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## Say It With Psalms

### 2. We: Three Lessons from World Communion Sunday

Psalm 95:1-7 O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

The first country to see the dawn of the new day is New Zealand. Nineteen hours ago, the sun rose over that island land and members and friends of the Gateway Church in Hamilton began their day preparing to come together for worship where a lively band would stoke them to praise God with exuberant singing, lifted hands, and sharing Holy Communion together.<sup>1</sup>

In Seoul, South Korea, the Yoido Full Gospel Church is holding six worship services today with roughly 25,000 people in each service. As men and women leave worship after prayer and praise and sharing communion, they are greeted by elders from the church who bow as a way of thanking them for coming.

In war-weary eastern Syria, the worship service of the Syrian Orthodox cathedral in Hassake today included an ancient order of worship and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Many of the Christians living there can trace their roots back to the time of Jesus, and some of them even still speak Aramaic, the ancient language of Jesus' day.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.gatewaychurch.org.nz/gather/worship/>

In the midst of violence and war, every Sunday they draw together to the love of Jesus witness in scripture, song, and communion.

On the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya, the African Church of the Holy Spirit began their worship service today by marching through the streets of their village singing and dancing with instruments in order to invite more folks to come to church. After the sermon, an elder of the congregation stood to pray and drive out the evil spirits, and they closed by celebrating the Lord's Supper.<sup>2</sup>

A few hours from now, the church I served in Hawaii will throw open the doors to the plumeria-scented breezes and will gather and a dozen ethnicities – Japanese, native Hawaiian, Mexican, Filipino, Korean, and Caucasian – will joyfully come forward to receive the bread and dip it in a common cup and then will enjoy their own chat and coffee time with homemade poke and spam musubi and mochi and rice, always lots and lots of rice.

Literally millions of congregations around the world today are celebrating World Communion Sunday. From the tiniest house church to congregations that gather inside prison walls to grand cathedrals to homeless folks who gather under a bridge, World Communion Sunday will find folks feasting on bread and sadza and tortillas and pita and little crackers and matzoh and a hundred other varieties of bread. We saw a few of those gatherings from around the world in our opening video today.

It's a pretty amazing thing, really. But, at the same time, we who are part of the movement called the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) sometimes don't get it. That

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<sup>2</sup>These three examples adapted from  
<https://www.brickchurch.org/Customized/uploads/BrickChurch/Worship/Sermons/S12-1007.pdf>

is, we sometimes don't understand what the big deal is. After all, since the earliest days of our movement, two hundred years ago, whenever we have gathered for Sunday worship we have had communion. Frontier congregations may not have had a piano or organ, they may have had no hymnbooks, they may have had no preacher, but always, always, when they gathered on Sunday they produced a little homemade wine or juice they had carefully set aside and some sort of bread – even if it was last year's hardtack – and they followed what they understood to be the practice of the earliest Christians. But not all Christians do it this way. My church in Hawaii celebrated communion only on the first Sunday of the month. Some churches do so once a quarter; others once or twice a year. And so it *is* remarkable that so many otherwise sometimes squabbling and opinionated Christians of countless denominations can come together on this one day and receive the Lord's Supper together, from those earliest sun-tinged New Zealand shores to the final sunrise of the day over the beaches of American Samoa.

So what can we Disciples learn from World Communion Sunday, even as we find our own identity in celebrating this feast every Sunday? Three things, I believe; three lessons we can learn.

The first is this: **You don't have to eat alone.** There are several different versions of the Last Supper in the New Testament. They differ in their details. They even differ in what words Jesus spoke. But one thing they don't differ on is that this was a meal that Jesus and His disciples shared together. Whatever Jesus said on that occasion, what He *didn't* say was anything like this: "Hey you guys, let's each of us grab something at the Jerusalem McDonalds drive-through and I'll meet you at the Garden later tonight." Someone once said that there is a difference between fuel and

food. Fuel is when you hit that drive-through in the midst of a hurried day, or you slap together a sandwich to eat on the run, or you decide that a quick Starbucks frappuccino will tide you over. Fuel is when you put something in your mouth just to allow you to keep going. But **food** is when you eat together, when you slow down, when you gather around you – either physically or in precious memory – the people whom you love and who love you. Food is when you enjoy preparing something for your spouse that you know she loves. Food is when you bring a casserole to the door of a grieving home. Our fast-food, fast-paced, fast-lane culture sometimes isolates us from one another, isolates us from the fact that there are people who care about us, starting with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

