

World Communion Sunday

Mark 10:13-16 & Colossians 3

Late last spring, students from Cambridge High School painted a mural on the backside of the old Cambridge Newspaper Office Building on North Street, which is owned by Mike and Melanie Rumpf.

The mural, as I have mentioned before, is a colorful painting of four different youth, representing diversity and at the sometime, inclusion in our community and world. Underneath the picture of the four young people is the word "Everyone."



I mention this beautiful mural and the message our Cambridge youth are seeking to communicate through their artwork, because today is World Communion Sunday. Their mural and the word "Everyone" (Love Everyone) speaks to what World Communion Sunday is all about.

World Communion Sunday was first celebrated at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh in 1933. 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."**

I think the ministers and people of both Shadyside and Fourth Presbyterian Churches would have shouted a big “Amen” and applauded the message of our youth here in Cambridge.

Likewise, I believe they would have supported the middle school students in Cederberg, Wisconsin who, like our Cambridge students, painted a similar mural that depicted nonbinary people holding hands encircling the earth. On the chest of each person was a heart. Each heart has the colors of different flags which represent the larger global community. Added to their mural are spheres which painted with the different colors of support for people of representing the various gender and transgender groups (LGBTQ+).

In the center of the mural, written over the painting of the earth are the words: “Love Is Universal”.



“Love is Universal” Again, these middle schoolers from the Cederberg Student Acceptance Team, like our Cambridge High School students, and like the Presbyterian ministers at Shadyside Church, felt the need to communicate a message of unity and inclusion in a time when they are experiencing a growing division and hostility towards people of different gender identity, faiths, ethnic groups.

I think Jesus would approve of their message, after all, his new commandment he gave to us was to “Love one another as he first loved us”,

welcoming and including everyone at table together, regardless of their gender identity, ethnic background, or faith.

The writer of John spoke to this message of universal love for everyone when he wrote in 1 John 4:16: **"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."**

"Love is Universal" because God, the Creator of everyone, is Love and abides in all and through all. This is the message we reflect in our gathering here this morning, around Christ's welcome table on World Communion Sunday. One Bread, One Body, One Table, One God who is the Creator of all, and whose sacred presence and divine Love dwells in each and every one of us. Can I get an "Amen"!

So you might be surprised to learn that the Cederberg School Administration had the mural painted over because some people in the community complained about the message these middle schoolers were seeking to communicate about Love for everyone. I know, right?

In a similar move, the Waukesha School District has ordered all teachers to remove signage from their classrooms that advocate for inclusivity and diversity because they claim it is too divisive. Posters with messages like our Cambridge students and the Cederberg students created are no longer allowed. Teachers, like me, display these types of signage in classrooms to communicate to everyone in their classroom, and especially to their marginalized students of color, LGBTQ+, Trans, that you are in a safe my classroom.

But it is not only school administrations that are doing these types of things. Back in the early summer, a resolution was introduced in Marathon County, Wisconsin that proclaimed "A Community For All." It was intended to send a message of welcome and support for the Hmong, LGBTQ+, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color) who have been experiencing a growing resentment towards their presence in the Wausau area. In a vote that made the national news, the Marathon County Board of Supervisors voted down the resolution.

And now some in the Wisconsin Assembly and State Senate are seeking to pass bills (AB562) that would prevent schools from talking about gender identity and systematic racism while seeking to prevent public institutions from holding anti-racism and diversity training events.

While it may have been 1933, this gets to the heart of the reason the ministers at Shadyside Presbyterian Church felt called to celebrate World Communion Sunday, sending a message of unity and universal love for everyone at Christ's table.

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, 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.

Our "Oneness" in Christ though is not "Sameness". "Love is Universal," yes. Love "Everyone" as Christ loves each of us, yes. Unity around Christ's welcome table is reflected in the rich, diversity of those who gather as One in Christ.

For me, this is the message I believe the middle schoolers in Cederberg and the high schoolers here in Cambridge are seeking to communicate in their artwork. It is the same reason teachers have been putting up signs of welcome and acceptance for vulnerable, marginalized students. The only way to see the fullness of the sacred presence of God, is to see it in each individual as a part of the collective whole.

Because God is Love, Love is Universal, and Everyone Is Loved.

On this World Communion Sunday, may we take to heart what author and artist Jan Richardson says: "**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.

Amen.