

Welcome by the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

World Communion Sunday is a day when, with many churches across the globe, we affirm “*there is one body and one Spirit ...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.*” (Ephesians 4:4)

It is valuable for us to remember the church of Jesus Christ which gathers around the Lord’s Table is spread worldwide, including people of all ages, all nations, and many ethnicities, histories, and cultural practices. Though we may say the Table is Christ’s, often we may act as if it is ours, or belonging only to our own favored cultural practices. Today we are reminded that the Table of the Lord is indeed a gift to the whole church across the whole world. It invites us as United Methodists to share in the blessing of God’s grace and our renewal in Christ as we gather as his body.

Greeting: We are all one family

Somos todos una familia (Spanish)

Nous sommes tous une famille (French)

Siamo tutti una famiglia (Italian)

我們都是一家人 (Chinese)

Kami ay ang lahat sa isang Family (Tagalog)

Мы все одна семья (Russian)

كلنا عائلة واحدة (Arabic)

Chúng ta là một gia đình (Vietnamese)

Wir sind alle eine Familie (German)

हम सभी एक परिवार हैं (Hindi)

A meditation by Safiyah Fosua

“If I really had faith the size of a mustard seed,
What would I do?
Would I wave a hand to hurl Mount Kilimanjaro into Lake Victoria
Just to prove that I could?
If I really had mustard-seed faith, what would I do?
Would I start by extending a hand of peace
To the church across the street
Whose sign says something different from mine?
Would I start by extending a hand of peace
To the Ol' G that terrorizes the old people down the street?
Or to the grizzled homeless man who sits on the corner with a sign?
Would I start by extending my hand of peace
To those who brawl on schoolyards
And to those who brawl on battlefields
In search of a future with hope?
Maybe I could begin by just taking my hand of peace
Out of its hiding place
Long before the moment
That I cup my hands to receive Communion.
O, Lord, Increase our faith!”¹

¹ <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/extend-a-hand>

Message: Renewed in Christ

“Can you imagine taking communion on the moon?”

Back in 1969, astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Neal Armstrong did just that when they made their historic landing, setting foot on the moon for the first time. What you may not know is the story behind the first, lunar sacrament.

“For several weeks prior to the lift-off of Apollo 11, Aldrin and the pastor of his church, Rev. Dean Woodruff, had been struggling to find the right symbol for the first lunar landing. They wanted to express their feeling that what humans were doing transcended technology.

The two began to consider the many meanings of the sacrament of communion as they spoke together. ‘One of the principal symbols,’ Dean said, ‘is that God reveals himself in the common elements of everyday life.’ Traditionally, these elements are bread and wine - common foods in Bible days and typical products of human labor. These are typical elements of life today as well.

Aldrin wondered if it might be possible to take communion on the moon, symbolizing God’s revelation that God was there too, as humans reached out into the universe. Buzz said, ‘There are many of us in the NASA program who do trust that what we are doing is part of God’s eternal plan for [us].’

Pastor Woodruff made plans for two special communion services. One would be held prior to Aldrin’s departure for Cape Kennedy, when he would join other church members in a dedication service. The second would take place two weeks later on Sunday, July 20, when Neil Armstrong and he were scheduled to be on the surface of the moon. On July 20th the church back home would gather for communion, while Aldrin joined them as close as possible to the same hour, taking communion inside the lunar module, all of them meaning to represent in this small way not only their local church but the Church as a whole.

Right away questions came up. Was it theologically correct for a layman to serve himself communion under these circumstances? The pastor thought so, but to make sure he wrote the Presbyterian Church’s General Assembly and got back a quick reply - it was permissible.

How much should they talk about the plans? Aldrin wasn't one who naturally shared his faith, but he was becoming increasingly convinced that having religious convictions carried the responsibility of witnessing to them. They finally decided to wait to share the information about the communion service *after* the moonshot.

Aldrin had a question about which scriptural passage to use. Which reading would best capture what the landing meant? He thought long about it and came up at last with John 15:5, which fit perfectly. Aldrin wrote the passage on a slip of paper to take aboard *Eagle* along with the communion elements. Pastor Woodruff would read the same passage to the congregation at the full service held back home on the same day.

At last they were set. And then trouble appeared. It was Saturday, just prior to the first of the two communion services. The next day Armstrong, Collins and Aldrin were leaving for Cape Kennedy. Prior to a pre-mission press conference, the flight physician arrived and set up elaborate precautions against crew contamination. They had to wear sterile masks and to talk to the reporters from within a special partition. The doctor wasn't happy about the idea of a big church service. Special arrangements had to be made, but a small dedication service happened. They took communion. At the end of the service the pastor tore off a corner of the loaf of bread and handed it to Aldrin along with a tiny cup. He left a few hours later.

What happened after that the whole world knows. The Saturn 5 rocket gave them a rough ride at first, but the rest of the trip was smooth. On the day of the moon landing, the crew woke at 5:30 a.m. Armstrong and Aldrin separated from Collins in the command module. Their powered descent was right on schedule and perfect except for one unforeseeable difficulty. The automatic guidance system would have taken *Eagle* to an area with huge boulders. Armstrong had to steer *Eagle* to a more suitable terrain. With only seconds' worth of fuel left, they touched down at 3:30 p.m. Now Neil and Buzz were sitting inside *Eagle*, while Mike circled in lunar orbit. After a scheduled meal, Neil would give the signal to step down the ladder onto the powdery surface of the moon.

