

**SLD10.04.15 World Communion**  
**Emory Presbyterian Church**  
**Ephesians 4: 4-6**  
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<sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

When I was a girl growing up in Buckhead – which, back then, centered around about Girl Scouts and Sears - the only place to go for snail shells was a gourmet grocery store on Peachtree called Cloudts. Anybody remember Cloudts? It was the only place to go, on the north side of town, anyway, to find Swiss chard or Danish marzipan or capers or endive for your dinner party.

Boy, not anymore! Nowadays you can find all that stuff and much other international fare at any grocery store you shop. Why, just the other day I found fresh turmeric root at my Kroger, right next to ginger. Imagine finding fresh turmeric root at your local A&P or Winn Dixie 40 years ago.

When it comes to diversity of food, we've come a long way here in the ole' U.S. of A., at least in most urban centers. I mean, who here doesn't have their favorite Thai or Indian or Korean restaurant? Who doesn't know the best part of town to go to for Chinese food? Hint – it ain't intown. Who today doesn't enjoy taboule or dolmathes or baklava as a matter of course?

Indeed, when it comes to the culinary arts, who wouldn't agree that variety really is the spice of life? It's fun to dabble in various cultures through their foods. And most fun of all is to do it with a native of the culture, right? One who really know their way

around the menu. One who knows what's been dumbed down or diluted for tourists and what's authentic to the culture? What it should *really* taste like.

Well, on the liturgical calendar, the first Sunday in October is when we celebrate the multicultural nature of God through World Communion. That is, in the midst of the grand diversity of countries and cultures of this world, there is, as today's text teaches, only one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Creator of all, who is above all and through all and in all. Despite humanity's many faiths and denominations and spiritual paths, on World Communion we witness to the basic truth that 'there is no God but God,' with whom, through Christ, we and all our brothers and sisters around the world are one.

For the twenty four hours of World Communion, Christians all over the world are sharing the body of Christ in a witness to the boundary-less love of God. Christians in China and Madagascar and Nubia and Finland and Iowa are all taking communion at some point during this day, in acknowledgement of the One God and Father of All, so that, as Paul put it in Ephesians 2, we are no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. For Christ came and proclaimed peace to you who are near, you who are far off, so that all of us have access in one Spirit to our Creator.

The first Sunday in October is designated as World Communion Sunday, which celebrates our oneness in Christ with all our brothers and sisters around the world. Paul tells us that we are to "discern the body" when we partake of Holy Communion, mindful that we remember our relationship to all our brothers and sisters in Christ in the celebration.

In this light, the practice of World Communion is not only a liturgical event but an eschatological one. What I mean by that is that Christians gathering around Christ's table all over the world at the same time is meant to be a glimpse of the end time, of the Kingdom, of where we seekers are heading, or at least, where Jesus was heading as he walked God's vision on earth. World Communion imagines and enacts a global love feast to remind us less of how *we* are than how *God* is, the God of all nations, a native speaker of all faiths, the Holiest of Hosts who flat knows the way around *everybody's* divine menu.

Revelation 21 speaks of when the 'glory and honor of all the nations' will be brought into the Holy City of God (vv24-26) In this place of perfect worship and the immediate experience of God's presence, the culturally particular gifts of all nations find a natural home.<sup>1</sup>

What World Communion Sunday is *not* meant to be, however, but can easily become, is a kind of 'liturgical ethnotourism' in which we merely tolerate songs of other traditions but with a certain patronizing attitude, regarding them, by virtue of their 'oddness' or 'otherness,' as inescapably peripheral to our own central 'norms.'

We actually do this a lot in the Western church, though our intentions are good, when we dedicate a special Sunday to, say, the 'youth,' or to the celebration of women's gifts, or even, dare I say it? to Martin Luther King. I'm not saying we shouldn't have these special Sundays so long as we remember as we celebrate them that a worship service dedicated to 'ain't women great' or 'how 'bout that Dr. King' no more fulfills

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<sup>1</sup> Gather Into One, Praying and Singing Globally, C. Michael Hawn, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2003. p. X of the Preface.

Paul's teaching that in Christ there is no male or female, than singing 'What a Friend We Have In Jesus' in Korean satisfies John's eschatological vision of the Kingdom's multicultural love fest.

