

World Communion Sunday

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This is one of the church's High Holy Days, World Communion Sunday, the first Sunday of October. We remember and celebrate that our sisters and brothers in Jesus all around the globe are also coming to the One Table today.

We all come to receive sustenance
for our individual journeys of discipleship.....
but more importantly, for our united witness to the love and
justice of Jesus.....
here and there and there and everywhere.....now and forever.....
as together we get on board with the Spirit
in bringing in the kingdom of God on earth.

I love World Communion Sunday—the amazing decorations, the multiplicity of breads, the music, the clothing, the pageantry, the celebration of our diverse membership, the receiving of the Peacemaking Offering.

Today we also continue our fall financial stewardship emphasis, led by our Gifts and Gratitude Committee, and we welcome new members to the team known as Oak Grove Presbyterian Church. Wow! (I'm going to attempt to weave together all three of these themes in an 8-minute sermon.)

We continue our journey through the new Oak Grove vision/mission statement. Top of the bulletin: Read it with me and then we will continue to memorize it together: "Oak Grove is a joyful, inclusive, compassionate community of faith seeking to do justice, act mercifully and walk humbly

with God.” Today we look at “do justice,” perfect for World Communion Sunday.

And for stewardship. And for new members joining.

The last half of our statement is taken from the prophet Micah, who declares that God is not interested in having people sacrifice rams on the altar. What does God want from God’s people, in the way of worship? God wants us to do justice, to act mercifully and to walk humbly with our God. (Micah 6:8)

To do justice. Let’s use as our starting point the story familiar to many of us from Sunday School and from dozens of sermons, the story known as the Good Samaritan, from Luke, chapter 10. Jesus tells the tale of a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, who was attacked by robbers. They beat him, stripped him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Along came a priest who does not help, but crossed the road to avoid him. So, too, another religious leader, does the same thing. Then along came a Samaritan. The Samaritans and Jews have hundreds of years of history of deepest animosity, yet this Samaritan man stopped to help. He poured oil and wine on the man’s wounds, bandaged him, put him on his own animal and took him to an inn. The next day as he departed, he left money with the innkeeper to care for the man. (Luke 10:30-35)

A beautiful act of compassion, of mercy.

Can we look at this story through the lens of justice? I acknowledge that this wasn’t the point of Jesus’ story, but if we bring into this story the concept of justice, what would it look like? The first thing that comes to mind for many of us, would be to bring those robbers *to justice*, throw ‘em in the slammer, right? That’s justice, in the legal sense.

But let’s move further upstream in this story. *Why* are these robbers in the mugging business in the first place? Probably because they are

desperate. Maybe they have children at home who are literally starving. Maybe they have themselves only known violence all of their lives.

Can we look at prevention, rather than retribution? How about we give them alternatives to crime? Can we forge economic opportunity and job training for the robbers? If we create a just society for all, we eliminate the muggers. Bringing it forward to the present, since it costs more to house a prison inmate each year than to send a person to college for a year, we would save a lot of money as well as heartache and violence, if we can create a world of justice, in the heavenly sense. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven.”

Doing justice means creating a world of opportunity and sufficiency for all. Instead of *bandaging* wounds, we *prevent* wounds from happening in the first place.

There is a powerful quote by Scott Pippert that I have shared any number of times: “Doing justice is a way to love people we will never meet.” We can do justice through our actions, our work, our volunteering, our political action, working for Move To Amend, working for justice-minded political candidates...

And we can do justice through our money.

Author Bruce Larson once said, “Money is another pair of hands to heal and feed and bless the desperate families of the earth. In other words, money is my other self. Money can go where I do not have time to go, where I do not have a passport to go. My money can go in my place and heal and bless and feed and help.”

In the musical “Hello, Dolly,” Dolly Levi observes that “Money is like manure; it's not worth a thing unless it's spread around encouraging young things to grow.”

Today we welcome new members. In the Inquirers' Class we give each participant a folder full of all kinds of stuff which explains what we are about as a congregation: our core theology, opportunities for mission and fellowship, how we govern ourselves. The folder also comes with a pledge card. As I tell every group of inquiring folks in the new member class, membership doesn't get you much. It comes with only a few privileges. Membership is more about *responsibility*. To paraphrase John Kennedy, "Ask not what your church can do for you, ask what you can do for your church." Joining a church is reporting for duty.

So you get a pledge card.

My friend Lenny Snellman is not a wealthy man, by US standards, but he is financially comfortable. His pastor invites him to give a stewardship talk every year at this time. And Lenny is glad to do it. In that talk Lenny says, "I used to daydream about winning the lottery. What wonderful things would I do with that money? Then I went on a mission trip to Tanzania and I realized that I had already won the lottery." Lenny now gives away about a quarter of his income each year.

There is a saying of Jesus that my parents used to quote to us kids frequently, "To whom much is given, from that one much will be required." God expects us to use our gifts of talent, time and treasure, in service of others.

And sharing our gifts of talent, time and treasure is not a hard, grudging drudgery duty sort of thing. It is a joyful experience, when done in the right spirit. As Paul put it, God loves a cheerful giver, literally "God loves 'hilarious' givers." When we bring our completed pledge cards to the Table in three weeks let us do so with joyful hearts.

We come this day to the Table as recipients of God's amazing love made known through Jesus. May we be sharers of that love, and "do justice" with joy. Amen!