

Pentecost 13 B

Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalms 34:9-14

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't remember the first time I had communion. When I was a little girl, I can remember my mom would come back from the communion rail and I could smell the wine on her breath. It was always a "special" Sunday because communion was served only once a month. I'm not sure who or how it was ever determined that the love of God should be rationed out on that timeline, but it was well established. My first communion was probably when I was confirmed, which was as an adult. (In those days one had to be confirmed before receiving communion; it was felt that it was essential that one understands what is happening, so I took a 6 week adult confirmation class and was then deemed "qualified.")

By the time I got to seminary, some 16 years later, things had changed. Students were challenging the doctrine and practices around communion. Fervent study was going on and much debate as the call to include children at the Table was loud and clear. Documents were published, studies commissioned. It was a hot topic back then.

I remember in my first call one Sunday after church a mother asked me when her child could begin to commune. I said, "now." She too had grown up in the doctrines and practices that inhibited this and she retorted, "but she doesn't know what it's about!"

I thought about that and then asked her, "so how would you explain it for her?" She stumbled out a few words like "Jesus, body, blood" and then I asked her "yes, but what does that mean? What does it do for us?" and she couldn't answer. To lessen her embarrassment I told her, "Tracey, I've been to seminary for four years and I can't explain it either. It's a gift." Her daughter came up every week after that (and her niece too.)

There have been arguments over what kind of bread is used, the type of wine, how it is served, how often, the words said, who can offer it, who can receive. And perhaps that's all good, because we are learning that we really have no control over it at all. The Table belongs to God. That's why we say and practice here that anyone may take the bread of life. There is no achievement that qualifies you and nothing to turn you away.

Taking communion isn't about being good enough or coming to church enough or knowing enough, it's about being open to receiving. God is whom God is. We don't give communion it's meaning, God does. We take a mystery in our hands, a crumb of hope that proclaims we belong, we are welcome, we are forgiven – and so is the person beside you. We sip the wine or juice and don't really know how it nourishes our lives, but it is a reminder every single time we take it that God is present with us.

Like at the family dinner table, we eat together. Each of us carrying our woes and wounds, regrets and grief of the week. We may come with deep gratitude and joy, or tears, spending a brief moment or a long, long pause. Just as important as the bread and wine is the practice of sharing this meal together. Food is a powerful “glue” to bind together the diversity of humanity. We eat here with people we might not even know or like a lot, but we come and share by a holy invitation.

Eating together, is an act of healing, an act of reconciliation, bridge building, forgiveness. We eat to know God, we eat to know forgiveness and as we eat we deepen relationships. But we also eat this bread to be changed. Think about that. Eating changes us.

The thing about being God's people is, we come to this Table and we eat bread, then we go out and live as bread. That can be challenging. It can be hard for us to know just what that looks like because it can happen in such a multitude of ways. So, what does being changed by God's bread or being “bread” look like?

Recently, I watched a short video¹ (which is on our Facebook page) about a Syrian refugee to the United States (Heval Mohamed Kelli) and a former KKK member (Chris Buckley.) As you watch the video, you can see that it's obvious these two men come from different worlds, but you also can't miss their profound friendship.

When Heval was asked “Why would you be friends with a member of the KKK?” Heval's simple reply was, “Why not.” And then he says, “It's hard to hate something you know. People who don't like immigrants and refugees haven't tried my mother's food.”

Isn't that great? “My Mother's food!” So true!

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<https://www.facebook.com/MoreInCommon/videos/2185898268359547/UzpfSTEwNDExNjI4Nzc6MTAyMTQzMjQzNjY4NzY2NTE/>

God gives us the common tools which sometimes taste like bread and wine for us to share with others the good news of acceptance and love. Sometimes it looks different though. Sometimes bread is a smile, a friendship, a helping hand, a welcome, a card. Whatever form it takes, it is always meant to empower us, free us, send us, propel us into a world brimming with hungry people. And that's part of the beauty of it, good food is meant to be shared. When you taste something amazing don't you just want to say to someone "taste this it's soooo good!" There is just something in passing plates, watching others enjoy, try a new dish, relish an old favorite, there is something to pushing back from the table well fed in both food and conversation - all fueled by love.

When you come today to this Table, maybe just turn for a moment to the person behind you in line or beside you at the rail – and see them, give thanks for them joining in the feast God provides, give thanks for one another! And remember when you are sent this morning, you are meant to bread in a hungry world. Be generous, be thoughtful, be inclusive, be loving, because by simple ingredients such as this the world becomes a more beautiful place.

Amen.