

Philippians 3:3-14  
October 2, '11  
World Communion Sunday

“COMMON UNITY”

MANY OF YOU KNOW THAT AFTER WORSHIP LAST SUNDAY, EMMA SUE & I DROVE TO INDIANAPOLIS & WENT TO THE COLTS-STEELERS FOOTBALL GAME WITH DREW & MARIE, OUR SON & DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WHO LIVE THERE.

AS STEELER FANS, OF COURSE, WE ALL WORE OUR PITTSBURGH GARB.

I WORE A REALLY OLD STEELERS SWEATSHIRT THAT HAD BELONGED TO JOE HUDASCEK – THE LATE HUSBAND OF MARY JANE, OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY.

WE ALL HAD OUR TERRIBLE TOWELS – A STAPLE OF PITTSBURGH FOOTBALL FANS.

I WAS A BIT HESITANT TO WALK INTO A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT DECKED OUT LIKE THAT, BUT DREW WAS PRETTY INSISTENT THAT IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

WE HAD A GREAT TIME, BUT WHAT REALLY MADE IT ENJOYABLE IS THAT DREW *MADE* THAT HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT FUN.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO KNOW DREW, THAT PROBABLY COMES AS NO SURPRISE.

HE TURNED OUR DIFFERENT COMPETITIVE ALLEGIANCES INTO SOMETHING THAT JUST CREATED A LOT OF LAUGHTER, BOTH WITH OTHER STEELER FANS & COLT FANS AS WELL.

I WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW HE MADE THAT HAPPEN & I CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE WAS REALLY A PRETTY SIMPLE ANSWER.

WE ALL HAD A CONNECTION – WE HAD SOMETHING IN COMMON WITH ONE ANOTHER – THAT WENT DEEPER THAN A LOYALTY TO EITHER TEAM.

IT WAS A LOVE FOR FOOTBALL.

THAT WAS THE BOTTOM LINE & THAT’S WHAT CONNECTED US & GAVE US A COMMON UNITY.

I THINK THERE’S SOMETHING INSTRUCTIVE IN THAT EXPERIENCE FOR WHAT WE EXPERIENCE WITHIN THE CHURCH.

TODAY IS WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY.

IT’S A DAY THAT, FOR MANY YEARS, WAS CALLED SOMETHING ELSE.

SOME OF YOU MAY BE OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER WHEN IT WAS “*WORLD WIDE COMMUNION SUNDAY.*”

I GUESS AT SOME POINT, SOMEONE DECIDED THE “WIDE” WAS REALLY REDUNDANT.

THERE’S REALLY NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “WORLD” & “WORLD WIDE.”

GROWING UP LUTHERAN, I REMEMBER BEING SURPRISED WHEN I FIRST EXPERIENCED THE PRESBYTERIAN VERSION OF THE LORD’S PRAYER.

NOT ONLY WAS THERE THE CHANGE FROM “TRESPASSES” TO “DEBTS,” BUT THE END OF THE PRAYER WAS DIFFERENT AS WELL.

AS LUTHERANS, WE DIDN’T CONCLUDE WITH “...*FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM & THE POWER & THE GLORY, FOREVER...*”

WE SAID "...*THE KINGDOM & THE POWER & THE GLORY, FOREVER ----- AND EVER!*"

HOW MUCH LONGER IS "FOREVER & EVER" THAN "FOREVER!"

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SPECIAL EVENT FOR ME.

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'M A SUCKER FOR UNITY & I LOVE TO THINK OF THINGS WE HAVE IN COMMON WITH ONE ANOTHER THAT FORGE A BOND OF FRIENDSHIP.

IT'S AMAZING TO ME TO THINK OF THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD WHO WILL BE SHARING THIS SAME EXPERIENCE TODAY.

WHAT'S INTERESTING, THOUGH, IS THE VARIETY OF WAYS IN WHICH IT WILL BE EXPERIENCED AND ALSO THE VARIETY OF UNDERSTANDINGS OF IT.

IN SOME PLACES IT'S CALLED "EUCHARIST" – OR THANKSGIVING.

IN OTHER PLACES, IT'S SIMPLY *COMMUNION*.

