

You Are What You Eat

I Corinthians 10:14-17; Mark 14:22-25

October 3, 2021

“You are what you eat!” Have you heard that expression somewhere as you were growing up? I heard that a lot from my grandmother, particularly when I ate too many donuts at the family bakery.

Speaking of bakeries, I heard a story on this subject about a business person who decided to try and shed a few excess pounds. He was very serious this time. His colleagues at work supported him. He even changed his driving route to work in order to avoid his favorite bakery. But one morning, he arrived at work carrying a big coffee cake, and the office staff scolded him roundly, although he promised to share it with all of them. The man smiled and gave his explanation. He said, "This is a very special coffee cake. I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window were all of these goodies. I felt this might be providential, so I prayed `Lord, if you want me to have one of those coffee cakes, then let me find a parking place directly in front of the bakery.'" "And sure enough," he said, "On the *eighth* time around the block, there it was! I knew the Lord wanted me to have it." That's my kind of man!

We are what we eat, and that's especially true when we come to the Lord's table on World Communion. World Communion Sunday originated in the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 1936, the first Sunday in October was celebrated in Presbyterian churches in the United States and overseas. After a few years, the idea spread, and today World Communion is celebrated in Christian churches around the world.

Today we are reminded that we *are* a family and we *have* a family beyond these walls. It is a sacrament to cherish today and every time we share in this meal. Today you are invited to receive the sacraments from the table, and it is a personal invitation to you, just as Jesus addressed the disciples that night in the upper room around the table.

As we heard in Mark's gospel this morning, in the breaking of the bread and the lifting of the cup, we recall that God loved us so much that he sent his son, who suffered and died as a way to show perfect love and service to others. So often we talk about how we need to believe in this God of love, and we do, but what we celebrate today reminds us that even when we don't have faith in God, God still has faith in us. God-in-Christ still comes today, to mold and make us in that very image and likeness. God has made us into a family, a family that stretches around the world; a family that is called to love as we have been loved, to forgive as we have been forgiven, and to give as we have received.

Here at First Congregational Church, we celebrate the sacrament of communion every month, and today we are privileged to share it with brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. Communion means many things to different people. It takes on different meanings, depending on your situation and life circumstances. When you lose a loved one or you face bad news, this meal gives you strength. When the road is hard, and your life is shrouded in darkness and doubt, this meal encourages you and helps you go on. When you feel joy and experience the depths of God's grace, this meal is spread before you in celebration.

You are invited to share in this meal because you are a part of God's family, and there is always room around God's table for one more. Growing up, if someone dropped by our house around dinner time, they *had* to stay for dinner! I mean, they *had* to stay! There was no discussion. My grandmother made sure of it! We would just pull up another chair, and squeeze everyone in. There was always more than enough to go around. Churches should be like that, too.

Sometimes I think most of what I learned about God at an early age happened around the kitchen table. Today in this church, things are much the same way. Much of what you need to know about God's love and grace for you can be experienced around this table and the meaning of this meal.

It used to be before covid, you remember, we gathered in a circle as we shared in this sacrament. It was a circle of love and inclusivity. We should still remember that today, even though the method and the means by which we receive communion is a little different now. The message is the same. We can look forward to the time when we really can gather around the table for a meal, or have coffee and refreshments after church again.

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For the early church – Christians who were called People of the Way -- communion was a way of remembering Jesus by reenacting his last supper. The sharing of the meal was a way of keeping alive his memory in their midst.

In the gospel this morning, we are taken back to the historical setting. In Mark, the setting was the Passover Feast. Every religious person would have been familiar with the feast – it was a reminder of how the Jewish people were lead out of slavery in Egypt. The celebration would include the sacrificial lamb, the bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

According to Mark's gospel, near the end of Jesus' life, he celebrated this last supper with his disciples. Jesus told them that his body would be broken for them, and his blood would be poured out for them in the cup of the new covenant.

Over the centuries as Christians have shared this sacrament, they have experienced something more than simply an act of remembering. Like them, we can experience at this table a spiritual presence that endures – a divine presence that comes to us through the simple act of sharing bread and the cup. Therefore, this sacramental meal becomes more than just a remembrance, but a reminder that God is with us. Sharing in this supper brings us comfort and restores hope through faith in an act that goes beyond rational explanation. As a philosophy major, I used to insist on having a rational explanation of things in order to believe. Now it is enough to have faith that Christ is present at the table as we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Time and experience have taught that much.

World Communion Sunday in particular makes me recall the many churches and altars over the years where I have experienced hospitality and grace. Some members have gone on to the Church Triumphant, and are sharing in the sacred feast at the Lord's table in God's kingdom.

I also remember serving communion to people in many different places that were not in a church –for instance, I offered communion numerous times at a state mental health institution as the chaplain. I once took communion to a parishioner who was in prison for kidnap and murder. Yes, it happens. I took communion to a family in the church when their house burned. They were living in a shelter, and they lost everything, but communion was the *one* thing they asked for. I offered communion to some who were on their deathbed as a hospice chaplain. They were waiting for the Lord to call them home, where as one woman said, "This may be *my* last supper on earth, but soon I will be able to receive the holy bread and cup from the Lord himself." She could almost taste that heavenly manna.

World Communion brings back so many other memories. I remember celebrating it in a middle school and in a movie theatre where we held worship as a new church, because we did not have a building. We served adults who were receiving communion for the very first time. Some of them were shedding tears when they received the bread and cup, because they had been denied communion in the Catholic Church for various reasons.

So many sacred moments ... so many sacred places and people. My friend Quasi is walking five miles to church today in Ghana, and singing all the way as he prepares to receive communion. My high school classmate is a missionary in Thailand, and he is breaking bread with new Christians under a tent. I know an army chaplain who is serving communion today on a military base in the Poconos where we used to live.

All of those celebrating the Lord's Supper today are standing in a sacred circle of belonging. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, as the author of

Hebrew puts it. When we celebrate the sacrament together, we join hands with others around the world. How we need this unity today as the world is divided and fractured as never before. Christ is always with us, and as we celebrate this holy meal, our eyes are opened in new ways. From the time we get up in the morning until the sun sets, we belong to God.

When you gather around your table at home, Christ is sitting next to you, making every meal a holy feast. Martin Luther was once asked what he did when he felt discouraged or overwhelmed. He answered simply, "I remember my Baptism." I think the same could be said for the Lord's Supper. Remember and be reminder of who you are as a child of God. Savor this moment.

Today God's people are gathered around the table and around the world . . . living . . . laughing . . . loving . . . singing . . . eating together. Even covid can't stop 'em. We are what we eat, and today we are daughters and sons in Christ, the bread of life, the body of the Risen One. AMEN

Corinthians 10:14-17

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Mark 14:22-25

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the * covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'