

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**October 7, 2018, WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY/ The 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost/The 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**

Psalm 8, Hebrews 1:1-3, 2:5-13

**SERMON SERIES: STEWARDS FOR CHRIST #1**

**THE STEWARDSHIP OF WORLD CITIZENSHIP—LOVING ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD”**

Just when you thought it was safe to come to church on World Communion Sunday, today we are at the beginning of a four week sermon series on Stewardship.

I know that usually you just brace yourself for one stewardship sermon a year, but this year I am sneaking up on you a little early, and offering you four Sundays to think about stewardship!

Now before you begin to panic and think I'm going to stand up here and ask for money for the next four sermons, catch your breath. Stewardship is not just about how we give financially to the ministry of the church. It is about so much more. It's also about how we give from all of our lives to God. God has made us caregivers, or stewards, of so many things

When you look at stewardship that way, as giving from your life to God, then four weeks is obviously only the beginning of this conversation.

But how do we do that? How do we become lifelong stewards sharing our lives with God and God's people? If this idea is confusing to you, you are not alone.

Years ago I came across this story in the *Presbyterian Outlook Magazine*:

Two young boys named Allan and George sat unattended on the front row at church. Their father was at work and their mother sang in the choir.

It was Pledge Stewardship Sunday. Cards were passed out and after they were completed, each person brought their card to the Communion table.

Six-year-old George watched the process and began to fold his picture from the Sunday School into card size. He hurriedly printed his name so he could join the procession to the table.

Allan, anxious to maintain their reputation for good behavior, whispered, "Don't do that. We're not supposed to have anything to give."

"In This Corner...by Marj, Presbyterian Outlook, Feb. 13, 1995

Now you may be asking yourself, besides my morning offering, and some of the ministries I'm involved in at the church, I'm not supposed to have anything else to give, am I?

In the next weeks we'll be looking at how we can give from our lives to God. In the next four weeks I am going to be asking you to commit yourselves to being gift-givers to God in familiar and new ways.

And yes, of course I'll be talking about our financial pledges, but I'm also going to be talking about the way we've been called to be stewards, or care-givers: care-givers who are part of one planet,

care-givers of the things we like to do and the things we are good at doing,

care-givers of creation,

and care givers of the financial resources we've been given.

"Stewardship" has gotten a dirty name for much too long. I see these next four weeks as the continuation of my campaign to challenge us to take on the full meaning of stewardship!

Another part of these next four weeks is that I am asking you to have a voice in the sermons. Each week you will find a yellow insert in the bulletin that will ask you a few questions that will help shape the sermon for the week to come.

So I thank those of you that filled out last week's questions. And this week I invite each of you, children, teens and adults to fill out the yellow page. If you are the parents or friend of one of the younger people of our church you may want to help them fill out their yellow sheet. You can put it in the offering plate, on Karols' desk after worship, or take it home and email me your answers by Tuesday morning. I look forward to having your voices join my voice as we talk about stewardship and our lives.

On this World Communion Sunday we are celebrating with Christians around the world as we come to the Communion Table. Today we celebrate that we are part of the universal Church of Jesus Christ, sharing in the one meal that joins us together.

In Jesus we are all one family.

The idea for World Communion Sunday actually started with the Presbyterians. It was started by the pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh, PA in 1933. In the first years it spread to Presbyterian churches around the country. By 1940 it was adopted by what is now the National Council of Churches, and spread to denominations around the country, and then out into the world.

This is a favorite Sunday of mine because I like the comfort and the challenge of thinking of us belonging to the international church of Jesus Christ. Each year it helps me reflect on what it means to be a world citizen, and a Christian in the world.

Have you ever looked back at how you became aware of the world around you? I don't mean the place you grew up, but the actual world.

Who was it that helped shape your understanding of yourself as part of a whole globe of people?

Who was it that challenged you to pay more attention to what was happening in the world?

What are the events in your life that helped you learn that the whole world does not live life like you do?

In preparing for World Communion Sunday today, I have been thinking about these questions.

In filling out the yellow sheets of questions last week, one person wrote that they realized they were part of a bigger world at a very young age because of all the types of communication in the world today.

Another one of you wrote: "My family was always aware of international developments and committed to improvement of local conditions. I'm not sure when I adopted the wish for equal distribution of the Earth's bounty to all communities."

World Communion Sunday asks us to stretch our imaginations and see how we are connected to the world and how we live in the world as people who follow Jesus.

As some of you reflected on what this Sunday means to you, you wrote: "I feel that I am part of a very big picture. And it is a very good feeling."

Another person wrote: "When I think about taking communion with the world on World Communion Sunday I feel exhilarated and humbled. We are sharing our faith in the Creator. Our

world-wide unity gives us power to do God's work, over-coming the world-wide powers of greed, division and hate."

In a world where our diversity often causes division, World Communion Sunday asks us to celebrate our diversity and the one-ness we find in Jesus.

I believe that part of growing up into our faith, is letting ourselves become more and more involved in the world. It doesn't take traveling on a plane to start stretching the boundaries of our world. Between television, the internet, and best of all the diversity of the Quad Cities, there is plenty of the world all around us. I believe that as Christians we are invited to explore that world.

Being a Christian means that we look at the world and our community with different eyes. We have different information when we consider people of other nations, people of other ethnic or racial backgrounds, people who are like us and people who are nothing like us, and name them as people loved by Jesus.

When we begin to see the world populated with God's children. When we name people in our lives, and people on the news, as Jesus' brothers and sisters, then our understanding of the world changes.

And our understanding of ourselves and our lives is changed too.

This World Communion Sunday is the day to celebrate God's good gift of diversity, and our stewardship and care-giving of that diversity.

This is a day to celebrate that today some Christians will gather in churches that look just like ours. Other Christians have gathered, or will gather, today in outdoor churches, in cathedrals, in house churches, in villages, in big cities, in small farm towns, in churches without buildings, and churches whose buildings take up city blocks.

In Asia, Africa, North and South America, Australia, Europe and maybe even in Antarctica Christians will hold bread and the communion cup

and in many, many languages we will hear Jesus say to each of us and to all of us:

"This is my body, broken for you, this is the cup of a new covenant sealed in my blood for the forgiveness of sin."

As we come to the communion table today, we know that around the globe our brothers and sisters are joined to us and we are joined to them in Jesus' love.

We are each part of the universal church of Jesus Christ.

We are each citizens in the world.

God has blessed us with diversity and entrusted us with the gift of our connectedness to people everywhere.

Jesus the pioneer of our faith, shows us how to live the life of faith, as he names all people his brothers and sisters.

As Jesus' sisters and brothers, let us live the life we have been shown,  
living as good stewards of our gift of belonging to all the people of the world,  
because together we are all part of God's one family,  
and together we came to the Table of the Lord.

One of my colleagues in my e-preaching group, the Rev. Timothy Haut, puts it this way in his poem "Table" that he wrote this week, for today's worship:

## Table

Around the table  
we gather,  
this big family of ours.  
Some have hurried here,  
tired from work,  
hungry and glad to be home.  
Some were carried here,  
little ones on their mother's back,  
sleeping or squawking.  
Some hold hands,  
lean in to talk and laugh,  
remembering those not here  
who linger among us still.  
We will eat together,  
pass food around,  
make peace for a while  
with those who are hard,  
surround the lonely ones  
with voices, kindness, love.  
But first we will hold hands,  
breathe deeply and feel  
a Presence larger than all of us.  
And when we are quiet enough,  
we will say  
in a hundred beautiful languages,  
"Thank you"  
to the One who gives life,  
to the One who gives joy,  
to the One who gives us  
each other.

--Timothy Haut