



Let us pray:

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, re-form it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it

is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. *Amen. [BCP 816]*

Why do you take communion? This question was posed on a blog that considers the readings for the week and the blog's followers are largely, but not exclusively, pastors ruminating on what to preach.

It is a question that all of us should consider on this, World Communion Sunday. Some of us have the opportunity to take communion each Sunday as a regular and important part of our liturgy and faith tradition. In other churches, communion is once a quarter, once a month, only at Christmas or at Easter.

Some of us use bread and wine, others small wafers and grape juice. One of the questions in other cultures that do not have bread as a staple have struggled with is the question of whether using rice cakes or what is common in a particular culture is compliant with Scripture. Take this bread. Drink this wine.

We are clearly not all the same. And even within The Episcopal Church we are not all the same. That is a good thing.

We learn from each other when our hearts and minds can be open to see the value in others and the value in asking ourselves: Why do you take communion? What does it mean to you? How does this help us be the body of Christ?

Taking communion can be a way for us to be reminded that God, through Jesus, is incarnate and present in our world, then and now and yet to be. Jesus used what was common table fare in his time to remind us that we do not need to be wealthy, we do not need high social status- we simply need to be willing to be at table with each other and to share the fruits of the earth- in our particular culture, to be fed and empowered to go into the world to love and serve the Lord.

Taking communion- whether for you the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus, or whether for you they are symbolic or they are a memorial meal- is up to

each one of us to decide. It may also be that some Sundays the bread and wine are, in fact, for you the actual body and blood of Jesus while on some other Sundays they are more symbolic or memorial.

Jesus, as the Christ, meets us where we are. Jesus, as the Christ, meets us how we are- whether dressed in our best or dressed more casually. Whether we are actively listening and participating or perhaps a bit distracted. Jesus, as the Christ, is here in ways too numerous to mention but each important.

World Communion Sunday is the day picked by the organizing groups of churches as the day we would offer up a “unity event” to celebrate diversity and to remind ourselves and our community that bullying, of whatever kind or form, is not ok. If you are able, I encourage you to stop by Milligan Park this afternoon at 4p to share in the community-wide service. There will be music and games as well as ice cream. Pride will perform and there is also another event that the organizers hope you will find meaningful as we are reminded that we are one in Christ.

Our baptismal font has etched along its sides: One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism. A reminder on this World Communion Sunday that even as we are different, we are – or perhaps, we should be- one in Christ.

Unity does not mean uniformity. We are not all alike. We do not each have the same gifts and talents, thanks be to God! To live a full life we need diversity. We need people who approach problems and issues differently. We need people who have different passions for different ministries. Each of us will grow and thrive if and when we can learn to be with someone who thinks differently from us if we also remember to treat each other with respect and dignity. Celebrate what’s right with the world.

Because we are different, because we live in community, we need some structure and ground rules. Our reading from Exodus retells the struggles of the people as they wandered in the desert between the time of leaving Egypt and before the time of entering the Promised Land. Conflicts and struggles galore. A people who at the time of the exodus had been city dwellers who have now become desert nomads. A people who were slaves under Pharaoh who are now are to create, through and with God’s help, what it means to be God’s chosen people. As we have read in the last several weeks, they grumble and complain and accuse Moses of leading them out into the wilderness in order to kill them. They yearn after the “good ole days” back in the land of Egypt, forgetting that they were slaves who lived or died at the whim of Pharaoh. Perhaps the “good ole days” weren’t really all that good, but they were known and the people now face the unknown. And so they quarrel and become divided and Moses is afraid of being stoned to death because what had been unity has become division and the pitting of one against another.

Unity does not require uniformity. Unity does mean that we agree to certain norms so that we can celebrate our diversity even as we pledge to uphold the dignity of every human being and all of creation.

As the psalmist reminds us: "The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent. The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart." Thus, the Commandments given by God through Moses to the people of Israel and thus to us, give us a way to be in community and to thrive even though we are different.

The Gospel gives us a parable of what can happen when we are greedy or we go astray of social norms. It tells us what happens when we fall astray from the Commandments and become focused solely on ourselves. "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom." Note that the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable and when they realized Jesus was talking about them, they wanted to arrest Jesus but feared to do so because the crowds regarded Jesus as a prophet.

It does not say that the chief priests and Pharisees repented of their positions. Rather, they sought to do evil by arresting Jesus because Jesus asked them to look at the world through a new lens. The chief priests and Pharisees wanted uniformity rather than unity. Their hearts and minds were closed to the new world that God was offering them.

Celebrating World Communion Sunday does not mean that we will only have communion once a month or once a quarter or that those who do will change to become like us when we offer communion every Sunday. What our celebration can mean is that we see the value in every human being and all of creation. What it can mean is that rather than feeling hurt or bitter because the way things used to be is no more, we can open our eyes and our hearts to the possibility that God is doing a new thing in new ways here at St. John's. None of us will always get our way. All of us will be hurt at some time because something we wanted is not approved. God calls us to dream about what can be when we work together, when we learn together, when we are open to the Holy Spirit who lives and moves and is in each of us, a beloved child of God.

There is an old adage: God never shuts a door without leaving an open window. Today, at the community "One in Christ" event, God has left open a window for us to share the love of Christ with others who may have been bullied or belittled or otherwise feel of no account through the actions or inactions of others. Go, if you can, and share the love and peace of God which passes all understanding. Go and help all present know that they are loved by God and loved by us, whether they share communion every week or not at all.

The bread and the wine, the rice cakes and sake, the pizza and beer, when offered to each other in the name of Jesus, the Christ, can show the world that we celebrate what's right with

the world even as we also celebrate diversity that enriches our world if we open our eyes and our hearts to God's presence in all of creation.

From Genesis 1:31: "God saw everything that he had made and indeed, it was very good." God created diversity. We should not shy away from it or be afraid of it but rather embrace it as being able to teach us the myriad ways in which God loves us and calls us to be in communion with each other, now and forever, **Amen.**