

Mark 14:22-25- The Meaning of Communion
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A few years back when I was deep into my time in Seminary, I had to take a class related to worship styles. As a part of that class, I had to attend a few different services outside of my faith tradition. Since I live about four doors down from the biggest Catholic Church in my hometown, I decided that I would attend a service there. My then seven year old daughter attended with me.

Prior to going to that service, I explained to my daughter that going to different churches was sort of like going to different friend's homes. They may have different ways that they do things and different wasn't right or wrong, it was just different and just like when we visited other folks homes, when we visited other churches, their rules were what we followed.

All of this made great sense to my daughter and she happily walked with me down to the church. Now mind you, I had not been inside a Catholic Church for about two decades and had not had the most joyous separation from the faith tradition of my childhood. But in the interests of ecumenical learning and in pursuit of my three credits, off we went.

My daughter was really engaged with the different approach to worship that she encountered in that service. She had been going to a UCC church from about the age of three so knew no other worship experience than what she saw each week in her home UCC church. All was really interesting and engaging until we got to service of Communion. When folks began to go forward to participate in Communion, my daughter leaped up and grabbed my hand and yelled quite loudly, 'let's go!'

I however remained seated and tugged her back into her seat. I told her that she and I wouldn't be participating in Communion because the church we were in had different rules about Communion. 'Rules!' my daughter loudly exclaimed! What rules! As I attempted to get her back into her seat, reminding her that this was just like going to someone else's house and we were going to follow their rules, my daughter kept pulling my hand to get up and go for Communion.

And I kept reminding her that we had to follow the rules of that church and in that church neither she nor I could go up for Communion. My daughter finally sat down with much force and exclaimed for all in the church to hear... 'don't they know that that is God's table and all are welcome!' We left soon afterwards....

My daughter had been raised within the United Church of Christ and though I had never really considered what messages she was hearing about the service of Communion; she had clearly

been listening! She knew that she was welcome at the Communion table and that table belonged to God, where all were welcome.

Within the UCC we only practice two sacraments, Holy Communion and Baptism. Out of all of the Sacraments that existed prior to the Reformation, those two remained. They were kept by our reforming Protestant ancestors because they both are so deeply embedded in the scriptures. They are both rituals that the Gospels clearly show were a part of Jesus' ministry and story.

And Communion in particular is a celebration of one of the most critical foundations of Jesus' ministry. The meals that he celebrated during his ministry represented all of who he was and what he taught. At his table were folks who didn't think like him, didn't pray like him, or didn't look like him. At his table were folks who were welcome at no other table. His table fellowship was expansive and demonstrated radical welcome and inclusion and there was always enough, even if there were 'thousands'. That is what we find in the Gospels in story after story.

And I have to imagine that those meals with Jesus were joyous affairs. They were the sort of meal where you knew your host was so glad that you were there. Where you were seen and you knew that your story mattered. Where you showed up without having to put on pretenses or false images, you could show up in your most authentic self and were welcomed. That's what I imagine those meals were like with Jesus.

The meal that we celebrate each month and that we will celebrate in a few moments is a reenactment of all of those meals and his last meal with his closest friends. At that table were people who would betray him, who would deny him, who had struggled against all of his teachings and preaching's. None of the Jewish disciples who received the bread and wine from Jesus on that night had been baptized or confirmed, none professed a creed. And yet he welcomed them, washed their feet, and broke bread and shared wine with them.

And he blessed them. He invited those broken disciples to that table and he asked them to remember all of those meals that they had shared together. He asked them to remember who was at the table and what that meant. He asked them to do that all in remembrance of him.

And that holy meal was the first Christian practice that the earliest followers of Jesus instituted. Accounts of that meal exist in our earliest Christian writings, Paul's letters. That text from the Letter to the Corinthians is all about how Paul is not happy with how the Corinth community is instituting that holy meal. He's upset that the Corinth community is serving two meals, one for the rich folks with tons of food and then a paltry simple meal for the poorer folks later on. Paul's head literally blows up when he finds this out because that is the opposite of what he taught them, that is the opposite of the Gospel message, that is the opposite of expansive, radical

hospitality and the welcome that the holy meal of Communion was intended to be. Imagine hearing that letter in ALL CAPS!

That letter to the Corinth community is coming within twenty years of Jesus' death. Within twenty years of Jesus' death, we see issues around exclusion and separation at the holy table cropping up and those issues continue to this day. There are a whole lot of Christian churches where I am not allowed to receive Communion because I am married to a woman. There are a whole lot of other folks who are excluded from the table in a variety of churches for a whole range of reasons.

Within the UCC and here at Magnolia UCC, we hold sacred that this is in fact God's table and all are welcome. The radical nature of the inclusivity of that message is both beautiful and powerful. It means that there are no professions of faith or creeds to be recited, doubters and believers of all variety are welcome. It means that we are welcome at this table if we believe the bread and juice are the body and blood of Christ. It means we are welcome if we see the bread and juice as a symbolic representation of Jesus' message and ministry. It means we are welcome if we see the bread and juice as an invitation to community and care.

It also means that regardless of how we show up, we are welcome at this table. We are welcome in our brokenness, in our grief, in our joy, in our uncertainty, in our confusion and in our light and in our darkness. We don't have to be a certain way to be a part of this table. All are welcome, all are met the simple elements of bread and juice and the message of life and hope.

My young daughter knew a simple truth when she was faced with a gate separating her from the Communion Table. She knew that the essential meaning of that table was that there should be no gates and no barriers because it has never been our table, it has been and always will be God's table. A table where we are seen, known, welcomed, in our most authentic sense, in our most authentic way and in our most authentic self. A table where we are nourished in order to go into the world and welcome and see others with the same radical hospitality that Jesus showed all he encountered and all he welcomed to his table.

May we all know the simplicity of that message. May we all know the radical welcome and hospitality of this table and may we all offer that radical welcome and hospitality to all we welcome to our own tables.

May it be so, may it be so, may it be so!

Amen