

Gather 'Round the Round Table

[World Communion Sunday]

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It's highly unlikely that after the Last Supper was finished, Jesus actually said, "Everyone on this side of the table for a picture!" [Us-ie opportunity!] Nonetheless, that lighthearted dig at Leonardo DaVinci's culturally and historically inaccurate portrayal of the Last Supper, does raise some pertinent points. Rather than sitting in chairs, on one side a long and elevated table - people in 1st Century Judea would be reclining on cushions, encircling a more round and lower table. Instead of looking like a bunch of noblemen, that gathering would have the feel of ordinary people from the Middle-East. Rather than a line-up of pale-skinned blonds and redheads, this would be a group of individuals with deeply dark haired and dark skin. And while I hate to disappoint any diehard fans of *The Da Vinci Code*, there definitely would have been a cup on that table - the Elijah Cup - a key part of every 1st Century, and 21st Century Passover Meal.

The reason I bring all this up, is because, from time to time, it's important for you and me to revisit - and reassess - the deep-seated images we have about our Faith, and about our Faith Practices. For example, for me [and maybe for some of you] the image that was seared into my young impressionable mind by my church's strict practice, was that Holy Communion was an extremely stern and restrictive event. As a way of keeping Communion's austerity and rarity, we only celebrated it *four* times a year [though it certainly never felt like a "celebration"]! We would start that service by saying to God Almighty, "We poor sinners humbly confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean; and that have grievously sinned against Thee by thought, word and deed. Wherefor we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace...." Later, we'd go forward, kneel at the altar

rail, and meekly open our mouths to receive a dry, thin wafer, followed by a thimble-sized cup of wine, that we dare not spill! Then we'd return to our pew, to further contemplate our moral depravity. But, hey, at least we were covered for another three months!

Now I certainly don't mean to *demean* the deeply profound power and purpose of Holy Communion. On the contrary, I want raise-up the tremendous importance of taking that Sacrament *more* seriously, by taking ourselves *less* seriously! I'd like all of us Christians to "humbly confess" that any power and effectiveness which Holy Communion contains and conveys, comes exclusively from the Holy One, and **not** from our own personal or denominational claims to understand, or interpret, or control it! I'd like us to do-away with all those restrictive religious practices, and our culturally biased images, though which we often distance others from this Divine Gift of Grace. I'd like us to raise-up a renewed image of Holy Communion: one that looks less like a desolate funeral for the recently departed, and more like a joyful reunion with the best friend a person could ever have!

In its elemental form, Holy Communion is an eclectic celebration of a Life - and a Love - which transcends culture, race, and religion; betrayal, denial, and even death itself! Jesus Christ offers the first "Holy Communion" to a group of *Jewish* people, including a couple of guys named Judas and Peter - both of whom are about to betray Jesus' friendship. This group has absolutely no idea what Jesus is talking about, when he calls the bread his body, and the wine his blood. He says to them, "Take and eat - this is for you, just as I am for you!" So they take it and pass it around the table, sharing it with one another; simply trusting that Jesus' love for them is strong enough to overcome any doubts or confusion, fear or failings that they might have. I think that World Communion Sunday offers an excellent opportunity for all Christians to trust that Jesus' love is still strong enough to

overcome any doubts or confusion, fear or failings that we might have! It's also the perfect occasion for us to stop treating the Body of Christ as exclusively "ours"; to understand that every person in this world is a loved and cherished Child of God - as worthy, and *unworthy*, as any of us, to come to Christ's Table!

Jesus offers Holy *Communion* as a sign of our *Common-Union* - our unbreakable bond with him, with our One Divine Source, and with the entire Human Family. This is why World Communion Sunday was established: to express the unity of Christ's followers throughout the world, and to celebrate Christ's extravagant welcome to all people. It's also why we at Brecksville United Church of Christ always extend a specific and sincere invitation to partake of the Bread and Cup, to *all* those who are present. We espouse a Faith which embraces the interconnectedness of *all* our lives - regardless of one's faith tradition, personal background, or current condition. And it's a Faith which shows us, that to truly honor the "*Body of Christ*" means much more than being concerned for people's spiritual well-being. It also includes caring for their *bodies*' physical needs. It's a Faith that calls us to help provide for *all* our neighbors in need, just like Jesus does!

Jesus doesn't just talk about feeding the hungry, he does it! He doesn't preach about universal health care for the poor, he actually practices it! He not only believes in the abundance of Divine Compassion and Grace, Jesus Christ faithfully shares that abundance every day, and in every way. Jesus proclaims the Good News:[News](#): that [News](#): though our human tendency is to fearfully push-away those people we perceive as being different or deficient, the Divine Desire is to lovingly gather us all around the Table as One Human Family.

This morning, as we eat and drink together, you and I not only remember Jesus; we are also empowered to *re-member* the Body of Christ: to graciously welcome all God's children who have been

cut-off and tossed-aside, and to lovingly help them re-connect. So, even though this is a really simple “meal” that we share, because we do *share* it with all who desire, it represents so much more!

It connects us to all our sisters and brothers throughout the world, and throughout time.

It links us to the ancient Hebrew Passover Story, and sets us free from our *own* slavery to fear and bigotry, self-centeredness and narrow-mindedness.

It awakens within us that age-old practice of extending gracious hospitality to everyone we encounter.

And it opens our minds and our hearts to a New, Divine Image: a glorious vision where *all* are welcome to gather ‘round, and to share a foretaste of that Great Heavenly Feast which is still to come. Just imagine the magnificent portrayal Da Vinci could paint of *that* Celebration!