

Together Something Special Happens 2021  
1 Corinthians 1:2-3, 10:15-17, 23-26, 31-11:1

1 Corinthians 1:2-3, 10:15-17, 23-26, 31-11:1 (New Revised Standard Version)

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Today is one of our most meaningful worship services at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres.,  
when we celebrate communion with Christians all around the world.

It reminds us that we are but **one small piece**  
**of the whole Church of Jesus Christ- of all believers,**  
and that we are all truly **one in Jesus Christ,**  
bound together and connected because, **Jesus is our Lord.**

Today Christians worldwide are 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.

**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 diversity, our uniqueness & differences...

... as Paul writes, vs. 2

... together with all those who **in every place** call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both  
their Lord and ours.

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, Korean, Twi, Portug. 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...**  
**... a visible and living representation of Christ to this world.**

**In Jesus Christ, by grace we become and are becoming new creatures.**  
**Not defined by our race, culture, income, nationality,**

**or anything else other than the grace we share in Christ.**

Years ago, when our youth processed into worship carrying flags,  
the different flags represented countries around the world  
where we supported missionaries and Bible translators...  
**... and so we celebrated those connections we had around the world,  
that have become increasingly rich and meaningful over the years.**

When several university students and their families from Cameroon  
became such a faithful & active part of our lives and church family  
they were delighted when the flag of Cameroon was added  
in celebration of those wonderful new relationships.

Sometime later, some families with connections to Korea  
became active here and joined our worshipping community,  
so we were pleased to add the flag of South Korea.  
**And what a joy to see their surprised faces and smiles  
when they first saw that flag in our worship procession.**

It was just a few years later that the Korean Presbyterian Church  
met with the Missions team looking for space for 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  
as year by year our procession has been enhanced with more flags.  
They are each in celebration of the relationships we share...  
**... they represent people, our family we've grown to know and to love.**

Together, we have been on a most remarkable journey  
without knowing in advance where the Lord would lead us.  
We have been building new and deeper relationships along the way.  
**Clearly, God has been up to something amazing all along,  
and today we celebrate the continuing work of our Lord.**

The point is whether the church is in Corinth, Brazil, LC or Africa,  
whether the language of worship is Twi, Korean, Farsi or English,  
we are all one in Jesus Christ, all of the one body and united  
in our call to proclaim the Gospel, **which is our true purpose.**

Throughout this 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Christians living in Corinth,  
Paul addresses topic after topic about how they are letting  
issues, preferences and status **divide and separate them...**

... loyalty to a particular leader, the food someone eats or doesn't,  
lawsuits among fellow believers, leadership & spiritual gifts,  
male or female, slave or free, Jew or gentile, rich or poor,  
other resentments and even the way they celebrated Communion...  
**... all of those had been divisive issues in ancient Corinth.**

The problem in Corinth, they weren't **handling God's grace very well.**  
They were corrupting the good that the Lord created and gave  
into something that was defective, destructive and divisive.  
**"Corruption of the good" is a useful way to interpret sin and evil.**

For example, in Genesis we're told, God declared his Creation good,  
and it is good to appreciate the wonders of that blessing and gift.

**But, human appreciation of that gift of Creation is often corrupted  
into something sinful and evil, terrible and destructive,  
such as human greed, materialism and always wanting more.**

Yes, God's creation is good, but human avarice corrupts that good.

Or, it is a good thing to love and be loyal to our family and friends.

**But that becomes destructive, evil and sinful, and even racist  
if we decide that our group or those who are most like us  
are somehow better, more worthy and precious than others.**

**Sin is corruption of the good God created and entrusted to our care.**

Paul points out, to divide people by status into separate groups,  
is to deny and reject the truth, grace and power of the Gospel,  
that all are equally precious, loved by God, **and one in faith.**

No human defined division, grouping or sense of superiority  
is greater or more important than the truth of God's grace  
that all of us come as lost sinners **saved by grace alone.**

Indeed, God uses diversity to strengthen the faith of each of us  
as we learn from one another and to practice forbearance at times.

In this part of Paul's letter he is focused on the Lord's Supper  
and how by excluding and segregating some believers,  
they were humiliating and mistreating fellow Christians...

**... missing the whole point of coming together as the Church. vs. 10:16-17**

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?

The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, **we who  
are many are one body**, for we all partake of the one bread.

In our sharing of the Communion bread and cup,  
together we are sharing the one body of Christ as the body of Christ,  
remembering, we who are many become the one body of Christ...

**... & anything less or exclusive is to miss the point of the sacrament,  
given as a sign that all are equally loved and cherished by God.**

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

It is when we live those values of unity and love faithfully,  
that we are able to live together in harmony as a community,  
down the walls that separate the children of God.

breaking

Paul explains that we must look beyond our own desires & preferences  
by living lives that reflect God's grace and glorify our God  
and that are attentive, that serve and connect with others...

... as Paul writes, vs. 23-24, 31

"All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. So, whether you eat or drink, or **whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.**

There is no question or doubt but that these days are perilous times  
of polarizing hatred, threats of violence and vicious distrust,  
a harsh and bitter divisiveness that seems to infect everything.  
We live in a world desperate for words of grace, reconciliation, gentleness & hope.

Meanwhile surely the mission of the church of Jesus Christ is,  
as called and equipped by God to live out **an alternative view**  
as a place of welcome, joy, healing, kindness, compassion & grace.

That is the chief business and purpose of the Church ----  
to live out, to reflect and share with others, the Gospel,  
**for the Church is called to be a bold, hopeful and authentic,  
visible and living representation of Christ to this world,  
as we live out our individual uniqueness & gifts together.**

Contrary to the many ways we allow differences to divide humanity,  
World Communion reminds us that our **One God** created & loves us all ...  
... and that none are more loved or worthy than any other.

As we read in our Meditation in Preparation for worship, *Galatians 3:28*,  
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.**

In Christ,  
**God chooses only to see sinners who are loved & have been forgiven.**  
Not Jews or Greeks, not slaves or free, not male or female,  
but all uniquely precious, adopted as the Children of God...

**... and as we, individually, grow deeper in our own journey of faith,  
the church collectively, grows more effective and faithful.**

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

**Surely God has poured out his grace upon us, and on this church.**  
Faithfulness begins by living lives well **right where we are**,  
so that our lives are worthy of the grace we have received.

So as we gather for World Communion,  
we are getting an early glimpse at our future hope, life and joy,  
a tiny fore-taste of what God's Kingdom fulfilled will be like.

**Today celebrates and calls us to notice and appreciate  
that we are each one wonderfully different and diverse,  
that we have been blessed in unique and wonderful ways,  
for by grace alone we are all made one... the one body of Christ.**

**Recognizing that truth,  
that Jesus calls us to Christian unity based upon his gracious love,  
it is God's will and purpose that we learn to live together  
to love & respect even those with whom we differ or disagree...**

... as Jesus prayed on the night of his arrest, John 17:1, 11, 23

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; ... and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them ... so that they may be one, as we are one. ... that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.