Still, often it's the best we can do, these special Sundays that help us stretch ourselves a little beyond the familiar in order to celebrate the larger body of Christ. The main thing is to remember that we do not celebrate them in order to *fulfill* the gospel vision of the Kingdom but merely to *remind* us yet again of what it is comprised – the boundary-less compassion, presence, and participation of God. We mustn't confuse our puny efforts at multiculturalism with what second Peter calls our profound 'ability (actually) to share in the divine nature itself (2 Peter 1:4), to enter and enjoy 'that unified field underlying and supporting all creation.' (Rohr)

You see, what we're aiming for is not singular Sundays set aside for each and every 'special interest group' but rather a singular *state of being* in which we might, even for a moment, genuinely *experience* and *practice* our place in the global body of Christ. *This* is our intention - to reach beyond our own certitudes and comfort zones to embrace a God who embraces the whole wide world – an intention I believe God blesses no matter how imperfectly executed. As long as pulsing behind our initiatives like assembling meal bags for CHOA or building Madhouser Huts or celebrating Thanksgiving with Muslims or blessing our pets or rotating through the nursery, or singing an Hispanic anthem, as long as behind, beneath, and throughout all that pulses a genuine desire to open our hearts and break down barriers and learn to love the way Jesus does, God blesses our efforts.

That we're not all that good at it begs a bit of humility, but, hey, what about following Jesus doesn't? The point is, let's just don't confuse our limited attempts to stretch our liturgical imaginations with anything more than pointing at the moon.

The moon is Christ. Unity in Christ.

Dedicating a Sunday to global awareness and incorporating music and prayers from other countries are "are just tugboats to get us away from the shore and out into the right sea."<sup>2</sup>

The 'right sea' is God. The Oneness of God.

Clumsily wrapping our tongues around different sounds, our minds around different cultures, our hearts around different traditions, these are just 'oars to get us working and engaged with the Mystery. "

The Mystery is the Kingdom. The Kin-dom. The Connectedness in Christ of all Creation.

Remarks Ronald Rolheiser, "One of the marks of being a church is catholicity. And what does it mean to be a catholic? It is not the opposite of being protestant. Jesus gave the best definition of catholicity, says Rolheiser, "when he said in the gospel of John: "in my father's house there are many mansions." This is not an architectural conundrum but a revelation of the breadth of God's heart. God has a catholic heart – in that catholic means universal, wide, all-encompassing. The opposite of a catholic is a fundamentalist, a person whose heart has only one room."<sup>3</sup>

How many rooms does your heart have? How many rooms do we have here at EPC, where we say there's "room for everybody?"

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward*

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, Image, New York, 2014, p. 130.

However many we have now, World Communion tries to add a few more. Because on World Communion Sunday we're invited intentionally to drop *all* our denominational and doctrinal distinctions and turn together with all Christians of the world to be warmed by the embrace of God's Son, who shines equally on all those who seek God. What World Communion teaches us is that, in the embrace of God's Son, there is no male or female, no slave or free, no black or white, no Asian or Alaskan, no liberal or conservative, no democrat or republican, or libertarian, no traditional or contemporary, nor any other divide that separates us from the love of God.<sup>4</sup>

Which, for those of us who cling determinedly to our personal, political, philosophical and religious distinctions, can be a tough one.

John Shea once suggested that the heavenly banquet table is open to everyone who is ready to sit down with everyone else. Though you might not always know it these days, the task of church is to stand toe to toe, shoulder to shoulder, and heart to heart with people absolutely different from ourselves – yet who, with us, share one faith, one Lord, one baptism, and one God who is Father and Mother of all.”<sup>5</sup>

Author “Carol Shields ends her recent novel, Larry's Party , with a scene depicting a dinner party. Larry, the bungling hero of her story, invites a motley group of persons to join him for a Saturday night dinner. The guests include his two ex-wives, his present girlfriend, and an array of disparate individuals, each of whom is well equipped to illustrate all the virtues and sins in the world. The party goes like all dinner parties. There is banter, debate, jokes, and arguments about politics, religion, and life.

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<sup>4</sup> Rolheiser, p. 131.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

As the evening progresses, writes Shields, “old wounds raise their ugly heads and new wounds are created. People are reminded in subtle ways of their past stupidities and infidelities, even as these are being washed clean by the celebration taking place. Food and wine get passed around and, underneath it all, despite everything that has been wrong, and is still wrong, there is a deep joy present. A wee messianic banquet is taking place, above, beneath, and throughout which, redemption is happening.<sup>6</sup>

Well, that’s us, folks, the whole motley, multicultural crew of us, equipped to illustrate all the virtues and sins in the world, invited, despite our infinite stupidities, and infidelities, never mind distinctions of language, appearance and tradition, to belly up to God’s great big global love feast.

You know, diversity’s everywhere you look these days – shops, restaurants, schools, neighborhoods. But the *only* place to go to experience God’s all-in-one-ness, along with everybody who’s willing to sit down with everybody else, is this table, above, beneath, and throughout which redemption is happening.

To the glory of God. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 140.