

"Holy Communion = Holy Community"

Pastor Hubert Den Draak, Oct. 4, 1025: World Communion Sunday
We read Mark 10:2-16



Today's a pretty special day, if you think about it. All over the world, right now, from time zone to time zone, hundreds of thousands of Christians celebrate what Christ has done for us - and still does, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because that is what our faith is about: Christ, that very special teacher who was so closely in tune with the divine, so filled with God's Spirit, that people realized, he's like God's own son. You want to know what God is like? Look to Jesus. You want to know what we can be like? Look to Jesus.

And the way we celebrate what Jesus is all about, is through that very simple meal he had just hours before he was executed as a common criminal. Not a three-course meal, but just the basic food stuffs - bread and wine. Wine was not special in those days; it was the only way to preserve grape juice and prevent it from going bad. And it was much safer to drink than grubby well water most people had.

That simple meal became something very symbolic, pointing to God's kingdom of true peace, right relations, and abundance for all, right here on earth as it is in heaven. So celebrating and remembering Jesus is all about communi-on, communi-ty, about being together, no matter how different or unworthy we think we are.

This Sunday, despite any differences there may be within this congregation - within our denomination the United Church - and between all other denominations all over the world, this day focusses on what we have in common: Jesus the Christ, who want us to be together to be like parts of the same body.

That is what Jesus is talking about in Mark's gospel when the Pharisees ask him that trick question about divorce. In his answer, Jesus makes it clear that God's intention is not separation, but the joining together.

The purpose of marriage is to bring two people together so they can thrive, and become even better than they would be on their own. Of course this is not meant in a legalistic way, that married people have to stay together no-matter-what. If a marriage has become dysfunctional because of, say, abuse or domestic violence, when people get harmed in a marriage - then it has lost its purpose and should be dissolved. We live in a broken world, as Jesus knew all too well.

God's universal intention is not to exclude others, but to draw them in, as Jesus draws in the little children who were being kept out. Because in the second part of that same story that Mark seamlessly connect to the first part, Jesus gets ticked off when his disciples try to prevent a group of children from coming to him.

You need to know that children in those days were a pain in the neck, a liability and just another mouth to feed, until their early teens when they'd be able to contribute to the household. But until then, children were not valued like they are now. And what does Jesus do? Instead of getting rid of these little nothings, he blesses them!

As we celebrate World Communion Sunday we remember the "nothings" around the world; the "least of these", all those pain-in-the-necks and people who make us feel depressed or uncomfortable: the refugees, the poor and hungry, the weak and powerless: they are all called by Christ as essential members of God's "holy communion", the last ones who shall be first in God's community, God's kingdom.

A day like today is a good opportunity to think a bit more about who this Jesus was. Jesus the Mystery, Son of God, the Promised One, Saviour, Redeemer - yet also the Jesus who was human being like us. A man who struggled to be faithful to God; a man who was called to love his neighbours as himself.

A man who was tempted like we are tempted. A man who suffered like us. Who was born from a woman, like all of us. Who laughed with us, who cried with us, stubbed his toe like us, loved a good meal like us.

I remember one of my Sunday Schools teachers telling us something like that, many years ago; and I remember one smart Alec in our class piping up, asking, did Jesus also go to the bathroom like we do? Now for a 10-year old, that is a very good question! There was this loaded silence, all eyes were fixed on our Sunday School teacher. What was he going to say? The verdict was, "No, he did not." Apparently that's where our teacher drew the line: yes, Jesus was fully human, but he never used a bathroom. Which of course for us kids made Jesus not human, but super-human!

I'm sharing this with you to show how challenging it can be for us to see Jesus in human terms. For some reason it's easier for us to see him as divine: distant, on a pedestal, out of reach. But to also see him as fully human, someone vulnerable, someone who could be ticked off by his own disciples, someone who could be fed up with hypocrites... well, maybe that's a little too close for comfort; that side of Jesus can make us feel uncomfortable or awkward. And yet, it's there: Jesus fully divine - and fully human. The one cannot exist without the other.

So often we talk about how we need to believe in this Christ; but what we celebrate today reminds us of a different fact. It reminds us that even when we don't believe in Christ, Christ still believes in *us*. Even when we mess things up; *especially* when we mess things up.

Most of you are probably familiar with the famous Irish-made Waterford Crystal. It is just gorgeous to look at, it's so delicate, so pristine. The only problem is, it's extremely fragile. You easily knock off a piece and damage it; and when you do, it loses its value, right? You can't just glue it back together again.

Sometimes we have the idea that we human beings are like fragile crystal. God creates us as lovely, valuable beings - until we make a mistake, and we all make mistakes. And when we do, we lose our value; we are no longer the way God meant us to be. We are damaged goods, no longer worthy of God's grace.



Christ tells us the exact opposite. By blessing those pesky children and by inviting the poor, the weak, the hungry, the powerless - *and us* to his table, he tells us we are loved just the way we are, no matter the mess we made of our lives. No matter how damaged or broken we may be.

So instead of comparing ourselves to fragile crystal, I can think of something much better. Remember Silly Putty? I think we're much more like *that!* Like Silly Putty, our lives can sometimes feel like they get pulled apart, or flung against the wall, or squashed flat. We all know that feeling, right?

But like Silly Putty, we can always be scraped back together again, forgiven, reworked, remoulded, and reshaped into something that is even better than before!

And just like Silly Putty, you can add several clumps of it together to make a bigger, more colourful ball - in that same way our lives can be added together in we call... community. Only in community we can grow into something bigger and more colourful than we ever thought possible by ourselves. Only in community we can experience Christ in all his fullness, human and divine.

God believes in us. God sees our potential. God loves us, and God, in Christ, has come, and still comes today, to forgive us, to scrape us back together again, and mould us into something even better than that which we were before.

It is this coming unto us that we celebrate today, and it is the fact that we can be what God wants us to be, that we give thanks for. God has made us into a faith family - a pretty big family that stretches around the world - a family that is called to love as we are being loved, to forgive as we are being forgiven, to give as we have been given too.

As we share today in our basic "family meal", let us give thanks to God that we are not alone, that we have both each other and the Spirit of Christ amongst us; the Spirit of Christ who was, who is, and who shall ever be one with us, and who truly loves us, day by day by day.

Amen.