

Sermon: Communion Values
Scripture: Luke 22:7-23
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: October 6, 2019

We will be having our Confirmation Class tonight and joining the 15 youth in the class will be 15 members of the church who have agreed to be their mentors. Tonight's lesson will be focused on the values that we are taught in our lives and expected to carry along with us and for the teenagers it's about discerning what are the values that they want to maintain and what are some that may be baggage and worth at least questioning. The confirmation program is called Confirm not Conform – and ideally as the class goes over the year they'll evaluate the values that our Christian religion and the church encourages and what of that will inform their lives.

As a church we have many acts of sacred ritual that connect us to God and to one another and that in their design through the use of sacred objects and sacred space and sacred time, promote certain values that we as Christians have passed across the ages and believe are essential to living a whole life. These are at times, and maybe more than we care to admit, at odds with the values that our culture, our society, promotes. So I want to take a moment and lift up some of the core values that are being imbued in our children, our families, our adult lives by this simple yet profound act that we call The Lord's Supper or Communion. For in this simple act of eating from this table together volumes are being spoken about the kind of people we seek to be and what we understand to be at the heart of the mystery of existence.

So first, this sacred act of communion promotes the value uniting and unifying, suggesting that whatever divides us, whatever separates us one from another and places us at odds with one another, must ultimately be transcended if we hope to achieve God's purposes for our lives. Our differences are beautiful and good, of skin color and culture and language and gender identity and sexual orientation and religion and perspective, all of it is the way God made us as beautifully unique and wonderfully specific and yet in our world of sin too often our differences divide and separate us and set us at odds with one another, they literally can tear us apart.

But we know that is not fundamentally the way it's meant to be. We know at some deep level that we are meant to in the end be united as children of the One God. That is the movement of this sacred act of communion, an act of coming together at this table in unity to eat and drink of the One Presence. Regardless of our differences that separate us, at least the hundred of us can share in this moment, at this Lord's table and as we do this together in this time and place it becomes a prayer and an enactment of the unity of all people that will come, we believe, in time... or even if only at the fulfillment of all time.

Secondly, this sacred act of Communion is also fundamentally about the value of forgiveness in our lives... which is sometimes the precursor necessary for the reunification. "Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died and was buried" – his broken body and spilt blood is represented at this table. Even before it happened, he was preparing for it not by lining up his forces to protect him nor drawing up sides to retaliate but he gathered at the table and told his disciples that this meal

was what they were to continue doing after he had died and that they should do it in the spirit of forgiveness.

And when Jesus returned from the dead, he did not retaliate, he did not make his betrayers and crucifiers, some of whom were his closest friends, pay for what they had done, he forgave them. And so every time we gather for this we speak of forgiveness for that is the heart's pathway to healing, the people's pathway to wholeness. Did you see the news report this week of Botham John who was shot in his apartment by an off-duty police officer, how Botham's brother offered her forgiveness and asked to hug her while she wept in the courtroom. It was stunning wasn't it? We who witness that are awed by the deep-souled nature of such an act. That man embodied Christ, that man is an example for us of God's undying love, a love that suffers but forgives. The sacred act of communion is an act of forgiveness.

And finally, though there are other values present here in this rich and multivariate act of communion, the sacred act of communion proclaims that life is not a closed system. The bread and juice here represent Jesus' death, the breaking of his body and the spilling of his blood, the end of the road for him as far as anyone could tell. He was born, lived his life and died, which apparently is the closed system of this life. How much do we do or not do to avoid death, to remain young and young looking. How hard we fight to counter that greatest of limitations that is our mortality, though it is futile. But in Jesus Christ, as represented at this table, we are reminded, as a poet once put it – that life is eternal, love is immortal, and death is nothing save the limit of our sight.

We proclaim and experience here that Jesus conquered death making of it not a doorway to oblivion but a portal to the eternal. To believe that God, that love, is greater than death and that death is not the end of the road is not to deny reality, as some might believe, but to hold out for a larger context of reality than we could ever know. It's liberation, to understand that it doesn't all begin and end here, but that the values and qualities of love and mercy and connection and beauty and peace transcend this layer or portion of existence. It might even mean, as it has to some martyrs and prophets and saints over the ages, that death is even embraced for the larger values of life. "Here I stand even if I have to die for it" means that ultimately the defining values of this existence lie outside of this narrow dimension. It's not life at all costs but living as deeply and faithfully and sacrificially for the good of the world for whatever time we have, knowing that death is but a threshold to the mystery of the greater unknown, but an unknown that is held by a God of Love. This too is what Jesus table uplifts and reminds us of – that life is not a closed system where the last word in this world is death but rather we partake of this meal, share in Christ's life-blood to proclaim that the last word is LIFE and life abundant!

All of this and more is contained in this simple act which you and I are invited to and which people all over the world are participating in this day. May the values inherent in this act be absorbed into our lives and suffuse into our world in greater and greater ways so that on earth it may be as it is in heaven, Amen!