IT MAY BE KNOWN AS "*THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD,*" OR "*THE LAST SUPPER*" OR "*THE LORD'S SUPPER.*"

AS VARIED AS THE TITLES ARE FOR WHAT WE DO IN THIS EXPERIENCE ARE THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS DONE.

SOME WILL COME FORWARD TO RECEIVE THE ELEMENTS (AS WE DID IN THE EARLY SERVICE THIS MORNING).

WITH SOME – LIKE US – THE ELEMENTS WILL BE BREAD & JUICE.

WITH OTHERS – IT'S A WAFER & WINE.

STILL OTHERS MAY DO THESE THINGS AS PART OF A FULL MEAL – SEATED IN A SANCTUARY AT A TABLE – OR IN A CHURCH HALL OR A HOME OR A SCHOOL BUILDING – OR SIMPLY SITTING IN A CIRCLE IN A HUT OR IN A CLEARING IN THE MIDDLE OF A JUNGLE OR FOREST OR IN THE MIDDLE OF A PLACE OF SAND & ROCK.

IT'S NOT ONLY WHAT WE CALL IT & HOW WE DO IT THAT VARIES FROM ONE GROUP OR ONE DENOMINATION OR ONE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION – IT'S ALSO WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT IT.

SOME TODAY ON THIS WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY WILL REGARD THE BREAD & THE WINE – AFTER THE WORDS OF CONSECRATION ARE PRAYED – AS BEING FULLY & ACTUALLY THE BODY AND BLOOD OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR.

OTHERS WILL REGARD THE ENTIRE EXPERIENCE AS AN IMPORTANT "MEMORIAL" – AND SEE JESUS AS BEING SPIRITUALLY PRESENT IN A SPECIAL MANNER, BUT DENY HIS PHYSICAL PRESENCE IN THE ELEMENTS.

YES, THERE WILL BE DIFFERENCES IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS MEAL – SOME OF THEM QUITE PROFOUND.

SOME WILL THINK THAT THEIR WAY OF DOING IT IS REALLY THE ONLY PROPER WAY TO HAVE COMMUNION.

SOME TRADITIONS WILL WELCOME ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY – DURING THE PAST WEEK – "ANNOUNCED" FOR COMMUNION AND EXPRESSED THEIR DESIRE TO RECEIVE IT.

THERE ARE THOSE TRADITIONS THAT WILL INSIST THAT EACH PERSON MUST BELONG TO THE DENOMINATION OR EVEN TO THE PARTICULAR FAITH COMMUNITY IN WHICH THE MEAL IS OBSERVED.

YES, THERE WILL BE A WIDE VARIETY IN THE NAMES, LOCATIONS & UNDERSTANDINGS THAT TAKE PLACE TODAY ON WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY.

SOME OF YOU MAY RECALL THE THANKSGIVING EVE COMMUNION SERVICES THAT WE HAD WITH THE EASTSIDE MINISTERIAL FELLOWSHIP CHURCHES – 7 CHURCHES, EACH REPRESENTING A DIFFERENT DENOMINATION.

WE ALWAYS OBSERVED COMMUNION AT THAT SERVICE AND WE WOULD DO IT IN THE MANNER THAT WAS CUSTOMARY TO THE HOST CHURCH.

THAT GAVE US ALL THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE HOW OTHER CHURCHES CELEBRATED COMMUNION.

I REMEMBER THERE WAS ONE & ONLY ONE STIPULATION THAT WAS ASKED TO BE OBSERVED BY ANY OF THE CHURCHES.

A FEW OF THE MINISTERS SAID THAT SOME OF THEIR PARISHIONERS WOULD BE EXTREMELY UNCOMFORTABLE IF THE WORD “SACRAMENT” WAS USED.

I HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED MYSELF PRETTY SENSITIVE TO SUCH THINGS & SO YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW DEVASTATED I WAS WHEN I WAS OFFERING THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION AND – BY HABIT – SAID, AT THE END, - *“LET US SHARE THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION TOGETHER.”*

AS SOON AS THE WORDS HAD LEFT MY MOUTH, I KNEW WHAT I’D DONE & I FULLY EXPECTED TO SEE PEOPLE STAND UP & WALK OUT OF THE CHURCH.

