

One Table, Different Breads

Exodus 17: 1-7

Philippians 2: 1-13

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Exodus 17: 1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

Philippians 2: 1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Today is World Communion Sunday as we gather at the table of unity with Christians around the world, affirming our diversity and our belonging. Jesus Christ has set the table for every one of us as his body and his blood was given for each of us. However we arrive at the table, whatever bread of heaven we eat, whatever cup of blessing we drink, whatever language and culture and liturgy affirms and celebrates the given that Jesus Christ is the head of the Body, the Church, our Redeemer, the image of the invisible God, we are welcomed. We take this day and this time at the table mindful that there are yet still many and growing divisions among us,

differences in beliefs, practices, theologies, and witness that seek understanding, healing, and reconciliation, so that together our faith may increase as conflict and dispute decrease.

We can find ourselves not unlike our Israelite faith ancestors who were in a wilderness, in the desert, in between where they came from and the unknown where they were going. They knew, we know, divine promise and now wait for its fulfillment. They thirsted for water, for the very essential of life itself. They complained to Moses wondering how they could have endured all that they have, traveled as far as they have, only to see that the God who saves, who gives and sustains life, was not providing what was absolutely necessary for their survival. They pleaded with Moses, “Is the Lord among us or not?” We who have lifted prayers and justice work and ecumenical and interfaith relationships to heal wounds, address needs of poverty, hunger, racism, inequality, housing, and violence can also wonder, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

God sent Moses to strike the rock at Horeb so that life giving water would flow. In the dry wildernesses of our lives, when circumstances, or the inhumanity of others, have left us alone and wounded, Jesus offers us living water, the fountain from which we can drink deep and long, as yes, the Lord is indeed among us.

Quenching our spiritual thirst we have encouragement in Christ, and consolation from his love, to be as of one mind—the mind of Christ—to bear a wonderful witness to the entire body of Christ, humbly looking not to just our own interests, but to the interests of others, as God is at work in each of us, enabling us both to will and to work.

When we gather each month at the Communion table, one of the many things we affirm in the invitation to come to the table is, ‘come not because we must, but because we may.’ We are all invited to eat and drink together...not because we *should*, not because we feel obligated or pressured or because it is expected, but because we can, because we are invited to this sacred and ancient feast of remembrance and love and sacrifice.

As we gather for worship and prepare to come to the table on World Communion Sunday, as every tongue confesses, *in* every tongue confesses, we hold in our hearts and thoughts Christians around the world who have broken bread and shared the cup of blessing in remembrance of Jesus Christ, and those who will do so later when their worship begins. Some have little bread to share, some share sips from a cup of dirty water. Some have wine and wafers. Some have naan or rye or unleavened or corn bread or tortillas. Some celebrate with a cup of green or purple grape juice. Some arrive having fasted so that they will be hungry for Christ. Some are in grand cathedrals or country churches or homes or thatched roof huts or open fields or hidden away in secret. One table, different breads, as Christians live into Jesus’ mandate, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”ⁱ

We are mindful that many are like us—free to come to the table and the flowing bounty of bread and cup. We are also mindful that some who come to the table may not do so in the eyes of government authorities and regimes so that Christianity is illegal, risky, subject to persecution, a mental hospital admission or even death.ⁱⁱ They come because they may *not*, yet the faith and love of Jesus strengthens and inspires them. As one man was quoted, “Sincere faith under duress is most fulfilling. Thousands of miles from home, it’s easy to feel lonely, but communion is a

reminder of the constant presence of God. No matter where you are — in prison, in Africa or in Nashville, Tenn., your finest association is with Jesus Christ.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The sacrament of Communion has even been observed on the moon. Buzz Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon, said, “The very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the Communion elements.” The minister of a church near Houston gave Aldrin a kit that included a wafer, vial of wine, and small chalice. Aldrin administered Communion to himself shortly after landing.^{iv}

Wherever we gather, wherever the table is spread, whatever food and drink are the bread of heaven and the cup of blessing for us, we are spiritually, collectively, in the upper room with Jesus and the disciples at the Passover feast. We hear Jesus tell the disciples to take and eat of his body and blood given for us, to do this in remembrance of him. We proclaim Christ’s death, celebrate Christ’s resurrection and await Christ’s coming again. We join with the disciples who were transformed at that table.

Our invitation to come not because we must, but because we may, is actually the beginning of a longer invitation:

“Come to this table, not because you must but because you may,
not because you are strong, but because you are weak.

Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come,
but because you need mercy and help.

Come, because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more.

Come, because he loved you and gave himself for you.

Come and meet the risen Christ, for we are his Body.”^v

On this day that holds so much promise for Christians in each bite of bread and sip of the cup, on this day on which the vision of what can be is bold and clear, may our faith increase by our practices and ways of living the gospel’s good news out into the world in ways that has life shared in the Spirit, and having the same love as we come to the table. Amen.

ⁱ 1 Corinthians 11:26

ⁱⁱ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-where-christianity-is-illegal>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://christianchronicle.org/practices-may-vary-but-churches-around-the-world-share-in-sweet-communion/>

^{iv} <https://christianstandard.com/2011/05/wherever-the-table-is-spread/>

^v W. Barclay, *The Lord’s Supper*, SCM, 1967