

World Communion Sunday, October 3rd, 2010

Introduction: World Communion Sunday is an opportunity for the wider Christian Church to move beyond historical and theological differences and worship together in active hope of genuine unity in Christ. It is a Sunday where we try to lower the walls that separate our communion tables of one denomination from those of another.

The Scriptures set out in the lectionary for October 3rd remind us of the struggle for justice in our world. Specifically, the readings invite us to think deeply about how God's people ought to respond to wrongdoing. You are invited to come to the Lord's table on this day as a sign of your confidence in Christ's peacemaking, rejoicing that in his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has torn down the dividing wall of hostility, reconciling us in his own body (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Lectionary Texts this Sunday:

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; Psalm: 37:1-9; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

Sermon Ideas

- The prophet Habakkuk laments that you can't count on the courts to bring about justice. In his day – and we might argue in ours – the legal system was painfully frustrating as cases got bogged down and drawn out to the point where it no longer was about truth-finding and right-making. It is exciting to note the trust expressed by Habakkuk who dares to tell God how he really feels, even at the risk of implying that God isn't doing a very good job standing up for the few righteous people left in Judah. The prophet sets us an example to follow as he prays out his frustration and then takes up a position in the watchtower. Deep down he knows God has heard his prayer and will prove faithful to address the wrongs committed.
- The Psalmist also recognizes the anger, injustice, and the failure to address it that this generates. But he invites us to let it go, and leave it with God who can be trusted to redeem and restore. We should not only wait and watch for the Lord, but that we also should be found faithfully going about the ways of God, doing good. Tell about the long-suffering approach David took with Saul who was trying to kill him (1 Samuel 24, 26), and how it did much to shame and convict his adversary, while also winning David much support from the people.

One might also tell the story of Abigail (1 Samuel 25) who helped David turn aside from exacting justice upon her husband for Nabal's extreme rudeness. Offer some present day examples of people who returned good for evil, and who waited on God to direct the outcome.

- Paul's letter to Timothy calls us to be people of grace, mercy, and peace, imitating Christ who courageously spoke truth to lies, but did so from a position of vulnerability that the world thought was weak. Unashamed of our powerlessness, we find our confidence in God's power displayed through absolute trust even from a prison cell.
- Lastly, in the gospel reading we hear from Jesus. His disciples appear stunned at the Master's instruction to forgive someone his/her sins even as many as seven times in one day. "Increase our faith!" they respond, making it clear how unattainable this response to injustice feels. But the Lord replies that it's not as impossible as you think. The barriers injustice creates can be uprooted and tossed into the sea by calling on God. It's not about the quantity of faith you have, or according to how much you think you deserve God's help. In this case, attitude is everything – full, complete, yielding. There is a cost in giving up our right to exact a pound of flesh from those who sin against us. Like the disciples, we struggle with letting go, and find it unappealing to absorb or suffer the debt of another's sin(s). Jesus invites us to look at it from a different perspective, directing us to remember the relationship we have with God, and to trust it. We are to go about our work, accepting that our first priority is to serve God and not defend ourselves. As the parable states, we will get our chance to eat (we will get justice). What stories could you tell from within your community where someone chose to let go of the right to sue, in order to bear witness to God's Lordship through weakness?

Children's Story: See the Lectionary children's story on Luke 17:5-10 at www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/23/6796, and The Lectionary Story Bible Cycle C, by Ralph Milton, Woodlake Publishing, 2009, p 205, for a story on 2 Timothy 1:1-14.

Call to Worship:

Leader: Trust in the Lord and do good, and he will help you.

People: But wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight.

Leader: Be still in the presence of the Lord; wait patiently for him to act.

People: I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guardpost. There I will wait to see how the Lord will answer my complaint.

Leader: Don't worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong.

**All: Show us Lord, how to increase our faith!
May justice and mercy shine forth like the
noonday sun.**

Invocation:

Dear God, we have come to praise and thank you for what you have done in our lives. Through your Son Jesus you have made us one with you, bestowing mercy, granting us second chances and power from above to live in right ways. You are just, and promise help for the oppressed. You sustain all who wait on your Word.

