

Sermon: What Kind of Table is This?**Scripture: Jeremiah 10, Psalm 86, Matthew 28****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: October 4, 2026**

What kind of table is this? This make-shift, ramshackle table in disarray, unclean, kinda... embarrassing, even. I hope there are no guests here this morning because we really didn't clean things up for them very well, no clean white table cloth, no pristine silver goblets and plates, no candlesticks with fresh candles...in fact it looks like we dirtied everything down!

What kind of table is this?

What kind of welcome is this?

Well, it's intended to be a table with all pretense gone, for one thing. We haven't tried this morning to clean things up enough or make it holy enough to be presentable to God, as though somehow our efforts make things holy, as though our work gets God down into this sacred moment. That is the typical path of religion in human culture across the ages. We busy ourselves with so many machinations to get what we want and need from the power above and beyond us. Jeremiah and the prophets had a word for this - idolatry - and he scoffs at it - "you cut trees and carve them and don them with gold and silver, like a scarecrow in a cucumber field and then bow down and worship it thinking it'll get you what you want if you do the right things and avoid the wrong things." The prophets are about ready to pull their hair out over how quickly Israel turns from the mysterious, invisible, uncontrollable and often times unsatisfying works of the true God to idols that they can create and manipulate towards the ends that they

think is best for them... but those ends rarely if ever are, best for them, in fact, the prophets rail, they often bring things from bad to worse.

So this table resists the idolatrous notion that it's what we do or don't do that makes us worthy or unworthy of God and God's presence and God's love. Here God doesn't say "don't just sit there" God says "don't just do something, sit there! I have done it all for you."

So it's not a religious table in the sense of what religion has been about across the ages and this is important also because once you begin to proscribe lines of value and worth and note that this belongs and that doesn't, that this is in place and that's out of place and these words need to be said and not those words all in an effort to get this right and make this presentable to God, no sooner do we do all that than we begin to establish categories of who belongs and who doesn't, who gets to come to the table and who doesn't, who is good enough or righteous enough or respectable enough or clean enough or pure enough or smart enough or talented enough... and who is not. That's religion at its worst, religion as a human construct where borders, boundaries, distinctions and categories of worth and value are laid like landmines around the whole endeavor and good luck navigating that!

But it is so ingrained in us in this society that we are worth what we earn and accomplish that we translate that into our relationship and understanding of the divine as well. But it is so clearly not what God was going for as our scriptures reveal God. It's not about what we do, the prophets of Israel scream into the void, it's about what God has done and continues to do... you know, His creating us and saving us from being an enslaved people, and establishing us in the promised land... and then, we Christians would say, coming among us as a suffering servant a crucified

criminal, a last one, a lost one, a loser and a defeated one... remember that's how God came, so that we wouldn't include some and exclude others... I mean, we still did that anyway but what this table represents is that respectability is not in the equation of who gets God and who doesn't, nor is wealth or success or even righteousness or sinfulness. Who gets God is who opens their hands and hearts to receive the utterly unmerited, unwarranted gift of God's love. That's who gets God, no other category of distinction is necessary or appropriate.

So we remember on this World Communion Sunday that it's not our respectability that gets us God, it's God's love that gets us God. There is an immense variety of ways in which communion, the Lord's supper is received in this world and many of them are in much much much less respectable places than this one. We mustn't forget that there was really nothing respectable about the way God came and what God in Jesus Christ did. God apparently couldn't give a hoot about respectability. In fact, in many ways, communion received in the rubble of a Palestinian church in Gaza or a bomb shelter in Ukraine or around a make-shift table in Myanmar amidst so much violence and grief, communion in places like that actually get closer to the heart of what the supper is about. It is actually the exact opposite of our having to create the right conditions for God to enter in. It is about God entering into the wrong conditions, the worst of conditions, the chaos and grief of nations or the chaos and griefs of our own internal life. That's where Jesus sets up his table, right there. Jesus' suffering and dying on the cross is how God comes, amidst dirt, blood, rubble, trauma, tragedy and what we have to do, I'll say it again, is open our hands to receive what God gives of Godself freely and without condition. And maybe offer a word of thanks after that.

What kind of table is this? It's not one that a respectable God would show up to... but that's the thing, we don't have a respectable God at least according to human standards of respectability - born in a stable to an impoverished family, hung out with riff-raff, accused of being a blasphemer, arrested as a criminal, hung naked on a cross... and He doesn't even respect the finality of death actually, but comes back from the dead and doesn't, as any respectable God would do, mete out consequences to those responsible for His death but forgives them... what??? But we in the church across the ages and across the globe have tried to dress him up ever since and make God more respectable than God ever wanted to be in the first place. God doesn't seek out the respectable but the disrespected and the disrespectful.

There was a vigil on the Town Common on Wednesday night of this past week and it was for lifting up those in our community who are in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction and for those who have died as a result of addiction in Winchester. You've probably seen the placards on the common down there still with the stories and the statistics and facts about addiction all laid out there to heighten our awareness and de-stigmatize the real and present struggle of addiction which still often sits as a silent presence in many families, wrecking lives. And especially in Winchester where social standing and keeping up appearances is highly valued, you might even say where respectability is an idol that is worshipped, it's particularly important, to highlight the chaos and sorrow that addiction wreaks upon families. Susan Rozmanith and I sang a couple songs for that vigil on Wednesday night and there were a number of speakers, three of whom were moms of young men in their teens or 20's who had died from

drugs and alcohol. These were brave brave moms that some of you might know, moms who had suffered the worst one can imagine and were standing up there to share and offer encouragement and hope to others whose lives are in pieces, shattered on the shores of drug and alcohol addiction. Now that is communion, received at the shabby table of grief. Though there was no table there, no bread or cup, no mention of Jesus and the last supper, Christ was there in the figures of those grieving mothers sharing their heartbreak, sharing how their bodies have been broken and their blood shed and giving that to the people gathered there in hopes that goodness might come from their sorrow, light from their darkness, life from the death of those they love. That's what communion is about, light arising out of the raw not the pure, out of the dirtiness of life not the clean, the brokenness not the whole.

It's a broken and dirty table this morning that we come to, to be reminded that no amount of shatteredness or disease or brokenness keeps God from us and in fact it's in the very broken nature of life that our defenses are finally down enough to notice that God's been here all along seeing us through, which can then inspire us to give of ourselves to others as Christ gave to us. So the only people who are not welcome here at this dirty table are those who are too uncomfortable with the disrespectability of it all, only those who choose not to show up or disinvite themselves because of illusions of how they are better or more deserving or more respectable than what is offered here. Everybody else is more than welcome to come.