

## SECOND READING: Ephesians 4:1-6

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

## FIRST READING: Psalm 133

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

<sup>2</sup>It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.

<sup>3</sup>It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.  
For there the LORD ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

### ***“A Better Idea”***

You know, I agree with Rev. John Buchanan that World Communion Sunday, or Worldwide Communion Sunday, as so many of us have known it, “is one of the Church’s better ideas”.<sup>1</sup> It began with a realization of brokenness of the human community before and during WWII. The idea was that on the first Sunday in October, Christians all over the world, in their own beautiful ways and traditions, would make it a point to come to the Table to partake of their Lord’s Supper. In so doing we’d all remember and give thanks to the God who so “*loved the WORLD* (not simply a nation, but the world) *that he gave his only begotten son that WHOSOEVER* (not a particular people but whosoever) *believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life*”. (Jn 3:16) Christians of the world would celebrate our unity with each other in Christ’s love, partaking of his feast which transcends barriers of nation, race, and ideology.

And so it is, that early this morning, while you and I were still sleeping, Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo broke bread together in their places of worship. And so it is, that the Church of S. India in Kunnankulam, Kerala sipped from the spoon of wine offered them by their priest. And so it is, that the mountain Presbyterian Church of Honolulu will SOON hear the words of our Savior, “*This is my body broken... This is my blood shed for you*”. And so it is that the faithful have already knelt to receive the Sacrament at the magnificent cathedral of the Holy Resurrection in Jerusalem, in the Greek Orthodox church on the West Bank, and in US army tents in Iraq, South Korea, and Afghanistan.

It’s one of the church’s better ideas because we continue to live in a broken world which needs an alternative vision. We live in, what has been described as, fearsome times, “when the wells of kindness and love for one another seem everywhere to be running dry,”<sup>2</sup> when the world is rife not only with a real threat of monumental natural disasters, of famine, disease, and irreversible destruction of creation, but with hatred & conflict, with bullying, with self-destructive behavior when people are so polarized and consumed by their differences. One need only read a bit or listen briefly to the world’s headlines of vicious “-isms” and scandals, of

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<sup>1</sup> John Buchanan. “*Small Wonder*” <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2003/100503.html>. (accessed 10-5-18).

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Kingsolver. Quoted in John Buchanan. *Small Wonder*.

revolutions and coups to know that we need an alternative vision. Even in the Church there's strife and discord. "It has not been very long since the Episcopalians and Presbyterians were in the news because so many congregations were not able to be together even within their own walls. Methodists are in the news now. Catholics and Protestants still cannot break the bread of communion together; the Southern Baptists don't want much to do with even other Baptists and Evangelicals are so wary they don't want to sit down and talk."<sup>3</sup>

Theologian, Douglas Hall, states that "*unity is the foremost mark of the Church. The community of believers can hardly regard themselves as a creation of the one triune God and live in relationship with the one Lord Jesus Christ and anticipate the ultimate reconciliation of all creatures, if it is to consider its own unity incidental or merely desirable .... A DIVIDED Christendom cannot preach unity.*"<sup>4</sup>

The Church in Ephesus was really no different. Believers were arguing and fighting and pushing divisive agendas. In Paul's letter to them, he admonished this behavior and provided the needed alternative vision. He told the Ephesian Christians that they should live lives "worthy of their calling". Such lives should be filled with humility and gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love, and they should maintain a peaceful unity. He stated that such lives are founded on a realization that there is only one body and one Spirit, one hope, one love, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

It seems that Paul understood the power of this divine, alternative vision. It is stronger in the long run than any military or economic force. Its power can not only heal divisions in the Church, but its power can eventually change the world. For humility, gentleness, patience and the bearing with one another in love are contagious things, you see. They extend outward, beyond the boundaries of our PARTICULAR families and communities of faith, beyond our denominations to reach and embrace everyone, everywhere, all of God's children.

*Last Friday evening I just happened to hear a report of this contagion by Steve Hartman, part of his "On the Road" series. It is as pertinent a report as it is beautiful. He says that "For*

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<sup>3</sup> John Buchanan. "To Dwell in Perfect Unity". <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2006/100106.html>. (accessed 10-5-18).