In gratitude for all that we have received, we pray that you would renew our sense of oneness with all followers of Jesus. Where there are rifts and barriers, we pray for grace and understanding. Send your Holy Spirit among us and bring the light of your Word to instruct, heal, and inspire.

Bless the worship we bring today, and by the presence of your holiness and power in this place, shape who we are, deepening our love across the many tables of communion in the Church worldwide. Let it be truly said of our fellowship and love for one another that we are indeed Jesus' disciples.

To your honour, glory, and praise! AMEN!

Confession and Assurance:

Dear God, we humbly confess that misunderstandings and wrongdoings, matched with an unwillingness to forgive, and anger-driven attempts at justice, have mired us down, weakened our health, and dimmed our witness to your grace and power.

We are more conformed to the world than we like to admit, often looking first to lawyers and courts to settle our disputes. We tarnish your name and diminish the Gospel's reputation of achieving justice through humility and weakness.

Forgive our timidity and embarrassment about the way of the

cross. Help us believe again that its power is shown through love; that reconciliation is still achieved through long-suffering. (pause)

Lord, we thank you for your faithfulness and open arms of mercy, and for the wide scope of your justice. Purify us from all unrighteousness.

Remind us again of the spiritual gifts you have given us – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Help us open ourselves to your holy breath that blow upon their embers and rekindles their fire within us. Help their light shine through us as a witness to Christ's way to lasting peace and reconciliation.

In Jesus' name, we pray. AMEN.

Litany for Communion:

Leader: Dear God, You invite us to come and eat at this table that has been prepared for us – food and drink; reminders of nourishment and the blessing of fellowship.

People: You bid us come, but our feet are heavy, our spirits hesitant. Who all will be there? Some who've criticized us? Others we've passed judgment on?

Voice 1: How awkward, even unnerving, to celebrate unity within the diversity of Christian faith when it seems so superficial.

Voice 2: How do you, Lord, see past our inflated senses of superiority, and the doubts we have in each other's integrity and beliefs?

Voice 1: How is it you ask us in when our arms are full of grudges and complaints?

Leader: Jesus said: "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to." (Luke 13:24)

Voice 2: You want us to let it all go – to leave behind all our "right" answers and the "right" we have to sue those who have sinned against us. That's asking a lot.

People: Lord, with the faith that we have, as little as it may be, toss our deeply rooted prejudices and fellowship-killing stereotypes aside, that we may come into your banquet through the narrow door, and be at peace with all whom you have drawn in.

Leader: Bless this bread and drink, and let it inspire us to imitate Jesus' choice to lay down everything, even his life, to hold your love and welcome out to all.

All: May this communion be ours to enact with all followers of Christ in the worldwide Church. Fill us, Lord, with your Spirit, and with your joy. Make us one body, one light, one united witness. To the glory of your Name we ask it. AMEN.

Communion: Reflect unity and diversity in this celebration of World Communion Sunday by serving a loaf of bread made up of many clusters. Some bakeries even make a cluster using a variety of bread types (e.g. egg, pumpernickel, white, whole-wheat).



Alternately, consider using a loaf where the dough is braided, symbolizing the weaving together of many expressions of discipleship that are all made one in Christ.

Benediction: Colossians 3:16-18

Songs:

Communion

- HWB 452 Ubi caritas et amor
- HWB 459 I come with joy to meet my Lord
- HWB 461 In the quiet consecration
- HWB 465 Here, O my Lord, I see thee

- HWB 475 Become to us the living bread
- STS 34 You are holy
- STS 60 Come to me, come to me
- STS 77 Here is the bread
- STS 123 Let us talents and tongues employ

Unity/Praising

- 334 Christ is the world's true light
- 322 For we are strangers no more
- 454 Seed, scattered and sown
- 15 O Prince of peace
- 311 The Church's one foundation
- 306 In Christ there is no East or West

Sending

- STS 119 We believe, as one by one

This worship resource, edited by Elsie Rempel, was prepared for Mennonite Church Canada by Don Penner, Pastor of Wanner Mennonite Church, Cambridge Ontario.

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