

Worship for October 6, 2024
World Communion and
Peacemaking Sunday

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

To those who are hungry, Jesus says:

“Come and eat! There’s more than enough for all!”

To those who are thirsty, he says:

“Come and drink! It’s free for the taking!”

Stop wasting your money on food that doesn’t satisfy.

Come to me and you will find everything you need!”

*Hymn 2 Holy, Holy, Holy

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God,

**we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and what we have left undone.**

We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength.

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

In your mercy, forgive what we have been,

help us amend what we are,

and direct what we shall be,

that we may walk in your ways,

to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

*Hymn **Take, O Take Me As I Am**

Assurance of Forgiveness

The mercies of the Lord are from everlasting to everlasting.

They are new every morning and sure as the sunrise.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ,

our sins are forgiven. Be at peace with God and one another. Amen.

Passing the Peace *Please offer a sign of peace to those seated near you in the pews.*

First Reading Micah 6: 1-8

Time With Our Young Disciples

New Testament Reading John 21:15-17
Morning Message

The air conditioning in my car went out last summer. It was finally scheduled for repairs, meaning Ed and I made two trips in three days to the Honda dealership in South Charleston. On our way home after picking up the car, we stopped for dinner at a place we like in Teays Valley. Ed arrived first, but, he told the hostess I may have beat him because I had a head start. Could he just walk thru the restaurant to see if I might already be there?

To which the hostess replied, “Well. Do you know what she looks like?”

We got a lot of mileage out of that.

When we entered the chapel today, we probably noticed something different. The paraments have been changed to white. The Table is set for Communion, the holy meal to which Jesus calls us.

We know what it looks like.

Bread and wine. Simple. And profoundly filling. Food and drink were important to Jesus. The first of the miracle stories happened at a wedding in Galilee. He turned water into wine. Then he multiplied a little boy’s lunch of bread and fish to feed thousands of hungry people. We remember the poignant story of Jesus being the dinner guest at the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

After the resurrection, Jesus shows up on the beach to cook breakfast. This event is important if we are to be resurrection people. We have a witness to the world: Jesus rose from the dead. And in his death is the promise of ours.

Jesus never misses a teachable moment. In our scripture text, Jesus connects the act of feeding hungry people to love. If we love one another, we show it by feeding one another. Food is important to Jesus and to us and to every man, woman, and child who ever lived.

I love infants. The family joke used to be, “Don’t let Cinda hold your baby-you may not get it back!”

I love the way they smell, their soft skin, the wisps of downy hair, the way you cradle them in your arms to feed them. Early on, they begin to make eye contact with the mother or whoever is

privileged to feed them. And in those fresh, clear, innocent eyes are the sweetest, purest expressions of love and devotion.

“If you love me, feed my sheep.”

Today Christians around the globe are celebrating World Communion Sunday, a day when we are urged to embrace the Biblical vision of unity and peace. Not as a far-off dream, but as Christ’s calling to us.

World Communion Sunday is a gift of the Presbyterian Church to the larger ecumenical body of Christ. The first observance was at the Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, in 1933. The Rev. Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr was the pastor. It was from his vision that the day was set apart for the purpose of promoting peace and global witness. Years later, his son, the Rev. Dr. Donald Kerr, reflected on his father’s vision.

“The concept spread very slowly at the start. People did not give it a whole lot of thought. It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. World-wide Communion symbolized the effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

It seems to me, we are trying to hold the world together right now. Hurricane Helene wrought destruction and death upon thousands in the US last week. It will be months and maybe even years before some communities are restored to their former functionality.

Military aggression has intensified in Israel-Palestine. We are painfully aware that war anywhere could unfortunately lead to war everywhere.

There is a palpable tension in the country that we know will not be relieved on November 5. It would do us well to decide now how we will respond no matter which team prevails. Could we set aside our loyalty to the blue team or the red team and take on allegiance to a re-imagined red, white, and blue team, the one that will lead to peace, justice, security, progress for all of us?

Noted theologian, Karl Barth, is remembered for saying this about preaching: “Hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.” His point is that faith, apart from real life, is irrelevant.

There is a taught tension between the Bible’s vision for the world and the world’s news, isn’t there? Let’s consider some current news:.

NBC News reports:

Israel and Iran are on the path toward a catastrophic war.

The Bible says: “No more shall there be the sound of weeping, or the cry of distress.”

The Logan Banner reports:

Bluestone Dam keeps Hurricane Helene’s New River Waters at Bay. The 75-year-old Summers County flood control project may well have saved Charleston and other downriver communities from catastrophe.

The Prophet Isaiah says:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

The Herald Dispatch headline yesterday:

Annual Survey Shows Snapshot of Homeless Population

The average person experiencing homelessness in Huntington is a 44-year-old white male taking occupancy at a shelter.

