

“The Table Will Be Wide”

*27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 17:5-10*

World Communion Sunday

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: *Gracious God, we know your table is wide and your welcome is wider. We ask now that you gather us in and open our hearts to receive your grace. Help us to trust that your Word and love are enough, and that our aching and sorrow will be met with bread and cup. Transform us by your grace and your Word for us this day. Amen.*

Several years ago, TIME magazine ran a couple of photo essays on its website based on pictures taken in the 2005 book, *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats*. In each one of the photos, members of a family are gathered in their kitchens, with the food they would consume in a normal week spread all around them on their table and counters. Below their pictures are written their native country and city, their weekly food cost in American dollars and quotes from the family about some of their favorite foods and recipes.

The families span the globe: from Japan to Italy, Kuwait to the United States, Chad to Ecuador. Although their food choices are different and expenditures around the globe vary dramatically, the common image is the table fellowship of each family. Some sit on the floor, some sit in chairs or in their living rooms, and others sit outside. Wherever they gather, eating together, sharing a meal, is what constitutes their family.

As Jesus' followers formed relationships on their journey, their meals began the seeds of faith that would change the world. In the early church, table fellowship was just as important as worship and stewardship. Most important, for today, that community began their life together around the table. That community, like the millions of churches that grew out of her, **celebrated Jesus' life, death and resurrection with potluck** meals, a little wine and fellowship, and one family meal after another. They were a loving Church, adding more and more people to their number each day, and they devoted themselves to eating together.

But, it was more than what was on the table, it was about who gathered at the table.

A few years ago I did pulpit supply for a pastor who was on vacation. She had told me that there would be communion on the First Sunday of the month, so I planned accordingly. What **she didn't** tell me was that this church liked to engage more of their senses on communion Sundays: sight, taste and smell. Early in the morning a woman in the church arrived with prepared ingredients and her bread maker. She set it up in the kitchen, (which was in close proximity to the sanctuary) and by the time we all gathered for worship, the space was filled with the aroma of homemade bread. As we were singing our way to

the table that morning, the woman brought the bread to the table.

After saying the Words of Institution, I broke the bread, and as if on cue, steam began to rise from the bread. I looked up from the table and sharing the bread. I was met with such amazement and their excitement to participate in that feast. One by one, members came forward, received a piece of freshly baked bread, dipped it into the cup and returned to their pews, nourished. Their family connection as a church continued to grow, and now I was part of that experience with them. It was an extension of the communion table that felt like we were around table fellowship in the family kitchen.

It was more that what was on the table, **it's about who's** gathered at the table with you.

In 2006, eight other seminary women and I traveled to Guatemala for a cross-cultural experience. We met with other women who were leaders in their denominations from across the country. Only recently, had women been welcomed into leadership in their denomination. Gathered around meals and fellowship and bible study, we all shared their stories of hardship and faith, struggle and hope.

There were only 3 women in the entire country who had been ordained in their denomination and who were now serving communities of faith. We shared closing worship with them and the first ordained clergywoman in Guatemala presided at the table. We had made connections with them and now we were set to feast at the table which Christ had prepared. **The table in God's kingdom got a bit wider that day.**

It's about **who's** gathered at the table with you.

On this World Communion Sunday----Christians around the world gather at the table to taste and see that the Lord is good. All over the world today, Christians are praising God through varieties of worship styles and in thousands of languages. Today, we celebrate how the Holy Spirit is moving and working all over the world, from Africa to Europe, and from Asia to the Americas. We rejoice together in the feast Christ has prepared for all people.

This week I received an email from a pastor who I met while in Malawi, Africa a few years ago....**we connect around this time every year.** He was sending me greetings for World Communion Sunday. **He said these words,** 'May God's love be wide enough to allow all to come to the table and find their place and be fed.'" Experiencing communion in his church, on

World Communion Sunday reminded me just how much we have in common. Common liturgy, the Lord's Prayer, tiny pieces of bread... (they too cut their bread into little tiny cubes). And we share joys and sorrows of a community faith, nurtured and fed around table fellowship.

But, I, also, am reminded that there are places around the world today where it's more of a challenge to see where God's Table is spread wide for all people.

For our brothers and sisters in Syria, who face the constant barrage of gun or mortar fire, may they draw together to witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where unrest has come around political elections and shell casings line the streets and the airport tarmac, may they draw together to witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma or Charlotte North Carolina, or Anderson, South Carolina, or even, Columbus, Ohio, where recent events are enough to divide communities. When events like these threaten the fabric of communities, may we all find a way to draw together to witness to God's love.

In a time and place where we experience so much that divides us ... we need something like World Communion Sunday to remind us that we are more alike than we may realize.

We need reminders that we are all together, by **God's** grace, fed with a love greater than our own.

Soon we'll gather at the table. We'll hear **Christ's invitation**, to come and take our place at the table. The invitation extends to all of us. **No matter who we are. No Matter where we come from. No matter what we carry with us this day---we are welcome at this table of grace.**

From this table and this meal today, may we be compelled outside the walls of this cathedral of grace and into our broken and hurting world to be **God's hands and feet** to those in need. To all those and more, the table will be spread wide.

I'll leave you with a **Blessing for this World Communion Sunday**. It comes from author and artist, Jan Richardson

And The Table Will Be Wide¹

And the table
will be wide.

And the welcome
will be wide.

¹ © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com. Found on Textweek.org

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.
– Jan Richardson

‘May God's love and grace be wide enough to allow all to come
to the table and **find their place and be fed.**’

Amen.

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