

# Worldview Communion

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John 6:1-14

## Introduction

Today is the day that the Presbyterian Church began a tradition back in the 1930's at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA. It is called World(wide) Communion Sunday.

The premise is simple. All churches, whatever their tradition regarding the practice of the Lord's Supper, Communion, or the Eucharist (Thanksgiving) are to celebrate communion on this day. It is something that most North American Protestant churches do every year, joining the rest of the world that practices the Lord's supper weekly.

The irony for those of us who are enamored of this tradition is that while we can all celebrate Communion on the same day, the sacrament itself is a cause for much division and separation within the worldwide Christian church. Unlike Baptism, which is almost universally recognized across churches, most Christians don't share communion across the major sectarian lines. Roman Catholics do not recognize the sacrament as practiced by most other churches. The Orthodox have their own separate ways as well. Some conservative Christian traditions would not think that I could be the celebrant here today because I'm a woman, and women cannot be pastors or priests in their traditions. Other complications arise. In some traditions, everyone, including children, are welcome while in others, only confirmed adults of that tradition or church may participate. Some use only grape juice, others only wine. A bru-ha-ha erupted a while back when a Roman Catholic authority decreed that rice-based products could not be used for folks who cannot digest wheat gluten, the opposite of what Faith Presbyterian does here.

The ugly truth about communion is that it is the one thing we don't do when we are together. When broad ecumenical groups gather, they have tried to invent a new ritual that will bring everyone together. These attempts usually backfire amid recriminations. It's a mess!

Communion, indeed. The fact of the matter is that we in the Christian communion practice a kind of religious apartheid, each of us getting things our own way, smug in our assurance to ourselves that we know what is best for the community and the world. If only other people could see the light of *our way*, we think, *all would be well*.

The truth is when we repeat the words of Jesus, "This is my body, broken for you" we

can get a whole new picture of the kind of brokenness that exists today with the body of Christ.

Here in the US, it feels like things are breaking down. The pandemic continues. Our normal ways of operating are disrupted, and our ways of mediating differences politically are not being led by those who have the power to do so. Tensions are at a high, with protests continuing, and it's hard to see how this ends anytime soon.

## **John 6**

This kind of brokenness seems to have been apparent to the early Christians as well, if we are to read the story from Luke's gospel as applying to the community he was writing to.

Jesus was out preaching to the masses, providing an alternative view of how the world could be more life-giving, especially to those without power or wealth. A crowd followed him and he and his disciples had a hungry, anxious crowd.

The disciples wonder: how can there be enough for all?

The disciples are more like us than we realize. They are willing to do what is reasonable and even exceptional to follow Jesus, but now Jesus begins to ask impossible tasks and they don't know how to do them. As a matter of fact, they know they can't do them. They worried about forgiving the unforgivable, we wonder whether it's possible to even conceive of a Worldwide communion.

When they come to this brick wall, they want him to wave some magic wand. They want him to give them some superhuman powers to do what they know in their hearts cannot be done. They want some blueprint – some clear manual – that offers seven steps for being a disciple in community.

The process of this business of becoming a disciple is involved in a spiritual transformation, one that they think is impossible to have, because it would require a change in their worldview. The process of transforming is one that doesn't have the easy steps, it isn't a linear kind of process that allows for folks to take the rational steps toward gradually transforming, it's more about what direction one faces than how fast one can move. Jesus reminds them that someone as small as a mustard seed has the power to change massive things.

In the version of the feeding of the five thousand that appears in the gospel of John, we have a young person, a boy, who ends up being the most faithful disciple because he

starts with what he has, rather than rail against what is missing. The young, unsophisticated boy offers what he has, and that becomes the beginning of a miracle.

The disciples then become aware of this boy's offer, one which invites them to walk more deeply into the mystery. It was a change of direction and a change of their point of view.

### **A New Worldview**

This gets me to thinking more about our communion woes. Maybe instead of calling it Worldwide Communion service, we ought to rename it *Worldview* Communion. It would be our reminder that the point is not simply *who* gathers at the table, but *what we see*. Maybe we'd get the picture of what we're really aiming for in the long haul. A *Worldview* Communion in the deepest sense would require us to change how we view each other. Instead of walking in with points of view that have judgment attached, we'd allow each other the space to share the deepest parts of who we are, and allow ourselves the space to be different, created by God, and in need of communion with each other and the Divine.

We'd also try to look at the world from the point of view of God, instead of ourselves. If we look to Jesus' model of radical inclusiveness, we see that all the distinctions about who does what for communion are really ways to prevent some that we'd prefer not to have to deal with from being at the same table. Even enemies are present at the table.

A worldview communion means we'll find ways to keep connected even when we disagree with each other, that we will seek peaceful ways to mediate our differences instead of violence.

Taking communion with a worldview like Christ's means that we see each person as a beloved creation of God, each person is a sibling in our family, and all worthy of respect. Our church constitution reminds us of this when it says:

*The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church's membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction.*

As we gather today around this table, we come as humble servants and followers, with the willingness to have our worldview changed by the power of God's spirit.

Come, let our worlds be transformed! Amen.