

**Sermon**

**“All of Us ... We Come”**

October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 ~ First Presbyterian Church

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY**

Based on Philippians 2:1-13

**SCRIPTURES:**

**Philippians 2:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. [NRSV]

**OPENING PRAYER:** With your Word, O Lord, you spoke and creation sprang forth. Now, send forth your brooding Spirit to hover over us that your new life might emerge within, among, and through us, and then out into the world, to the glory of your holy name we pray; and let all God’s people say ... Amen.

**History of “World Communion Sunday”**

Today is the first Sunday of October, which we celebrate with sisters and brothers around this nation, and around the entire world, as *World Communion*

*Sunday*. Here's some good history about this special day ... This day was originally known as "Worldwide Communion Sunday." It originated in 1936 in a predecessor denomination to our current-day Presbyterian Church (USA). From the beginning, it was planned so that other denominations within the United States, as well as other churches overseas, could make use of it. And, after a few years, by 1940 or so, the idea had indeed spread beyond the Presbyterians to numerous others. The intent of today is, and always has been, to celebrate the call of *all* Christians—of whatever background and of whatever theological tradition—to recollect, remember, and celebrate that we are in fact *one in Christ*, and that the table we receive from, and communion at, is *God's table*—not our own. Today is *our* chance, here in this church, to affirm with all our joy, through the sacrament of Communion, that we are part of the universal church of Jesus Christ ... e-v-e-r-y-w-h-e-r-e.

Thinking back to the history of the 1930s, *World Communion Sunday* was born amid gathering clouds of war and great economic uncertainty. The world was just past the halfway point in the Great Depression, and World War II was on the horizon. Themes such as the "oneness of Christ," "peace and goodwill," and "justice for all" were prevalent during those times—as they still are today. And, while the names and labels may have changed with the decades, the themes that were in focus 80 some-odd years ago are still of the utmost concern to us. Today, we are still talking about the "Great Recession" instead of the Great Depression (while keeping a watchful eye on what may or may not happen to the economy in the coming months), and instead of World War we still talk in terms of Global War on Terrorism. So, similar to the 1930s, we still find ourselves "amid gathering clouds of war and great economic uncertainty"—to some degree or another—just as they did all those years ago.

In fact, today—*World Communion Sunday*—has taken on new relevancy and depth of meaning in a world where progress and advancement for some have often undermined peace and justice and equality for others, and in a time when fear divides the peoples of God's created earth in so many ways. On this day, it is truly right, appropriate, and hopefully our greatest joy (to borrow from our

Communion language) that we celebrate our *oneness in Christ*, the Prince of Peace, in the midst of the world we are called to serve—a broken world ever more in need of healing and peacemaking.

### Meaning For Us

Friends, we gather today in unity with believers around the world—to come to the table to break the bread of life and drink the cup of salvation. We gather as people who share a common faith, not so much focused on how much *more* or *less* faith we have than someone else, but focused on how much stronger we *can* be when we come together. We gather in suffering. We gather in celebration. And, we gather in hope—remembering that in a broken and war-torn world, God’s grand vision for peace and justice thrives and continues to course through the veins of this church body, and the body of Christ everywhere.

Today, I invite you to be captivated by the image of men, women, and children of every language, color, and nationality around the globe gathering in sacred spaces, such as open fields, straw huts, brick schools, wooden shacks, stone cathedrals, and more, and praising God and entering into both a physical and spiritual communion with one another. I invite you to be captivated by the idea of God’s community coming together in God’s name, with all of our beautiful, God-given differences, to be something more powerful and more amazing than we can possibly imagine. I invite you to be captivated by the understanding that a shared life together in Christ’s name truly does mean that, as a community of faith, we care about each other and we walk together through both good times and bad, and that the church—especially *this* church—truly is the one place where everyone and anyone will always feel like they belong and are loved ... because like the Apostle Paul said in today’s reading from Philippians, the church—especially *this* church—is a place where “in humility” we (all of us!) “regard others as better than” ourselves, and we look not to our own interests, “but to the interests of others” (vv.3-4).

### Closing Poem

Yes indeed, this day beckons us to be mindful that when we gather for times of worship, and when we gather shortly at this table [*pointing at the Lord’s Table*],

we celebrate not only with those present here today but also with sisters and brothers around the world. So knowing and accepting the reality of God's love and grace for the entire world, as well as the universal community of believers gathered in all places this day, I offer this prayer and blessing in the form of a poem beautifully written by a woman named Jan L. Richardson:

To your table  
you bid us come.  
You have set the places,  
you have poured the wine,  
and there is always room,  
you say,  
for one more.

And so we come.  
From the streets  
and from the alleys  
we come.

From the deserts  
and from the hills  
we come.

From the ravages of poverty  
and from the palaces of privilege  
we come.

Running,  
limping,  
carried,  
we come.

We are bloodied with our wars,  
we are wearied with our wounds,  
we carry our dead within us,  
and we reckon with their ghosts.

We hold the seeds of healing,  
we dream of a new creation,  
we know the things  
that make for peace,  
and we struggle to give them wings.

And yet, to your table  
we come.  
Hungering for your bread,  
we come;  
thirsting for your wine,  
we come;  
singing your song in every language,  
speaking your name in every tongue,  
in conflict and in communion,  
in discord and in desire,  
we come,  
O God of Wisdom,  
we come

*[And the Table Will be Wide – © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com]*

So in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—let us come ... all of us ... let us come. Amen!