

**Acts 2: 42-47 “Breaking Bread” Rev. Janet Chapman 10/6/24**

I remember as a pre-teen attending Sunday worship at my home church of Riverside Christian Church in Wichita, KS and having communion every Sunday. I remember other Protestant friends being surprised to hear we had communion every Sunday – why was that, they would ask? All I could think to say was, “I guess we’re hungry.” As I look back, maybe that wasn’t such a lame answer after all. In that church, communion was always before the sermon instead of afterwards like we do it here. So in order to get through the most boring part of worship, the sermon by Rev. Lee Baggett, I would try and keep the communion bread in my mouth without swallowing it for as long as possible. He didn’t know it but in my mind, we had this ongoing competition to see who could outlast the other – would his droning on about God knows what or the dissolving piece of bread in my mouth last longer? Only a couple times did I win but when I did, I would whisper an excited “yes” at the end of his sermon. My parents commented afterwards how pleased they were that I enjoyed the sermon – little did they know.

Celebrating weekly communion means that days like today often seem commonplace versus other traditions where communion only comes monthly or quarterly or even once a year. But I’m grateful for World Communion Sunday, if for no other reason, then we are hungry; as a society, we are hungering for connection and unity which will overcome divisiveness and animosity. We are longing for civility and an ability to not as much think alike, as to love alike. The beginning of World Communion Sunday dates back to between 1933-40, during World War II, when the spirit really caught hold, because churches were trying to hold the world together. The world was as fractured as it had ever been with the rise of Naziism and the prevalence of the Great Depression. Hope was hard to find and a common purpose was desperately needed. According to its founder, World Communion Sunday symbolized that effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. For those unfamiliar with the practice, today is the day when all Christians of every doctrine are invited to lay down their theological weapons, with which they seek to defend their own narrow portion of

the truth, and come to the Lord's Table with every other person around the world who claims Jesus as Lord and Savior, so that we might practice what Jesus meant when he said, "You must all be one." By promoting the message that we are all one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we unite to feed a hungry, hurting world.

Yet in Disciples of Christ tradition, it is not just today but every Sunday that we gather at this table in our worship. Some challenge such a practice asking "Why? Why this event and not some other events in the life of Christ?" Dr. Joey Jeter notes that Jesus was involved with many other things far more dramatic: his inspirational nativity, his temptation in the wilderness, his baptism, his magnificent sermon on the mount, his marvelous teachings, his stunning miracles, his triumphal entry, his sobering crucifixion, and his glorious resurrection. All of these pack far more punch than the simple, lowly Passover meal he shared with his disciples, a common meal like hundreds of others they had shared together. Important as these other events are, and they have their season among us, we don't rehearse them week after week like we do when we remember and re-enact that Thursday evening supper in the upper room. Little four-year-old Alisha had been going to a church with weekly communion for several months now when her aunt, who was babysitting, noticed that she had taken her lunch items and began to celebrate communion with them. She seemed to have even memorized the words of institution quite well, except when it came to the cup. The aunt heard Alisha say, "And Jesus took the cup, and he blessed it, and he gave God thanks for it, and he said, "Fill it up with Folgers and wake 'em up!" There's some truth there if you think about it.

Dr. Jeter suggests a couple other reasons why this celebration, this remembrance, has held such a focus in the worship of the church for over 2000 years. The first is that this table has become the foundation of our faith, something that was practiced early on as seen in our text for today. The things that are symbolized at this table are the primary things, the essential things that have made us who we are as a people. It represents Jesus loving us enough to make the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf, a sacrifice symbolized by the elements on this table. It represents the

tradition of our faith which is grounded in the idea of ultimate surrendering to God and sharing what we have been given to meet the needs of others. We need to remember this above all else. Henri Nouwen tells a story of a friend named Bob who died suddenly of a heart attack. Bob's wife decided to keep their two young children away from his funeral fearing it would be too hard for them to see their father put into the ground. For years after the Bob's death, the cemetery remained a fearful and dangerous place for the kids. One day, the wife invited Nouwen to visit the grave with her and she invited the children to come along. The oldest was too afraid to go, but the younger decided to come along. When they got to the place where Bob was buried, the three of them sat down on the grass around the tombstone engraved with the words, "A Kind and Gentle Man." Nouwen said, "Maybe one day we should have a picnic here. This is not only a place to think about death, but also a place to rejoice in our life. Bob's life is most honored when we find new strength, here, to live." At first, the wife admitted it was a strange idea: having a meal on top of her husband's gravesite. But Nouwen reminded her that isn't that what Jesus told his disciples to do when he asked them to break and share bread and wine in his memory? A few days later, she took her oldest child to the grave, the younger one having convinced his sister that there was nothing to fear. And they all pulled out the picnic settings and food, and told each other stories about Bob. In a time of grief and chaos, it became a celebration of love and unity. This table is a foundation of our faith: God loved; Christ surrendered and sacrificed; our foreparents believed and that strong foundation is to be regularly celebrated.

The second reason we come each week to this table is because of its symbolic gateway to holiness, to the sacred. In our society, there is precious little opportunity to experience holiness. We work, we exercise, we study, we clean, our car breaks down, we scroll through social media, we agonize over the news and there isn't much time for the holy. And so we hold on to this table for dear life, because we are invited to gather in a room with the chosen one of God and that this Chosen One is breaking the bread and offering it to us. Note here an important distinction about the Christian

faith. The approach to holiness is not aloof, high and lifted up, distant and different from us; the experience of the holy isn't reserved for some mountain top experience, but is to be found in the midst of life itself. What could be more common or everyday than sharing a meal? What is more basic than bread to eat and a cup to drink from? But Jesus takes this common event in our lives and says, "Look, this is holy." That holiness doesn't exist because of some kind of separation, but rather because of connectedness. This table reminds us every week that our lives are not hopeless, disjointed pockets of time, but that here we are connected to Christ and therefore to God. It is here that we get a foretaste of heaven, to be one with God and Christ as we seek to be one with each other.

Annie Dillard in her book, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, explains a fascinating reality from early Christian thinking. She says that in early times, one of the primary tasks of philosophers was to determine just what the universe was made of; this was before modern chemistry. Some said air or water or fire and so on. Christian philosophers joined in and made their own assertions about the stuff the world was made of. They said that there were metals, minerals, salts, and earths, but beneath it all, there was another substance. It was not on the surface, so you couldn't see it. But this basic substance at the heart of creation was in touch with the absolute; it was in touch with God. What this means is that the world was not fashioned by God and blindly cast into space to fend for itself. No, these old, primitive, unscientific Christians said that God never let go; that God was in touch with the basic stuff from the beginning to the end. The irony is that modern scientists don't disagree – there is something about the magnitude of the universe that is unexplainable, there is something deep in the earth's crust that remains mysterious, there is something unseen, measured in micrograms, within the human body outside bone, muscle, liquid and mass that leaves the body during our dying breath. All of it holy and all of it connected. So for this and many other reasons, we gather at the Lord's Table weekly which honors our foundation and connection to the holy. May the bread we break and eat this day far outlast the droning on of the message. Amen.