THEY DIDN’T & I ALSO DIDN’T NOTICE ANYONE WHO DIDN’T TAKE COMMUNION BECAUSE OF THE UTTERANCE OF THAT WORD “SACRAMENT.”

IN OUR EVALUATION MEETING A WEEK OR SO LATER, I APOLOGIZED TO THE OTHER PASTORS & ASKED IF THEY’D HAD ANY FALLOUT FROM MY FAILURE TO ABIDE BY THEIR ONE & ONLY REQUEST.

NONE OF THEM HAD AND, IN FACT, UNTIL I TOLD THEM WHAT I’D DONE, THEY HADN’T EVEN KNOWN IT!

I WONDER IF SOMETIMES WE *THINK* THINGS ARE A BIGGER DEAL THAN THEY REALLY ARE!

THAT DOESN’T CHANGE THE FACT, THOUGH, THAT SOME THINGS REALLY *ARE* A BIG DEAL – AND *SHOULD* BE.

BUT, GIVEN ALL OF OUR DIFFERENCES, EVEN WITH SOMETHING LIKE COMMUNION - THE ONE THING THAT SHOULD UNITE US AS CHRISTIANS – WHERE IS OUR COMMON UNITY?

TEX SAMPLE IS A PROFESSOR OF CHURCH & SOCIETY IN MINNEAPOLIS.

IN A BOOK HE’S WRITTEN, HE CITES AN OBSERVATION MADE BY A COLLEAGUE THAT GOES LIKE THIS:

*“WHAT IS COMMON IN COMMUNITY IS NOT SHARED VALUES OR COMMON UNDERSTANDING SO MUCH AS THE FACT THAT MEMBERS OF A COMMUNITY ARE ENGAGED IN THE SAME ARGUMENT...IN WHICH ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES, MISUNDERSTANDINGS, CONFLICTING GOALS AND VALUES ARE THRASHED OUT.”*

THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MINUTE.

WHAT HELPS TO DEFINE US A COMMUNITY – WHAT GIVES US OUR “COMMON UNITY” – BOTH THE COMMUNITY HERE AT EASTMINSTER & THE COMMUNITY THAT WE SHARE WITH OUR FELLOW BELIEVERS AROUND THE WORLD – IS THE FACT THAT WE ARE ALL ENGAGED IN THE SAME ARGUMENT – THAT WE ALL VIEW OURSELVES AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST AND ARE ENGAGED IN WORKING OUT THE BEST WAY, THE RIGHT WAY – FOR SOME – THE *ONLY* WAY, TO ORDER OUR LIVES AS HIS PEOPLE IN RESPONSE TO HIS CALL.

PART OF WHAT MAKES US A WORLD WIDE COMMUNION IS NOT THAT WE AGREE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN EVERYTHING, BUT THAT WE BELIEVE THAT THE DISCUSSION WE HAVE – EVEN THE DISAGREEMENTS WE HAVE – ARE OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE.

C.S. LEWIS WRITES ABOUT THIS WHEN HE’S TRYING TO HELP US UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TRUE FRIEND OF ANOTHER PERSON.

HE SAYS, “*DO YOU CARE ABOUT THE SAME TRUTH? THE ONE WHO AGREES WITH US THAT SOME QUESTION, LITTLE REGARDED BY OTHERS, IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE CAN BE OUR FRIEND.*”

AND THEN HE SAYS, AND LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THIS:

“*THE PERSON NEED NOT AGREE WITH US ABOUT THE ANSWER.*”

GO BACK AGAIN TO THAT FOOTBALL GAME WE ATTENDED LAST WEEK.

WHAT ENABLED US TO BE FRIENDS WITH THOSE WHO WERE FOES WAS SIMPLY A COMMON LOVE FOR FOOTBALL.

NOW, IF THAT CAN BE TRUE IN SOMETHING AS INSIGNIFICANT AS A SILLY GAME OF FOOTBALL, CAN’T IT BE TRUE TO AN INFINITELY GREATER DEGREE IN SOMETHING THAT MATTERS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN LIFE?

OUR COMMON UNITY – THAT WHICH BRINGS US TOGETHER ACROSS THE MILES AND ACROSS THE AGES – IS OUR COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
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