

# *“One Bread, One Body, One Lord of All!”*

*Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Philippians 2:1-13;  
Matthew 21:23-32*

*World Wide Communion Sunday*

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*October 1, 2017*

From the Pulpit

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A Communion Meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, World Wide Communion Sunday, October 1, 2017, dedicated to Spencer Anne Kiesel on her baptismal day and to the men and women across the globe, in every communion of Christianity who are stepping up to the Lord's table today to lift up, celebrate and remember our savior, his sacrifice for us, his love for us, and his gift of grace and salvation for us and always to the glory of God!

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

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She was 87 and I was 27 when we first met. Elsie Tomasch had escaped Hitler's Germany in the 1930's and had made her way to Cleveland, Ohio where she had worked in a variety of low paying jobs for many years. By the time I became her pastor, Elsie was living in public housing on Cleveland's west side. She had an absolutely beautiful smile and a joyful disposition – in spite of all the hardships she had seen in her lifetime. She also had very little ability to hear. Although her hearing was weak and her hands were gnarled by arthritis, her spirit and faith were strong.

One autumn afternoon, a day much like today, I took Elsie communion in a home communion set passed on to me by my grandfather – first put into service in 1923 (here it is now). As I read from scripture, she would say, “what?” I would repeat myself – sometimes two or three times. When the time came to celebrate Holy Communion, I took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to her as I proclaimed, “the Body of Christ!” She said, “What?” I said, “the Body of Christ!” Again, she shouted back, “What?” I yelled, “the Body of Christ!” “Oh, thank you!” she replied as she smiled and put out her hands and I gently placed the body of Christ into her waiting hands. We repeated the same action with the grape juice – “the Blood of Christ!” three proclamations twice followed by “What?” A smile. An acknowledgement – “thank

you” and the reception of Christ’s blood – which we consumed at the same time.

Only a few minutes had passed when a loud knock came at the door. From the other side, I heard the words, “Cleveland Police! Open up now!” Since I was quicker than Elsie, I went to the door to meet two officers – with clubs in hand. They were as surprised as I opened the door. One spoke, “a neighbor called in a 9-1-1 call. She said, she heard a man yelling about a body and some blood.”

I welcomed them in to see that we were celebrating the eucharist. Moreover, as I offered them Holy Communion, Elsie brought out an even bigger plate of cookies and coffee. After some convincing (because – as they said – “we are Catholic.... I don’t think we can receive the eucharist from you... no offense”), they both sat down and received the body of Christ, the blood of Christ – gifts of heaven and some homemade chocolate chip cookies – gifts of Elsie’s still deft baking hands. In the end, they both thanked me and one said, “That was the most meaningful eucharist I have ever received. So personal. Thank you.”

*“Where two or three (or four or more) are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them....”* Says our Lord.

The Apostle Paul offers us a glimpse of real presence of Christ in our lives in Philippians. He does so through a model of humility that counters our culture. We might experience a kind of theological whiplash when we go from our everyday pursuits and immersion in this culture to hearing the words of Paul and contemplating the example of Jesus. Paul's words are a kind of contemplation on Jesus, who embodied the paradox of surrender that leads not only to resurrection but exaltation. And yet, much of modern Christian faith life seems to strive toward skipping the surrender and sacrifice and keeping the exaltation.

As we look around our church and our larger community, who are the quiet ones who “empty” themselves rather than grasping at high places or recognition for what they are doing? Where, in the life of our congregation, are the places of “consolation from love,” of “compassion and sympathy”? When are the moments and times of “sharing the Spirit” and “encouragement in Christ”? What does it look like in our congregation to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”? Where is God at work in you? (reference from Rev. Kate Huey, Sermon Seeds, 10/1/17, [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)).

Paul's call to the church to follow the model of humility in Christ Jesus our Savior, brings us back to World Communion Sunday. Today, across the world, Christians are celebrating

the Eucharist. While our Orthodox and Catholic sisters and brothers partake and share the body and blood of Christ each Sunday, it is not always so with those of us who are their Protestant brothers and sisters. But, it is essential (and in our times, I would say “urgent!”) that all 1.5 billion Christians celebrate the Eucharist in our practice of faith. Jesus calls us to remember him and to celebrate Holy Communion – not once in a while – but always and forever.

Today, in hamlets and huts; in villages and on farms; in small towns and huge cities, millions of Christians are gathering at the Lord’s table today. Priests, pastors, and lay people are gathered to remember him, to receive the gift of his sacrifice and love, to celebrate his presence in our lives. What a joyful gift we receive in this fourfold action of the eucharist – **taking, blessing, breaking, sharing.**

**Take. Bless. Break. Give.** The four-fold action of the Eucharist is profoundly important to me and I hope and pray it is important for you. It is truly a pattern for life.

**First, we take.** The 18th century spiritual director Jean Pierre de Caussade urged his listeners to give themselves to the present moment with a radical acceptance. Trust that God is always doing the best that God can do within the limitations of creation and our own brokenness. De Caussade said,

*“Accept the present moment as the sacrament of God's presence. If we are to know God and serve God, it can only be here and now within the circumstances of the present moment. So, let go of the struggle of resentment and judging, and accept what is as the context for our experience of God in our lives. Within this moment, in these circumstances, God presents us our communion with the divine.”*

Abandon yourself to the present moment, Caussade says, and simply intend to do one thing -- to do God's will. And what is God's will? He says it can be one of three things: Either to do some present duty, or to enjoy some present joy, or, in the dark mystery of God, occasionally it is God's will for us to suffer something for the sake of God in the spirit of Christ's cross. When we are doing God's will in the present moment, we are doing our part -- we are doing everything we can to bring near the Reign of God.

But, it all begins with Acceptance. Take.” Accept this moment as the crucible of the divine presence and will.

**Then, we Bless.** In Hebrew tradition to bless something is to give thanks for it. At a meal someone will “give the blessing.” They will make a prayer of thanksgiving over the food. Whenever anything is received with thanksgiving, it is blessed; it is consecrated. Thanksgiving is the characteristic Christian

stance before the world. We say in the communion prayer found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, “*It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks...*” (BCP, p. 361) To accept this moment and to bless it in a spirit of thanksgiving to God is to consecrate the moment, to make it holy. Every moment can be holy when we take it and hold it in our hearts.

**Then, we Break.** The word “sacrifice” literally means “to make holy” -- from *sacra* ("sacred rites") and *facere* (“to do, to perform, to make”). The bread must be broken to be shared. Offering precedes giving. Jesus shows us the path of death and resurrection. The breaking is always a form of willingness. Each one of us must be willing to surrender our own self-centeredness in order to enter into something greater. That sacrifice seems always to be a breaking open into an encounter with the divine, with holiness.

**Finally, we Give.** All of life is gift. We have been given all that we are and all that we have. How can we give ourselves, and continue the generative process?

**Take. Bless. Break. Give.** Each moment of this day and every day will contain a Eucharistic opportunity for each one of us to take, bless, break and give.

What is this moment about right now? On this world  
communion Sunday, I invite you to come to the table.  
Remember Elsie Tomasch “The Body of Christ!” “What?”  
“The Body of Christ!” “What?” The Body of Christ!” “O  
thank you!”

More important, Remember Christ, our model for humility,  
our Lord of Love....

Amen.

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