

Worship for October 1, 2023
World Communion 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

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 mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

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

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

First Reading Isaiah 65: 17-25

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 this weekend.

When we entered the sanctuary 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. On our scripture text, Jesus connects the act of feeding people to love. If we love one another, we show it by feeding one another. Food is important to Jesus and to us.

Who remembers their high school love interest? I clearly remember one boyfriend. We had a debate one day: Which is better- to live to eat or eat to live?

He argued that I seemed to live to eat, whereas, he had taken the better, higher understanding- he ate to live.

I fired that boyfriend.

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 in the 21st century. Hurricanes, fires, tornados, drought- all wreak destruction upon us. Health concerns are top of mind and have been since the early days of the Covid pandemic. My doctor says I need four immunizations this year: flu, Covid, RSV, and pneumonia. Has anyone else been advised to make sure you get your shots?

We have other causes for anxiety. I'm sure I'm not the only person who was concerned that congress would fail to pass a funding bill in the past few days. They finally managed to do it yesterday, but not without causing many US citizens great fear and anxiety.

Many around us have experienced job insecurity, which leads to a multitude of concerns. Food insecurity exists even here in our neighborhood, which is the reason behind the community dinners on the last Saturday of every month.

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

Rev. Christine Chakoian of Los Angeles says the first time she heard the gospel preached that way wasn't at her church, but in her parents' family room. It wasn't from a pulpit, but a record player. It was Simon and Garfunkel's “7 O'Clock News/Silent Night.”

Silent Night is one of our most beloved Christmas carols, a lullaby that the Christ Child and the world he came to save, would “sleep in heavenly peace.”

But, in this particular recording, over that carol, another sound intrudes, growing louder and louder. The voice of a reporter announces that demonstrators have been forcibly evicted from the US House of Representatives. And then the grim announcement that unless there is a substantial increase in the effort in Viet Nam, the US should look forward to five more years of war.

And then the reporter signed off, “That's the 7 o'clock news. Good night.”

Christine Chakoian says she has been thinking about that Simon and Garfunkel song a lot lately, and Barth's words of preaching advice. There is a taught tension between the Bible's vision for the world and the world's news. Let's consider just a few.

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

The New York Times says: "An incalculable Loss: America has reached a grim milestone in the Coronavirus outbreak."

The Bible says: "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit."

The newspaper says: Political Battle Erupts Over Homeless Encampment on Venice Boardwalk." It also says that another family has taken ownership of their Habitat-sponsored house.

The Bible says: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox."

The newspaper says: Collateral Damage of COVID-19: Rising rates of domestic and social violence. The paper also records those Barboursville Community meals which serve a lot of folks.

We find these competing truths in our own town. 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 social ills. 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.

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?

Christine Chakoian says 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 way to say 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 goes 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.”

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

*Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed

*Hymn 581 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

*Hymn 761 Called As Partners In Christ's Service

*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