

World Wide Communion Sunday Message Oct 3, 2021

Gospel Lesson: Mark 14:22-25 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Sermon: Today's Worldwide Communion

The world has changed since that first last supper, as we call it. I mean think about how when Jesus gathered the disciples together for that meal there was no electricity, no running water. They washed their hands and feet with water poured from a pitcher into a basin. The bread they ate would have been baked over a fire. And the cup and plates would have been created by a potter, not a machine. The world has changed. So, what would Jesus do today?

Well first off, he would gather his faithful followers, both men and women. He would tell them masks are required because Jesus was a responsible dude. He cared for the welfare of all. The place they would gather would be an outside space to eat. They would wear their masks, and when they began to eat, take them off. If any of the disciples were running late, Jesus might whip out his phone and text: "*Peter where are you, you're*

always running late?" Or "*I know what you're doing Judas*" with a contemplative emoji. 🤔 He might possibly check Facebook or Instagram to see what Zacchaeus was saying about his day or comparing what Mary and Martha had to say about each other?

But then he would put that phone away, and he would probably take the disciples to a sink and one by one, wash their hands with warm soapy water, after all, they were fishermen, farmers, workers who got their hands dirty. He would enforce the 20 seconds of washing rule maybe by singing a song the CDC recommends like Gloria Gaynor's I Will Survive, or possibly the Doxology, Praise God from whom all blessings flow....

And then as they sat at the table, he would invite them to take the bread that was placed on their plates (wrapped in saran wrap) and Jesus would offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the bread, and reveal to his followers it is a symbol of his body broken for them. The disciples would eat it, with honestly the symbolism lost on them, as they had not seen Jesus body broken yet. Then Jesus would invite them to take the cup that was before them, more than likely, a plastic cup filled with grape juice that could be recycled afterwards. And he would still say **"This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for the forgiveness of sins."**

Because even though the world has changed, the impact hasn't, neither have we. We still need this gift, just as the disciples did years ago. Because this is a powerful message of God's love, God's hope for your life and mine. In these elements we remember that. When we look at the bread and are called to remember his body, we remember he was born of Mary in a stable. That grew up to walk our walk. This isn't just bread; this is a reminder of a God who lived our life. In Jesus, God knew the struggles of working to earn money to pay the bills. Being a carpenter, he knew that. In Jesus, God knew the struggles of weakness and hunger. Like when he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in order to rely more on God and less on other resources. In Jesus, God even died our death and rose again for our sake, living for you and me. The bread reminds us of that.

And in the cup, we remember all that Jesus gave and all that he did. He offered a better way to understand and know God. A God who offers us a helping hand with our fears, like when we feel we are sinking in the waters. In the cup we remember a God who multiplies good deeds through others, when we all agree to share what we have, like fish and bread. In the cup we remember we are told to forgive our brother or sister not 7 times but 70 times 7. Not because they deserve it, but because we deserve not to carry that pain around. In the cup, we remember forgiveness and new life.

Speaking of new life, as I begin the fourth month of serving as your pastor, I decided that the next sermon series would be based on my wish prayers for us at First Hershey UM Church. Wish prayers of new life.

If you attended the membership classes, or Java with Jenn, or some of the other small groups where we were introduced to each other, I shared with you that the Apostle Paul writes of wish prayers in the New Testament. You may not be familiar with that phrase, wish prayer, but they are prayers, requests made to God, of what one wishes for. You and I do that with our prayers. “I wish that sickness would go away”. “I wish a speedy recovery”. “I wish for comfort and strength”. Well Paul does that too, especially in the letters he sends to churches he helped to establish. In those letters are reports of what he has heard about the church, and words of prayer that convey what he wishes for the church. For instance, he wishes the church of Galatia to recognize that regardless of gender, ethnicity, or religious background, all are one in Christ Jesus. Paul wishes for God to provide an abundance of needs to the church of Philippi for their generosity. And regarding the church of Thessalonica, Paul writes this: **1 Thessalonians 3: 11-13 11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. 12And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.** Paul’s wish prayer is that their circle of love will widen as they continue in their pursuit of loving God and loving others, as themselves.

Now when I asked you, what your wishes were, I heard things like: **Every child in the church knows 5 adults that can mentor them. That we reach more young adults. That our mission focus increases. That the heart of the congregation softens toward Social Justice Issues. To get to know the people inside and outside of the church building again. To widen the circle of love (meaning to grow in size)**

I heard you, and the staff and your leadership and I are all working on those things. But I want to lay down a few wishes for you that I pray for us. One wish, is, for us to celebrate your past in order to build for the present and future (Homecoming Sunday held on Oct 10th). Another wish will be for us to listen to the needs of those around us. And we have special guest speakers from Someone To Tell It To, Rev. Michael Gingerich and Rev. Tom Kaden. On Oct 24th we will study the story of Ruth as I wish for Charity, Truth, and Loving Kindness. And the last will be the wish for our faith to shape our reality. And we’ll do that by looking at Charles Shultz’ The Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown. But today, as we prepare to celebrate Worldwide Communion, it seems fitting to start with my first wish prayer, that you remember the hope, the love, the forgiveness Christ gives for new life. You see, that’s what communion is for when you think about it. After the resurrection, and after the birth of the Church, the disciples would gather daily in order to experience the presence of the risen Lord and receive sustenance for their lives as disciples. Just as the disciples needed that in the days of the early church, we need that too, because it is so easy to forget, to get caught up in the world and its ways, when we need to: **Remember our God, remember our life with God through Jesus Christ, and the Spirit that brings us together in this church.** So that no matter if we take the elements here together, or online, no matter our race, our gender, our socio-economic status, no matter what elements we use to celebrate, be it wine or juice, bread or wafer, we are all in dire need to remember. **Remember the hope of this faith that inspires you. Remember the love of this faith that saves you. Remember the forgiveness God offers you, and we are to offer each other, so that with this act, we can begin anew again.** Because we are beginning something new, with each other, with this church, in this communion, today.

Let us pray: Today, God, give us eyes to recognize your reflection in the eyes of everyone here. Give us a mind to accept and celebrate our differences. Give us a heart big enough to love your children everywhere. We thank you for setting a table with space and grace, enough for us all! Amen.¹

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-prayer-for-world-communion-sunday>