

One Bread, One Body **1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:12-26**

A Diversity in Celebrating Communion

Do you know how to say ‘hello’ in Korean? No?... oh... since you have had a Korean pastor for more than two years now, I think you should learn some Korean as I have learned English. I even have a slang teacher at Asbury! “Hello” in Korean is “Annyeong.” Good. It seems like we have many Koreans sitting in our Asbury pews! Annyeong means ‘hello.’ Hello, hallo, bojour, aloa, ciao, annyeong, knnichiwa, ni-hao... while they all sound different from one another, the meaning is the same. It is “Hello.” All languages have a word of greeting.

Each language also has a word for God. What is God in English? It is God. In Korean, Hannaim, Shen in Chinese, Gott in German, Theos in Greek, and Dios in Spanish, Dieu in French, Kami in Japanese, Mulungu in Swahili. Do you know what Arabic Christians call God? Allah. Allah does not mean God in Islam. Allah is the Arabic word for God. Christians around the world call God by different names but we all worship the same God.

Of course, the way Christians around the world celebrate communion is also diverse. What do we use for our communion? Bread and grape juice, but in some places in the world, these elements are not readily available. [ppt] Some churches in Africa use kool-aid and rice cakes for communion because grapes and flour for bread do not grow in their region. [ppt] Some churches in the middle east use sweetened Turkish coffee in place of wine. “Stuffing and wrapping food is a common theme in Middle Eastern cooking.”¹ This way of cooking was inspired by belief in God as a hidden treasure so the tasty part is concealed and we need to look for God. While we use a plain loaf of bread, churches in Egypt make sweet pastry with a nut or piece of fruit tucked inside which they use in place of bread. Sounds good. Right? Maybe after the pandemic, we could try to do communion in a sweeter way. There are various representations of bread and wine for the body and blood of Christ around the world. However, these diverse ways of doing communion have the same meaning. We are one in Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to all the world.

Today is World Communion Sunday. World Communion Sunday is a day when Christian churches around the world have agreed to celebrate Communion as a sign of our oneness in Jesus Christ. Of course, not all Christian churches participate, but many do. World Communion Sunday is a powerful reminder of our unity in Christ despite of our theological and cultural differences in churches around the world.

Christ Walks ahead of us

Unfortunately, we do not often experience our oneness in Christ through communion. One of the reasons why apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians was division within the Corinthian church and also the abuse of the Lord’s supper. While Jesus Christ reconciles people with God, Christians at Corinth were divided by factions. Also, during Lord’s supper, the rich became drunk because they drank too much wine while the poor went home hungry because they didn’t have something to eat. The Lord’s Supper, which symbolizes unity and love, had become a time of division. The Corinthian church didn’t experience unity in Christ through communion. They were divided and we are not very different from the Corinthian church today

¹https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/globalministries/pages/9682/attachments/original/1441215848/breadmideas_t.pdf?1441215848

We all know, the United Methodist Church is divided on the issue of human sexuality. Some Christians in America refuse to get vaccinated while many Christians on other continents are unable to access vaccines even if they want them. Churches are divided in terms of political positions, economic status, ethnicity, race and many other causes. Celebrating communion on the same day doesn't seem to heal divisions within our churches or the world. So, should we keep doing communion?

The United Methodist understanding of communion is as a means of grace. In other words, we remember and experience God's grace through communion and this grace continues to remold us to be more Christ-like disciples and empowers us to love others.

As you know, I like hiking. My father was also a hiker and my love for mountains may come from my father. When I went hiking with my father, we didn't follow trails but just went up and down the mountain finding wild herbs. This kind of hiking takes more energy than walking on a hiking trail. In early spring, there would be knee-deep snow in the shadow of the mountain and we often had to go through it. My father walked ahead of me and I followed complaining. But as I think about those moments now, I realize that I was able to walk much easier than my father because my father had already walked through the snow and made a way for me.

Jesus Christ has already walked ahead of us. The Holy Communion we celebrate reminds us of the way of love Jesus Christ has already walked for us. We, as his disciples follow his way of self-giving love. Communion is the meal that sustains us and empowers us to keep walking on this way of salvation. What we are doing when we celebrate communion is a double thing. We received the body and blood of Christ so that we may be for the world, the body of Christ redeemed by his blood. First, we become one with Christ and we give ourselves as the body of Christ for others. In communion, we experience Christ's self-giving love and we love others with that love we experience. Communion is a work of piety, but it's meaning cannot be understood apart from works of mercy and love.

Self-giving love, a holy fire that turn wheat to the bread

We need to partake of Holy Communion and at the same time offer ourselves to other as life-giving bread. How many of you like to bake? I know Asbury is famous for its Christmas bread and many of you are good bakers! During the pandemic, Juhee found two spiritual practices. One was gardening and the other was baking. Juhee is a good cook but she was not a good baker because she did not like to follow a recipe, but after a few failures, Juhee was able to bake bread that is edible. I didn't realize that baking took so much time. Mixing, rising, kneading, second rising, baking and cooling. I personally enjoy kneading because I can play with the dough.

While making the dough takes more time than the actual baking in an oven, we don't call dough bread. No matter how much energy and time you pour into kneading and rising, dough is dough and not bread. I am pretty sure that no one likes to eat raw dough. What is necessary to turn dough into bread is fire. [ppt] Kahlil Gibran, a poet, describes love as the sacred fire that turns wheat into bread for God's sacred feast.

[ppt] Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself [love]

He [love] threshes you to make you naked.

He sifts you to free you from your husks.

He grinds you to whiteness.

He kneads you until you are pliant;
And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God's
sacred feast. (On Love, Kahlil Gibran - 1883-1931)

We are all different but we gather in this place. Without love for Christ and one another, we are just flour dough, not life-giving bread. Through the Spirit of Christ, through the sacred fire of agape, we become sacred bread given to others. Christ's love for us and our love in action for others make us life-giving bread that nourishes our own lives and the lives of others.

I can say that Asbury UMC tries to be this life-giving bread. Last Sunday, Asbury UMC had an informational meeting about our "Food for Soul Project." Because we have tasted the life-giving bread of communion and through this body of Christ, many of us also love to share this love with our neighbors in need. We cannot do it alone, so we work with the New England conference and Lakewood Baptist Church. I think we are mixing, rising, and kneading the bread of life together and the Spirit of Christ is making us the sacred bread for God's heavenly banquet in which everyone is welcomed. Some people will get nourishment for their bodies through our hands of service. Some people may taste God's love for them, as we give of ourselves for others. All these are God's grace for us and we can foretaste the joy of God's feast through communion.

My friends, as we celebrate communion with other bodies of Christ around the world today, remember its meaning and enjoy the love of Christ given to us, let us be the body of Christ given to others. Amen.