

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**October 6, 2019, The 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost/The 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Psalm 137:1-6, Luke 17:5-10

**VISIONS OF WORLD COMMUNION**

Back in 1984 there was a movie called *Places in the Heart*. It starred Sally Field, John Malkovich, Danny Glover, and Ed Harris. If you haven't seen it, or haven't seen it for a long time, or as is more likely, have never heard of it, I recommend it to you. Briefly, it is a story set in Texas in the 1930's, during the Depression. In a time when so many have lost their farms and their homes, Royce and Edna Spaulding still have their family farm. They are farming cotton, raising two children, and seeking to live a life of Christian faith during a time of great destitution in their town and country.

Royce is the town's sheriff and is killed in the beginning of the movie by a young African American man. In retribution the Ku Klux Klan kills the young boy, and Edna and her children face the threat of losing the cotton crop and the farm.

While the bank tries to repossess the house, and the cotton gin owner seeks to cheat her, Edna finds business partners in Moze, an itinerant African American man, and in a border, she has unwillingly taken into her home, Mr. Will.

Edna, her two children, and these two men come to be unlikely partners in their bid to get the first crop of cotton to the cotton gin, which will save the farm.

But once again the Klan gets involved, nearly killing Moze.

I won't tell you what happens with the crop so you can watch it for yourself.

The movie ends with one of the most powerful pictures of the meaning of the Lord's Supper I've ever seen. It is Sunday morning worship and Edna and her children are once again in church. Slowly the camera begins to pan the congregation as they receive communion together.

As the camera slowly moves over the faces, you see all the people of the movie, those living and those dead and those who've had to leave town.

Sitting there in worship, sharing in the body and the blood of Christ, Edna sits beside her murdered husband and on his other side is his murderer. Klansmen and their victim Moze share in the Lord's Supper, passing the bread and cup to each other.

The meal they are sharing is stronger than hatred, stronger than death, stronger than divisions.

The meal they are sharing is strong enough to join them together as one in the heart of Christ.

This scene from *Places in the Heart* gives us a picture of that day in heaven when all of us will gather at Christ's table in heaven, sharing the heavenly banquet together.

And yet we live in a world that is so far removed from that promised day at the heavenly banquet where all will be welcomed and included.

All it takes is watching the next news feed, reading the next tweet, watching what happens at our school, our office, our family, hearing the next angry words between warring people or warring nations to see that we live in a broken and fractured world.

The unity of Communion with Christ is shattered and destroyed moment by moment by all the lines of division that crisscross our homes, our neighborhoods, our nation and our world.

In the book of Romans Paul talks about longing for that day when all of creation is healed and returned to gift of unity and wholeness we saw briefly in the Garden of Eden. He writes that even creation itself is in labor pains with us, waiting for that day when God's vision will be birthed. Romans 8: 22-23.

In the book of I Peter (2:10-11) the author says we are like strangers and aliens separated from our True Home.

And the Israelites, whose voices we hear in Psalm 137, would have understood that feeling of alienation. They had been dragged into exile by the Babylonian armies who had destroyed Jerusalem and torn God's Temple stone from stone until nothing stood. The Babylonians had killed their family members and friends, destroyed their fields and crops and leveled their homes. Then they were dragged in chains over hundreds of long miles to slavery in Babylon.

As they longed for Jerusalem and home, the Babylonians taunted them to sing the songs of their lost home. As they wept beside the Rivers of Babylon, they hung their harps on the branches of the trees, all joy and music silenced. While their captors demanded songs from Jerusalem, they asked with the Psalmist, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

We too know what that feels like don't we? Feeling that we are so far from the promised kingdom of God that it is hard to sing the Lord's songs in this foreign land of our own lives, our family's lives, or our national or international life.

Sometimes we too know that feeling of longing for our True Home with God in Heaven, where everyone will be gathered together at God's banquet table, and peace and love will rule the day.

We truly are all exiles from that world God envisioned for us, a world where:

all people are equal,

where everyone has enough food to live well, a roof over their heads,  
and they live without war, or slavery, or trafficking.

We are exiles from a world where our diversity is our strength, and not our destruction,  
where all children, no matter where they live in the world, live in safety and health,

We are exiles from a world where hope and justice and peace are not dreams, but daily realities,

where living out the love of Jesus is as natural as breathing, not as routine as Sunday morning for an hour.

But unlike the Israelites weeping beside the Babylonian rivers long ago, we are not a people without hope. Each time we come to the communion table, we are reminded that the Jesus who gave us this meal long ago, is the same Jesus who lives and moves and breathes in the world around us moment by moment here and now.

And especially on World Communion Sunday,  
when we break bread and drink the cup with Christians all around the globe,  
we are reminded that the saving love of Jesus is for everyone.

We are reminded that we are connected to brothers and sisters who are so different from us,  
but who are held in the same love of Jesus.

Our family of faith is extensive beyond our imaginings, and our call to love all of our family is a daily part of our living.

As we come to this Communion Meal this morning we live in an in-between time. Jesus promised that the Kingdom of God is right here in the midst of us. We pray it Sunday by Sunday in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

And yet our broken world is such a far cry from the Kingdom of God, and sometimes it feels like we will only see God's Kingdom in heaven.

We live in an in-between time of God's Kingdom here and now,  
and God's final Kingdom to come.

And into that in-between times comes the Lord's Supper. This meal we are preparing to share is stronger than hatred, stronger than death, stronger than divisions.

The meal we are sharing is strong enough to join us together as one in the heart of Christ.

This meal is strong enough to call us to live as people of hope.

We live in this world that needs us to live faithful, hopeful lives now, working for God's kingdom here on earth, singing God's songs, even when we feel like aliens and exiles far from our True Home.

And we also hold onto the promise that comes to us, each time we break the bread and drink the cup that the final day will come, when we will all gather at the Banquet Table of our God in Heaven.

As we share in today's Communion Meal with the world, we are called to be hopeful people who believe in and work toward that day when the healing power of God will create a banquet feast in the name of Christ.

Where repentant Klansmen and their victims sit side by side,  
and the murdered and their killers break bread in Christ's name.

Where those divided from each other by power, politics, ethnicity, gender orientation, beliefs, convictions, and what will happen at the ballot box, look into each other's eyes and see their brothers and sisters there.

Fed today by the love of Christ, let us work for the kingdom of God here on earth,  
as we hope and believe in that final banquet in Heaven,  
where we may all be surprised by who is sitting beside us, and then name them our brothers  
and our sisters,  
as we eat the bread and drink the cup with Jesus.

We can live with this kind of hope because this meal we are preparing to share together with the world is stronger than hatred, stronger than death, stronger than divisions.

The meal we are sharing is strong enough to join us together as one in the heart of Christ.

This meal is strong enough to empower us to live as people of hope.

May it be so, in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen.

(cf: 10-10-03)