One pastor tells the story on herself of how she had decided to get “creative” with her World Communion Sunday celebration and instead of the usual communion-ware she had a dozen beautiful small ceramic plates and woven baskets in which were contained the elements. The idea was that they were to be passed from one worshiper to the next, one at a time. But she didn’t quite think it through, she says. In the midst of the unfamiliarity of it, one little boy found himself holding the cup in one hand and the bread plate in the other. He had no way of tearing off a piece of bread and dipping it; he was one hand short, and he didn’t think that leaning forward and gnawing on the bread was a good idea. So, as he sat there, immobilized by the elements, his eyes got big and he finally said in a stage-whisper: “Help! Help!” “And,” she said, “within an instant helping hands arrived, hands of grace, hands of love, hands of humble servants

ready to help [him] eat and drink.”<sup>3</sup> As **you** take bread and cup today, remember all the hands – starting with the scarred and loving hands of Jesus Himself – who have held you, comforted you, encouraged you, cheered you on and helped to feed you: **You do not have to eat alone!**

But the second lesson is this: **You do not get to eat alone.** A writer and educator by the name of Frances Woodruff tells this story:

When I was a kid, my parents were always inviting people over to eat dinner with us. Sometimes they had planned for people to join us, so we had lots of food. And sometimes, they made the invitation so quickly, there was just enough food. To make sure our guests had enough to eat, my mom had two code phrases that she used at the table for us kids. If there wasn't a lot of extra food, my mom would say early in the meal, "F.H.B." [That] stood for Family Hold Back. Momma wanted us to hold back from taking a big serving until our company had had enough to eat. But if there was a good amount of food, she'd say, "P.O.T.T." [That] stood for Plenty on the Table. Then my family knew we could have as much as we wanted because there was enough food for our company and for us. Momma used these codes because she never wanted to hold back from hospitality or sharing with others. She never wanted to be stingy with our company.... this is the Lord's Table—it does not belong to us or to the church—it belongs to God. And God is calling out that there is POTT: Plenty on the Table. Our mission is to live God's openness—and wherever we are—we are to welcome

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<sup>3</sup><http://aflyonourwall.wordpress.com/2010/10/04/world-communion-Sunday>

others and be generous with God's love.<sup>4</sup>

There is so very much these days in our culture that counsels us to selfishness, there are too many voices that tell us that the reason people are hungry is that they are lazy, there are too many shrill and strident calls that want us to be fearful, to be suspicious instead of generous. But those voices are not of God and they are not what this Table is about. If we are privileged to eat, if we know where our next meal is coming from, then Jesus Himself commands us to not eat alone, to share what we have, to act as if indeed there is Plenty On The Table. Pastor Danielle Shroyer puts it this way in response to the question of why she takes communion; she says: because "I am hungry for food that reminds me God's love is so abundant it feeds the whole world. I take communion because I have been hungry for the wrong things. I have wanted to name God all by myself, to exclude others, to feast on my own apathy and be left to my own devices."<sup>5</sup> She's right, and World Communion Sunday reminds us that we do not **get** to eat alone.

Third and final lesson: **At this table, we sing!** I've told you before that one my mother's oft-repeated sayings was "In this family, we don't sing at the dinner table." But our Psalm for the morning would disagree: "O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into [God's] presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise... with songs of praise!" One of the reasons, I am convinced, that some churches celebrate communion so seldom is that they have

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<sup>4</sup><https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/about/>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Why-I-Take-Communion>

mistaken what is actually a joyful opportunity for an obligation. But it's not. It's a privilege, a glorious privilege that ought to cause us to sing and shout. Now, we Disciples aren't so much into singing and shouting, and I'm not sure what we'd do if we tried to dance the elements to the communion table the way the Puerto Rican church in Gary, Indiana, did when I would worship with them. But I hope that we are singing, nonetheless, aloud or in our hearts. For we are not alone, we don't have to let others be alone. We are part of a whole family of every race and nation, every orientation and ethnicity. And while we aren't quite where the Apostle Paul called us to be when he said that Christ has broken down the dividing walls, the hostility (Ephesians 2) that too often separates, we are called to help make it ever-more a reality – For God “has given us,” Paul says, “the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Corinthians 5). But we can't do that very well without being fed. And so this Table, shared this day by Christians around the world in a thousand forms, is the food we need to be strengthened to joyfully work for a day when no child shall know hunger, when food shall never again be used as a weapon, when every child of God will know love and care and safety and hope. Poet Andrew King says it powerfully in his poem, “The Table With No Edges”<sup>6</sup>:

We will sit down where feet tire from the journey; We will sit down where grief bends the back.

We will sit down under roofs wrecked by artillery. We will sit down where cries sound from cracked walls.

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<sup>6</sup><https://earth2earth.wordpress.com/2015/09/27/poem-for-world-wide-communion-2015/>

We will sit down where heat beats like hammers. We will sit down where flesh shivers in cold.

We will sit down where bread bakes on thin charcoal. We will sit down where there is no grain in baked fields.

We will sit down with those who dwell in ashes. We will sit down in shadow and in light.

We will sit down, making friends out of strangers. We will sit down, our cup filled with new wine.

We will sit down and let love flow like language. We will sit down where speech needs no words.

We will sit together at the table with no edges. We will sit to share one loaf, in Christ's name, in one world.

May that also be **our** song. Amen.