Jesus says to his friends in Matthew’s Gospel:

When you saw me hungry, you fed me; when you found me thirsty, you gave me drink; when I had no place to stay, you invited me in; and when I was poorly clothed, you covered me; when I was sick, you tenderly cared for me; and when I was in prison, you visited me.

And in Joyce Spencer’s column, some news from this village: The Barboursville High School class of 1969 is planning a 55-year reunion. What a milestone!

The psalmist reminds us of God’s benefits:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all my inmost being, praise God’s holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies you with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

We find these competing truths all around us. What are we supposed to do? On the one hand, we can see signs of God promise of peace, but violence still exists, poverty exists, disease and death exist.

One way we can respond is to just look the other way. Don’t concern ourselves with the world’s brokenness. Ignore the Bible. It’s irrelevant today. It certainly doesn’t compel many people to

action. Judging by the inactivity in my own neighborhood on Sunday mornings, I'd say this is the prevalent attitude.

But, Christians have to do better than that.

We could take the eschatological approach and lean into the time to come when Christ returns to make all things new and establish the peaceable kingdom. God will take care of this in God's good time. No worries.

This approach reminds me of a high school friend of mine who decided not to apply for college admission because he believed the Rapture, or Christ's return, was imminent. That was in 1974. We could concentrate on our personal salvation. It is important. Jesus saves. Our eternal security is sealed. But, Jesus saves us for what purpose? What is the work or mission to which Jesus has called us?

We could set all those approaches aside and try another way- the prophetic way. "A way that lifts up God's end game vision and at the same time, opens our hearts to let Christ make a difference now."

The churchy term for this is "inaugurated eschatology." The reign of Christ the King was begun through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus over two thousand years ago. His kingdom is here, but it is not here in its fullness. We still have that to look forward to.

That's the prophetic way, the Gospel way-where God's reign can be real, even now. Where peace is not a pipedream, where God assures that none of his beloved sheep go hungry.

Is that too naïve, too idealistic? Or is there a way to embrace that vision for the world God created and loves?

Seminary Professor Fred Craddock shares this story of how the reconciliation of faith and current events came together in his classroom.

At the beginning of many seminary classes, a student leads the class in prayer or shares a brief devotion. Maybe the student brings along a guitar and invites everyone to sing a hymn or chorus. This was a part of seminary education that I loved. Every lecture, every assignment, was wrapped in the Word read and proclaimed, and sealed with prayer.

On this particular day the student leading devotions stepped up to the front of the class with her yellow legal pad. It had a lot of writing on it. Fred thought this could take a long time.

The student spoke softly, first in one foreign language, then another-one sentence repeated over fifty times in different languages. Fred said it was only when she spoke in German, Spanish and French, that he began to understand what she was saying. She ended in English with these words: “Mommy, I’m hungry.” And then she sat down.

Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.”

Jesus asks all of us here, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.”

Preacher Christine Chakoian offers these thoughts to us who are even now praying about the world’s great problems and waiting in hope for the coming kingdom:

“Cynicism is the fate of realists who clearly see the present, but see nothing of God’s vision for the way the world could really be. That vision is before us now: where wolves and lambs can feed together; where all of God’s hungry children are fed at the table of grace.”

It takes some imagination and not a little courage to live into God’s vision. But, that is the call of Christ on our lives: to feed his sheep, so that every single one of the children of earth is fed- fed with security, fed with love... and bread.

*Hymn We Gather at Your Table, Lord (insert)

*Affirmation of Faith Apostles’ Creed

*Hymn Gloria Patri

Celebrating the Sacrament of Communion With Our Global Family

Prayer After Communion

Holy One,

we have been strengthened at this table, by loaf and cup,

and will live in gratitude for the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, our Savior and friend.

And we will become bread for a hungry world.

And we will become drink for those who thirst.

And the blessed will become the blessing,

and everywhere will be the feast. Amen.

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

*Hymn Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

Merciful God, we make our offerings, small and large, with the hope and confidence that all we do, all we offer, all we say, all we think, and all we hope will take root in this world. May this be the source of new expressions of God’s love, of God’s justice, of God’s character, of God’s

mission, and of God's reign. May God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven through us, alongside us, despite us, and for us. Amen. (Adapted from *Mustard Seed*.)

*Hymn 487 Amazing Grace

*Blessing

This is a vision of the way it can be, the way it should be:

Shouts of welcome, a joyful procession,

a community celebrating Christ's transforming power in unity.

As we go out, may we hold fast to his vision of goodness,

giving ourselves to God's love,

pouring it out into the world in God's name. Amen.

*Postlude