to love one another, and this love is to be more comprehensive than our love for our family and friends and tribe and nation. We are to love our neighbors though they may be strangers to us. We are to love our enemies. And this is to be a practical love: It is to be practiced here and now. Love evidently is not just a feeling but is indistinguishable from the willingness to help, to be useful to one another."**

This love, Berry speaks of which is the Love Christ calls us to through his life and teaching, is "our strength as we break down walls that separate and divide" us. We should not let fear and hatred pluck away the gifts we would share around Christ's table and with all people - friends, strangers, even enemies.

Friends, we share one Bread as One Global Body because of the One Love in Christ we have experienced through the One Creator of all who is in all and through all.

On this World Communion Sunday, blogger, Jan Richardson, expresses what many of us are feeling, writing: **"I have never been so hungry to live into the words of this blessing or simply to gather with others in the ordinary act of sharing a meal. In these days, when that is so often not physically possible, may we learn anew what it means to make the table wide, and wider, and wider still."**

AND THE TABLE WILL BE WIDE

And the table
will be wide.
And the welcome
will be wide.
And the arms
will open wide
to gather us in.
And our hearts
will open wide
to receive.
And we will come

as children who trust
there is enough.
And we will come
unhindered and free.
And our aching
will be met
with bread.
And our sorrow
will be met
with wine.
And we will open our hands
to the feast
without shame.
And we will turn
toward each other
without fear.
And we will give up
our appetite
for despair.
And we will taste
and know
of delight.
And we will become bread
for a hungry world.
And we will become drink
for those who thirst.
And the blessed
will become the blessing.
And everywhere
will be the feast.