

Come Together – One Body      2020  
Isaiah 25:1, 6-10

Isaiah 25:1, 6-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

When my mother was still living, there was nothing she loved more,  
than for family and friends to gather around her table  
and enjoy one of her amazing meals together, lovingly prepared,  
and always a great time of sharing stories, laughter and catching up.

**Something special happened when we were all together  
and sharing that special meal as family, as loved ones.**

For those of us who've been at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian church for a while,  
we know World Communion Sunday is also something like that...  
... an amazing experience of celebrating God's gift of grace,  
the wonderful and rich diversity of God's family  
made one by the faith in Jesus Christ we share.

It has always been one of my favorite worship services,  
when we celebrate communion with Christians all around the world,  
as we are reminded that we are but **one small piece  
of the whole Church of Jesus Christ- of all believers.**

**I am inspired by World Communion Sunday at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church,**  
for in a world and season of distrust, division and hostility,  
here we celebrate our uniqueness, diversity and differences  
**as God's gift to a people brought together by grace,  
and called to walk together with our Lord as one.**

In the ancient world whole communities would share a grand feast  
to celebrate an abundant harvest, a victory in battle,  
or a peace treaty between nations or tribes formerly at war.

**A meal together infers certain relational ties and connections,  
for ordinarily you don't sit down to enjoy a meal with your enemy.**

In 1933, the pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg  
was concerned about the rise of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany.  
He felt the impending threat of another terrible world war,  
and that the Church needed to speak a message of unity and peace.

So he suggested that on one Sunday during the year,  
every Christian church all around the globe

ought to gather together at the Lord's Table  
as a sign and symbol of Christian unity---

-a **unity** – that we share a common story  
whatever the specifics of my life, your life, or anyone's life,  
we are all sinners, yet saved by God's grace through Jesus.

-a **unity** – for we share a common calling  
we are all on a faith-journey, of becoming more Christ-like,  
so that more of the gracious love of God can flow through us.

-a **unity** – because we share a common purpose and mission,  
to participate in God's Kingdom by building a faith-community  
that serves to show and proclaim God's love for this world,  
and to grow, enrich & deepen the faith-journey of each one.

**That unity, however, does not mean uniformity, and does not deny  
or obliterate our distinctions, our differences and variances,  
but celebrates our uniqueness as God's gift toward mission.**

World Communion Sunday, celebrated by Christian churches worldwide,  
reminds us that we are all truly one in Jesus Christ,  
bound together and connected because, **Jesus is our Lord.**

Indeed it is through our unity despite diversity & differences,  
that the Kingdom of God is most boldly and vividly revealed,  
by welcoming into worship **whoever we are, wherever we're from,  
whatever** our language of worship, Spanish, Korean, Twi or English.

**Jesus Christ sets us all free to participate in God's grace,**  
and so we become one --- the one body of Christ,  
one with him which leads to being one with each other.

That is the chief business, purpose and mission of the Church --  
to live out, to reflect and share with others, the Gospel,  
**for the Church is called to be  
a visible and living representation of Christ to this world.**

Yes, of course we have an individual relationship with God,  
but a living and growing Christian faith involves community,  
**and to be Christian, is to be a part of Christ's body...**

**... for Christian spirituality necessarily involves other people,  
it means learning to work with them, and learning to love them.**

**In Jesus Christ, by grace we become and are becoming new creatures.  
Not defined by our race, culture, income or anything else  
other than by God's grace and our shared unity in Christ.**

It was just a few years ago that the Korean Presbyterian Church  
met with the Missions team looking for space for their worship,

and we began our journey together... and what a blessing  
to share in the work and mission of the Lord together.

For us, these flags represent more than just nations of the world.

They are in celebration of the relationships we share,  
and represent far more than just a distant place on a map...

... **they represent people, our family we've grown to know and to love.**

**I treasure the way our lives have intersected, which so greatly  
enriches the meaning and importance of World Communion,  
something very special here at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church.**

During my stay in Jerusalem, I woke up early each morning,  
and a friend and I would get up and out into the city,  
so we could watch the sunrise  
over the site of where the original temple once stood.

It is one of the most holy and sacred places in Judaism,  
where a part of the wall still remains from the time of Jesus,  
**and to be there when the sun came up was a very special experience.**

Along that wall there is a large area where men can come and pray,  
but I found it disturbing that women and children were  
separated & kept in a smaller section behind a barrier,  
**sending a message that some are more worthy and welcome than others.**

That dividing wall was a stark reminder that we humans, too often,  
and in too many ways, we allow our differences to matter more  
than the fact that our **One God** created and loves us all ...  
... and that none are more loved or worthy than any other.

In the ancient world, social & class distinctions were important,  
between races, nations, cultures, economics, gender and status...  
... and even in our culture it's still a contentious issue.

But do you remember how Luke describes the moment when Jesus died?,  
the dividing curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom.

It was a sign that Jesus came to destroy the walls that separate us,  
the barrier of sin separating us from God  
and that alienates us from other children of God.

Just as Paul wrote, (Ephesians 2:8-9, 13 and Galatians 3:28)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for **all** of you are **one in Christ Jesus**.

**This was a whole new way of being human, of perceiving other people,  
as a unified community brought together by grace and by faith.**

The Isaiah passage we read earlier is a description of that,

in which God's steadfast love & favor toward all of humankind,  
is represented by a rich and abundant mountaintop meal,  
**as a symbol and assurance** of God's blessings-  
the fulfillment of God's promises for all of humanity.

Isaiah 25:6-8

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, ... And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud (or separation) that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, ... **for the Lord has spoken.**

This mountaintop feast of the very finest food described by Isaiah,  
serves as a declaration of God's compassion & abundant provision,  
a picture that tries to describe  
God's indescribable gracious love and mercy,  
and God's blessings in abundance  
far beyond anything that we might ever imagine.

Isaiah's vision of God's kingdom is a banquet table feast,  
in which all are invited by grace – all are welcome to partake...  
... as Jesus himself described it in Luke's gospel: (Luke 13:29-30)

Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, **and will eat in the kingdom of God.** Indeed,  
some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

None of us come to God's table because we are worthy or deserve it.  
And because through God's grace **we are** all loved and invited...  
...and there at the Lord's Table I will meet other sinners  
who are also loved, much cherished and precious to God.

As we gather for World Communion,  
we are getting an early glimpse of our future joy and hope,  
a tiny taste of what God's Kingdom fulfilled will be like.  
That vision and is a sign, promise, hope and truth-declaration,  
all are equally loved and made worthy by our Savior's sacrifice,  
and that all are welcome, invited and brought here by grace.

It's a reminder that though we are different and diverse in many ways  
God's grace does make us all one... all of the body of Christ,  
**which is far more significant than anything we might do,  
or any opinion, belief or viewpoint that we might hold.**

\* Even if our every opinion and understanding of the Bible  
is entirely correct and in perfect agreement with God's truth,  
we are still saved only, **by God's grace alone.**

\* And even if we have it all completely wrong and  
our understanding of Scripture is totally flawed and erroneous,  
we are still saved only, **by God's grace alone.**

**Recognizing that truth,  
that God's grace calls us to Christian unity based upon grace,  
and it is God's will and purpose  
that we learn to live together with our differences,**

**to love and respect even those with whom we disagree.**

As we are directed and instructed in Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.