

## REFLECTION FOR WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

(Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, October 4, 2020)

Today we honor the tradition of World Communion Sunday, a celebration of Christian unity endorsed by the National Council of Churches in 1940 and celebrated on the first Sunday of October. Since then, Christians worldwide have shared the Eucharist in the spirit of the universal Christ, calling us to work for fairness and equality in a world spiritually disconnected, economically destabilized and environmentally compromised.

Paul told the Christians in his day that they were to be “discerning of the body,” the entire Christian community when sharing communion. Today, we acknowledge our worldwide relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ and continue the ancient Christian practice of discerning how we might best care for the ‘body’ of Christ.

On this day, the broader Christian church moves beyond historical and theological differences and worships together in genuine unity. At the same time, we acknowledge and confess that dividing walls remain high and that ecumenical harmony remains a dream. Yet, imagine how great this day is: Christians worldwide are finding safe ways to be together, eating a variety of grains and fruits of the earth, and using various forms of liturgy. Through the breaking of bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine and by remembering Jesus’ ministry of justice, inclusion, and unconditional love, we celebrate our continued hope for unity and ecumenical cooperation.

As we all know, this world in which we live is a shattered and broken one and is suffering profoundly. The coronavirus has changed life as we know it: thousands of people across the country – our friends and family, our neighbors, and perhaps even some of us – are struggling financially because of layoffs, reduced hours, and unemployment. Isolation, loneliness, and separation create immense stress and anxiety.

Daily we are confronted by news confirming that this virus is relentless and that we need to be vigilant in our endeavors to suppress it. Along with this already difficult reality, the world continues to contend with

the challenges of oppression, natural and human made disasters, racism, and prejudice and economic and political conflicts of every kind.

This is the reality in which we live ... and yet, when Christians and other faith traditions work for justice and peace and join hands with millions of others from around the world, a different reality is possible. While tremendous unrest and divisions continue and life often stretches us to the limit, World Communion Sunday reminds us that we all share in both the suffering and the joys of others. We are connected in ways that go beyond violence, viruses, prejudice, conflict, and loss, ways that break through the barriers of culture, geography, and language.

For one day, at least, World Communion Sunday dissolves these realities. It welcomes all to the table at which we proclaim our faith to each other and the world and declare that we have hope and believe that a better world is possible.

## **Musical Interlude**

### **World Communion draws us closer to others**

Many of us know loneliness and what it feels like to suffer, to feel empty, to not be welcome, to feel unloved, or to be rejected. We know there is much suffering, loneliness, and separation. However, through this worldwide partaking of the bread and the cup, we are shown a light in the darkness. As we unite through this ritual, we are aware that we are not alone in our suffering and our joy, that all over the world others are broken, lost, and lonely but also yearning and hopeful.

Christians come to this meal for spiritual renewal. As we partake, we remember how the One who first laid out this feast spent time with those who suffered and lived on the margins – the outcasts, the sinners, the forgotten, and the oppressed.

In these trying times, World Communion Sunday reminds us that we need each other more than ever. Today we bring our own brokenness to this meal seeking healing and renewal. Then, we leave it with the responsibility, but also the joy of reaching out to others in their brokenness with the same hand of love that God extends to us.

While we are all unique in our Christian identities, we are all invited to the meal. We look different from each other, we come with diverse prayers on our lips, we bring our own concerns weighing on our hearts, and we seek our own comfort. And yet in our differences, when we partake of this meal - we are one in the spirit. Even though we seek different things, we are all seeking. Even though we pray dissimilar prayers, we are all praying. Even though we travel various paths, we are all pausing to remember that we are held within the loving embrace of the Creator as we break the bread and share the cup.

The universal Christ meets each of us exactly where we are, uniting us as brothers and sisters in our renewal. Paul writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

### **Musical Interlude**

#### **World Communion Sunday reminds us of the interconnectedness of all life.**

My friends, we are all part of a world community of beings biologically and spiritually connected within a splendid Oneness that is God, that is the universe, that is life. We are beloved beings, spiritually connected by our common humanity and by the cosmic energy that flows through us and amongst us.

In his book *Jesus Today*, South African Priest Alan Nolan writes, "As humans, we are one flesh belonging to one human family. As living beings, we belong to the closely-knit family of living organisms that have evolved one from another over the last four billion years. So also, as individual entities, we can trace our ancestry back to that first burst of energy. We are one with the stars and everything else," one world family.

No matter how separated we appear to be across the spectrum of Christian diversity, we are never separated from God. No matter how firmly we believe that we are separate, independent, and autonomous, the reality is that every living being is part of an immense and intricate whole. For many years cosmologists and physicists have shared their revelations about the interwoven evolutionary processes of the universe, and the more we learn, the more aware we are of being but a tiny part of a holistic system, a single community of life.

Long before cosmologists' research, Paul taught that every thought and action of ours affects others and the community. This coronavirus has shown and confirmed that when something goes wrong in one part of the world, it impacts the whole of the world.

Humans are fundamentally relational beings. We know that we need each other, that we cannot survive alone. As I mentioned earlier, in these trying times we need each other more than ever. When Jesus broke bread and drank wine with his followers and friends, it was as if the walls of division dissolved around them. This act of Jesus, so profoundly loving, became a powerful symbol of hope. World Communion Sunday reminds us again of our need to care for one another and of the holistic system of the universe that connects every life in the world. While this connection can never be broken, even if it is continually challenged and tested, we must recognize and acknowledge it if we are to address the world and creation's suffering and pain collectively. Transformation, justice, healing, and renewal of our one world family depend on our loving human connections, our most renewable resource of hope and courage.

*In Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh*, Matthew Fox writes, "The Eucharist is about the universe loving us unconditionally still one more time and giving itself to us in the most intimate way (as food and drink). Interconnectivity is the heart of the Eucharistic experience: God and humanity coming together, God and flesh, the flesh of wheat, wine, sunshine, soil, water, human ingenuity, stars, supernovas, galaxies, storms, fireballs – every Eucharist has a 15-billion-year sacred story that renders it holy."

Every World Communion Sunday, through the breaking of bread and drinking from the fruit of the vine, we awaken again to this amazing interconnectivity that is life, and to our fellowship with Christians worldwide.

In celebrating the Eucharist we "find our face, our name, our identity," and how we are in Christ" together. As bread and cup are shared, we are

intimately connected to one another, to creation, and to life. This sharing pulls us out of ourselves and into one another, into life, into God. Richard Rohr calls this the great circle of inclusion, the full incarnation of the Christ in us, around us, and beyond us.

This day let us participate in this meal knowing that we are one with the universe, one with each other and with all our Christian brothers and sisters worldwide who are struggling, and who want peace and justice for the world. We are many but one in the body of Christ. We come with our family and friends and with our brothers and sisters – not in front of them, not behind them, not above them or below them ... but beside them, hand in hand. All are welcome. Amen.