<sup>4</sup> Douglas John Hall. "Confessing the Faith. Christian Theology in a North American Context" (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1998), 73.

*many people recently flooded out of their homes in and around Myrtle Beach, SC, the most welcoming port in the storm has been a total stranger named Jaret Hucks.” “I simply said, ‘Come stay with me. Come stay at my house until you can go back to yours,’” said Jaret. “It’s not really a house, though,” reports Hartman. “Jaret Hucks owns the 70 room Midtown Inn and Cottages in Myrtle Beach. Throughout floods, he has been open for business – or actually open for charity. To date, Jaret has given away almost 1,000 free nights to the community’s poorest and most vulnerable evacuees.” “I don’t know what we would have done,” one guest said. “I don’t know where we would be right now.” “Jaret has taken in every member of families. Forget the ‘No pet policy’. The Midtown has welcomed dogs, a tortoise and even a rescued baby squirrel named Mr. Squeakers.” “Love thy neighbor, right?,” he said. “I winked at him as I agreed that I’d read that somewhere too.” “That’s what you’re supposed to do. Love thy neighbor. My mama taught me that a long time ago.” “So far, Jaret has given away about \$50,000 worth of services. But even more important is the generosity he has inspired.” “They came out of the woodwork,” he said. “People came to me right away, ‘How can I help? What can I do?’” “Indeed, people have brought diapers, ice and lots of food. Anyone staying at the Midtown now gets 3 square meals a day. In fact, from the new shoes on their feet to the haircuts on their head, not a single need is going unmet -- especially for the children who play in the pool, oblivious to the suffering that surrounds them. In an attempt to return the favor, some of the parents have been pitching in with housekeeping and other chores. Jaret appreciates the effort, but says the best repayment has been the crayon on paper thank yous, as well as knowing with absolute certainty that he has made his mama proud.”<sup>5</sup>*

Friends, wouldn’t it be great if all Christians were known for this, for subverting the boundaries that separate people rather than building higher, stronger ones? Wouldn’t it be something if all Christians were focused on measuring themselves only by whom they reached out to, how much energy they invested in caring for others, and how very far their hospitality could extend? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all Christians could truly be bonded in the Spirit of

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Hartman. “Myrtle Beach Innkeeper Opens His Doors to Families” <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/myrtle-beach-innkeeper-opens-his-doors-to-families-flooded-out-of-their-homes/> (accessed 10-5-18)

peace and love of neighbor? What would the world look like? In a Nat'l Geographic article by Presbyterian author, Anne LaMott, entitled, "*Despite Perils, Decide Hope*", I read a great quote. Hold onto this one, "*Sometimes we have to believe that heaven is just a new pair of glasses.*"<sup>6</sup>

Well, this is what World Communion Sunday does each year. It gives ALL Christians the opportunity to see anew, for one Sunday, at least, that:

- we, millions of us everywhere, of every nation, race, and ideology, CAN forget our differences, not only between our denominations but within them. We can forget whether we agree or not on the Lord's bodily presence in the elements, or who to ordain, or what hymnal to sing from if we do sing from a hymnal, or what creed we recite if we do recite a creed, or whether we dance and clap or sit reverently in our pews.
- we CAN come to the Table of our risen Lord with each other and with all those who went before and all who will come after.
- we CAN, even in fearsome times, remember that we are all children of the same Creator God *who so loved the world (not a nation but the world) that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever (not a particular people but whosoever) believeth in him will not perish but have eternal life.*
- we CAN realize that our unity empowers us to live lives worthy of this calling, showing anyone watching humility, gentleness, patience and the bearing with each other in love...that our unity strengthens us to live contagious lives that show that all humankind may be bound together by the Spirit of peace, by the Spirit of the One who said, "*Do this in remembrance of me*".

Yes, World Communion Sunday is one of the Church's better ideas....a precious, tender, and holy better idea. Come, friends, all is prepared. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Anne Lamott, "*Despite Perils, Decide to Hope*". (National Geographic, 2018; Vol 234, No 4:19-22).