

## World Communion Sunday – 6 October 2019

I speak to you in the name of He who is, who was, and who is yet to come. PBS

The readings today speak to yearning, longing and faith. It is also World Communion Sunday. For some it may be the first time you are hearing about this celebration. For others, this is an annual observance.

One of the exciting things about Shared Ministry is learning new terminology and practises. Communion is something which has existed in the Christian Church for millennia. But first, our readings of the day.

The first reading is from the Book of Lamentations in which the writer is feeling disconnected and isolated. And then there is a shift 'but this I call to mind and there is hope'. (Lamentations 3.21, NRSV) In other words, even at times of great pain and isolation, there is hope in God, there is love in God, there is peace in God.

In the Psalm for today, the psalmist writes of sitting down by rivers in Babylon and weeping for the loss of Zion. You may remember this as a song "By the Rivers of Babylon" released by the Rastafari duo The Melodians in 1970. Eight years later it was covered by the German disco group Boney M. "By the rivers of Babylon, where we sat down, ye--ah we wept, when we remember Babylon"

The psalmist encourages us to remember from where we come. Not to spend the time weeping and mourning, but to remember who we are and whose we are.

Paul's second letter to Timothy speaks of faith through the generations. He writes that Timothy must have received his faith from his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois in whose faith Paul is assured. For many of us, we learned our faith from our families. In some cases, we continued in faith when our families backed away. For others of us Church has been a part of our formation and while we may have strayed, in the end we always return to Holy Mother Church.

World Communion Sunday began at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1933 as a way to bring local congregations together to reflect on the things that they share in common; namely a love of God, the adoration of Jesus and in sharing the common sacrament of Holy Communion. World Communion Sunday was adopted nationally by the Presbyterian Church of the United States by 1936. This was further adopted by the National Council of Churches in 1940. It is now celebrated on every continent in the world on the first Sunday of October.

The service for World Communion Sunday is traditionally celebrated as per each denomination's practice. For protestant denominations such as United Church and Presbyterian Church, Communion is always celebrated on World Communion Sunday as it may not be celebrated each week as it is in other Christian denominations such as Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Anglican.

The Communion Liturgy we are using this day is from the United Church and was written especially for World Communion Sunday.

It is worth noting that both the Anglican and United Churches recognise two sacraments: those of Baptism and Communion. The Anglican Church also recognizes five sacramental rites: confirmation, marriage, Ordination, Extreme Unction or Last Rites, and the Reconciliation of a Penitent or Confession.

The service of Holy Communion has existed in a more formal way since the Second Century. It has developed through many interpretations of the Last Supper, celebrated by Jesus on the night he was arrested.

It was believed Jesus gathered his friends together in the upper room and they shared a sabbath meal, or Shabbat where they shared the unleavened passover bread and wine as they had many times before.

In a Jewish Shabbat meal, rather than unleavened bread, which is used only during the festival of the Passover, a braided egg-bread called Challah is used. The bread has a prayer of blessing recited over it. "Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem (Le Khemekh) min ha'aretz" (Translation: "Blessed are you LORD our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth"). It is then broken and shared. Each person breaks off a piece of bread, salts it and eats it. Often one person will break off a piece of bread large enough that they can break it in two and share it with another.

Please note that the Shabbat meal is not to be confused with Communion. It is a separate celebration unto itself.

At the Last Supper Jesus took the bread, leftover from the meal they had just shared. It then had four elements; it was taken, blessed, broken and shared. These four elements made something ordinary into a sacrament: an outward and visible sign of an inward and believed grace. The cup of wine was then taken, blessed and shared. Again, these three elements made an ordinary cup of wine into something sacred.

So it is when we gather to share in Communion or Eucharist. There are many rituals that have been added and subtracted to the liturgy over the centuries. In some traditions, only the priest receives wine. In other traditions, grape juice is used instead of wine. In some traditions the congregation bakes bread that is used for Communion. In others, unleavened wafers are purchased. In short, there is not one way to receive the Lord's Supper, there are many.

In some traditions, Communion is received quarterly to keep it as something rare and special. In other traditions, Communion is celebrated weekly as it is believed to be fundamental to the expression of faith.

In some areas we grew up receiving communion every other week, with morning prayer in between. In other areas, it has always been weekly.

There is no right or wrong way to partake in the Holy Communion...only that we should come together and celebrate.

For some people they believe in transubstantiation which means a physical change in the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. For other people Communion is

more a memorial feast. The pendulum swing for belief is quite wide when it comes to each individual's belief in just what happens when we share in the bread and drink the cup.

When I began exploring my faith I was a strong believer in transubstantiation. I truly believed that the bread and wine was changed in the sharing. As I delved deeper into my belief I landed on the side of being a Receptionist; meaning that the change comes, not from the elements, but in myself. When I take the bread and the cup there is a change in me; a change bringing me closer to my Creator.

A priest or minister cannot celebrate Communion alone, it must be done with at least one more person present. Matthew 18.20 tells us "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them". (NRSV) This tells us that we must not practice our faith in isolation alone; it must be in community.

We can certainly study our faith alone, but to truly understand and experience the fullness and richness of God's holy banquet we must celebrate together, as community, in Communion. We should come together as often as we can to share in sacred word of scripture. We should pray together, eat together, play together, be together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Recently I asked some folks what Eucharist or Communion means to them. The answers were varied and each was beautiful. For some it represents coming before God at your most vulnerable. For others it was the joy of seeing children welcomed upon baptism. For some it was the corporate gathering to share in something sacred.

Some spoke of receiving wine or juice from a common cup. For others they received individual Jesus Jiggers or small glasses of juice. Some spoke of baking communion bread at home, or helping on the altar guild in counting wafers and preparing the elements for Sunday Communion.

What I heard from each respondent was that it is something profoundly sacred and deeply personal to come before God and receive, what I believe to be the greatest gift ever given; the gift of the bread and the cup.

Our readings speak of isolation and loneliness and fear. In Paul's letter to Timothy he writes of the faith he has seen through Lois and Eunice and he is assured because of their faith, that they have passed this on to Timothy. In the gospel the apostles are asking Jesus to increase their faith. And Jesus tells them if their faith was the size of a mustard seed, it would grow to a size that seems unimaginable.

Each of the readings is encouraging us, as believers in Jesus, as those who follow Him, to be closer to God through drawing closer to each other. What a wonderful day to hear these readings of anxiety and fear turned to joy and community.

So, wherever you are on the journey, come and feast. You who have been here before and you whom have never been before. This is the table of the Lord, it is not mine, come, together, let us feast.

Let all God's children say Amen. Thanks be to God.

The Rev'd Andrea L. Brennan, Incumbent  
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Lamentations 3.1-16

Psalm 137

2 Timothy 1.1-14

Luke 17.5-10