

One Bread, One Body *1 Corinthians 11:17-34 & John 6:35-40*

The World Communion Sunday

Today is World Communion Sunday, a day when Christians across the globe gather at the table, remembering Christ's love. While denominations may have various theological views on Communion and different ways of celebrating it, we are united in this sacred act by the love of Christ.

For example, in the Catholic Church, wine is used during Communion, while in the United Methodist Church, we use grape juice. Why is that? In the 1800s, alcoholism was a major social issue. To combat this, the Temperance Movement, led by churches, promoted complete abstinence from alcohol, which led to the use of grape juice instead of wine in Communion. But there was a problem—grape juice, if left alone, naturally ferments into wine. That's when Dr. Thomas B. Welch, a communion steward at a Methodist church in New Jersey, developed a method to pasteurize grape juice, and thus, Welch's grape juice was born. Since the pandemic, we've been using pre-packaged Communion kits for safety. Before that, we practiced intinction—where I would hand you the bread, and an assistant would hold the cup for dipping. In Baptist churches, because they believe in the priesthood of all believers, the bread is passed among the congregation. Isn't it interesting how different traditions approach the same sacred moment?

Despite these differences, World Communion Sunday reminds us that we all come to the same table, united by Christ's sacrifice. Communion brings people together without erasing our differences. It celebrates our unity in Christ while honoring the beauty of our diversity.

Communion in Remembrance of Christ's Love and Sacrifice

Despite our differences, the love of Christ that unites us in Communion is greater than anything that divides us. Christ's love and sacrifice overcome our differences, making us one in the body of Christ. At the same time, Communion invites us to rise above the things that seek to divide us—whether it's status, race, politics, or even sexual orientation. In today's reading from 1 Corinthians, we hear about a community struggling with division, even during the Lord's Supper. In the early Church, Communion was part of a shared meal. Believers would gather in the evening, share food, and at some point, celebrate Communion. But in Corinth, there were both wealthy and poor, slaves and free people. The wealthier Christians had the luxury of time and could bring plenty of food and wine, while the poorer, often slaves, arrived late after work, bringing nothing. Some ate too much and got drunk, while others went home hungry. What should have been a time of unity and love became a reminder of their divisions.

Paul addresses this sharply, saying: "You bring your divisions to worship. Instead of eating the Lord's Supper, you bring in food and make pigs of yourselves. Some are left out, and go home hungry. Others get drunk. Don't you have homes to eat in? Why humiliate those who have nothing?" (1 Corinthians 11:21-22, paraphrased).

Even after experiencing Christ's grace, we still struggle with division. But the great love of Christ, who gave His body for us, calls us to move past those divisions. When we surrender our hearts to His love, we can find unity despite our differences.

Unity is not an abstract concept; it is very practical. Unity means being connected to one another. It means sharing both joy and pain together. Think about your own body—if you bite

one of your fingers, does it matter which one? It hurts the same because all your fingers are part of the same body. In the same way, when we are one in Christ, we carry each other's pain and burdens, as well as our joys, as our own.

Communion and Unity

As we observe World Communion Sunday today, we not only remember the sacrifice and love of Jesus Christ, but we also lift up our prayers for Christians around the world, especially those who are suffering.

During a recent Christian Unity and Interreligious Relations meeting, Dr. Mitri Raheb spoke about the struggles of Palestinian Christians. Palestine, with deep Christian roots dating back to the time of Jesus, is now a place of great suffering. Since last year, 5% of Christians in Gaza have been killed, and 30% are devastated by war. Churches, once places of refuge, were bombarded and destroyed. Often, the cries of our brothers and sisters are unheard because they are Palestinians.

We must remember the body of Christ that suffers from violence and war. It is our responsibility as Christians to stand with them, to pray for peace between Palestine and Israel. Consider the war between Ukraine and Russia. In Ukraine, 85% of the population is Eastern Orthodox Christian, and in Russia, 74% are Christians. This means that Christians are taking the lives of fellow Christians. This is the tragedy—when we place something else above the love and grace of the Lord, we lose the ability to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. The self-giving love that Christ showed on the cross is what saves us.

The Call to Live Out Communion

Communion is a time to remember and confess that we are saved by the grace of the Lord. It is a moment to declare that Christ is our Savior, to accept Him into our lives, and to commit to living according to His will.

We live in a world deeply divided politically and socially. Too often, political loyalties take precedence over our loyalty to Christ. Allegiance to the state is placed above obedience to Christ's teachings. As a result, rather than loving and standing in solidarity with one another, we are divided along party lines, national identities, or ideologies.

But when we give ourselves for others, as Christ did, when we offer our lives as the bread of life, this world can be transformed. After we share in Communion, we pray:

**Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Grant that we may go into the world
in the strength of your Spirit,
to give ourselves for others,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

My beloved Asbury family, on this World Communion Sunday, as we gather at the table, we remember that it is Christ who unites and sustains us. This bond is stronger than any political or social divide and invites all people into communion. As one body in Christ, let us give ourselves for others and for our Lord. Amen.