

Welcome

World Communion Sunday

Oct 6, 2019

Gal 3: 23-29

Num 1: 48-51

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Galatians 3:23-29

²³ Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring,^[a] heirs according to the promise.

Numbers 1:48-51

⁴⁸ The LORD had said to Moses: ⁴⁹ "You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. ⁵⁰ Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the covenant law-over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. ⁵¹ Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who approaches it is to be put to death.

Bienvenue, Willkommen, Aloha, Baruch Haba, Bienvenidos, Welcome.

Today as we celebrate in the sacrament of Communion, sharing in the bread of heaven and the cup of blessing, we consciously and attentively join with Christians around the globe as we share in World Communion Sunday.

It began last night in Samoa and New Zealand as you were going to bed and will be finished in Pago Pago and at Midway as you prepare to end your day.

Asian Christians shared the bread and the wine. Churches in China met in secret so that they would not be arrested. Christians in the Middle East met under the watchful eye of the government as they celebrated the Eucharist. In Europe Christians gathered in churches that used to be much fuller to celebrate the Lord's Supper. In Africa the sacrament was celebrated in great numbers by a growing number of Christians, many of whom bare scars of persecution as they Commune together.

We join with those celebrating today including Methodists, Catholics, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Baptists, thousands of other denominations, and even those without denominations. Some of Christ's followers meet in public and some in secret. Some meet in freedom while others gather under threat of persecution and death. Some take the sacrament today with organ music, others with simple singing, and still others in quiet so as not to be arrested. The one thing we all have in common is that we all come to the same table of Jesus Christ.

In many different languages, by ordained clergy and volunteer pastors, something like these words of institution are given:

On the night He was betrayed Jesus took bread.
And when he had given thanks and blessed it,
He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying,
“This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way after supper Jesus took the cup
and gave it to His disciples, saying,
“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Drink you all of it.”

The bread is many different types and colors and from many places. Some created primarily from wheat, others from rice or other kinds of grain. Some will have bread left over. Some with very small pieces that could barely give every Christian there a morsel. Still it represents the body of Christ broken and sustained, the body of Christ around the world today.

The juice around the world will be different. For many it will be wine, some will have juice, some will celebrate with water that had to be carried from a dirty well some miles away. Some will use individual cups, others fancy goblets, still others have been passing around whatever cup was in the home where they were meeting Still it represents the cup of blessing in their place and in their communities, just as it does in ours.*

Also gathered at each of these table are a multitude of beliefs, practices, and invitations. Some welcome all, some are exclusive by age, membership, or theology.

Yet the Civil Rights spiritual “We’re Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table” reminds us not only of the voices of slaves who first dreamed of a seat at that forbidden table, but to be welcomed for who they were and are.

Welcome. The word is rooted in the Old English word, ‘Wilcuma’, meaning “one whose coming is pleasant.

The Romance languages each have a variant of ‘bien’, meaning, “may you have fared well in coming here.”

Paul’s educational and inspirational words to the people of Galatia remain a goal for humanity today.

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female.”

Faith calls us to love as God loves, to welcome the stranger, to not be afraid as we are all created in the image of God. Yet we are humans with an innate sense of survival and self-protection, so we can be afraid of the stranger, the outsider. It is the see-saw trying to balance between human nature and survival by fight or against the religious and spiritual mandates of Jesus to “love one another as I have loved you.”

For centuries the Church itself has been exclusive rather than inclusive, despite Jesus' desire to the contrary. We can be afraid of the stranger, the outsider, *even as a part of our faith.*

Jesus offered an extravagant welcome, yet in our fear and concern, we cannot be so open, so welcoming. Welcome cannot always be what Jesus aspired us to be.

It is human nature to fear the other, to protect ourselves, our family, our community. We fear the unknown, the unfamiliar. In our self-protective mode we think of what could be a danger. And each day the news only inflames our fears.

As our faith ancestors struggled during the 40 year exodus with Moses after escaping Egyptian bondage and then living precariously in a physical and spiritual wilderness, they also struggled with who was in and who was out, who was welcome and who was not.

“The Lord said to Moses.....When the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up. And any outsider who comes near shall be put to death.” *“The Lord said to Moses.....And any outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”*

The outsider in the days of Moses and the Levites wanderings was rejected and killed for being from the wrong tribe. Who is the outsider today? Who is feared and unwelcomed?

We are a church that breaks down walls and is open to all yet who could enter this sanctuary that we would *not* want to welcome? Who would we see as an outsider? Are there personality types that would jar us? A town bully, a prostitute, a furloughed prisoner?

And who would see *us* as an outsider? Who would hesitate, or outright deny us, a place at their table?

Today we gather—in body or spirit—at the table, just as Christians around the world do. Some will be welcomed yet shun others. Some will come freely, some will come having gathered enough courage. Some will come fearing rejection, some will come seeking a fresh start. Some will come seeking forgiveness, some will come just seeking to be welcomed.

When we can someday live into Paul’s words, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female,” when we can live into Jesus’ words, “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another,” then we will become bread for a hungering world and drink for those who thirst. Amen.

Credit to Jordan Rimmer <http://www.jordanrimmer.com/world-communion-sunday-ideas-and-liturgy/>