It was the moment for communion. Aldrin called back to Houston, ‘Houston, this is *Eagle*. This is the LM Pilot speaking. I would like to request a few moments of silence. I would like to invite each person listening in, wherever and whomever they may be, to contemplate for a moment the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in their own individual way.’

For Aldrin this meant taking communion. During the radio blackout he opened the little plastic packages which contained bread and wine. Aldrin poured the wine into the tiny cup. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. He said it was interesting to think that the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the first food eaten there, were communion elements.

And so, just before Buzz Aldrin took communion, he read the words chosen to indicate our trust that as humans probe into space we are in fact acting in Christ. Aldrin notes, ‘I sensed especially strongly my unity with our church back home, and with the Church everywhere.’²

Buzz Aldrin read the words of John 15:5, when Jesus says, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”*

The United Methodist Church recognizes two visible, tangible signs of God’s invisible, intangible grace: baptism and communion. We are gathered together on World Communion Sunday as a local church, one expression of the many rich and diverse expressions of the body of Christ on Earth, Christ’s church. We aren’t here to submit to or obey angels in heaven. We aren’t here to give praises for our dominion over the world. We aren’t here to praise God for all of our accomplishments as seen in the rich and vibrant history of our church. We aren’t even here to lift up the fruit of our missions.

We are here for one reason: to receive the grace of God.

“The story is told of a little girl whose parents took her forward to receive Holy Communion. Disappointed with the small piece of bread she was given to dip in the cup, the child cried loudly, ‘I want more! I want more!’ While embarrassing to her parents and amusing to the

² <https://www.guideposts.org/faith/stories-of-faith/guideposts-classics-buzz-aldrin-on-communion-in-space>

pastor and congregation, this little girl’s cry accurately expresses the feelings of many contemporary United Methodists. We want more!”³

In our heart of hearts, our spirit is crying out. It is hungry, thirsty and lonely. It is seeking a connection, affirmation and sustenance from God. We know grace and spiritual power are available to us, but we may feel like we aren’t able to receive the gifts. Even worse, we may walk away feeling like we don’t know how to apply those gifts to our lives. That’s sad and it’s a failing of the church if we haven’t learned. Today, I want to help us learn.

The author of Hebrews reports a question posed about our relationship with God, “*What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?*” (v6). This is a question that has bothered us for ages, as the author of Hebrews is actually referencing Psalm 8:4-6, which was written at least 1,200 years earlier. It’s a question that bothers us today, 2,000 years later. It’s the question behind Aldrin’s desire to seek God’s grace on the surface of the moon. At the heart of the question is a desperate desire to believe that we are, in some way, worthy of God’s grace.

According to the Bible and our United Methodist tradition, we believe all people are sinners, constantly in need of God’s grace. “God is gracious and loving, always giving us the grace we need. Grace is God’s free and undeserved gift to us, God’s love towards us. While God’s grace can reach out to us at any time or place God chooses, there are designated channels or means by which grace is immediately available. One of these is Holy Communion. It goes by other names.

The term *Holy Communion* invites us to focus on the self-giving of God, which makes the sacrament an occasion of grace, and also to focus on the holiness of our communion with God and one another. *Eucharist*, from the Greek word for thanksgiving, reminds us that the sacrament is thanksgiving to God for the gifts of creation and salvation. The term *Mass*, used by the Roman Catholic Church, derives from the Latin word *missio*, literally ‘sending forth,’ and indicates that this celebration brings

³ Source: “*This Holy Mystery*”, GBOD, Nashville, TN, 2004, p. 2

the worship service to a close by sending forth the congregation with God’s blessing to live as God’s people in the world.”⁴

All of this is made possible through Christ, as the author of Hebrews reminds us. Jesus is the one who originated Holy Communion, in remembrance of what God has done for us and as a means of renewal. Our spirit, our faith and our very life is renewed when we gather with our brothers and sisters in the community of faith, declaring our love and devotion to Jesus and to one another. We encounter Jesus when we come together, assembling as the body of Christ on Earth, called to be disciples by our Lord and Savior. We are reminded that, regardless of where we came from and what our situation may be, we, who are being set apart for God, are co-heirs with Jesus, the one Lord who calls us. We all have one Father, God Almighty. When we gather at the table seeking to know Christ, we are one in faith and one in the Holy Spirit.

When we are touched by God’s grace in Holy Communion, we are changed. And, each and every time, we are shaped and changed into the image of Christ a little more. Through those changes, we are healed and we become the instruments of God’s healing in the world. Through those changes, we are reconciled to God and we become God’s agents of reconciliation to the world. Through those changes, we are given strength and power for the redemption of the world, to seek peace and justice. Through the grace we receive during Holy Communion, we know God loves us and values us. We are worthy as God’s children. As we are changed, we begin to see the value and worth of others, which enables us to love them with the love of God.

Jesus said in John 6:54, “*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.*” Jesus is the spiritual bread that gives life, his blood is the living water that quenches our spiritual thirst forever. When we come to the communion table, God is already there, waiting to meet us with a loving gift, the gift of eternal life. Our union with Christ is an eternal union, it is life eternal. We are not just promised life with Christ after our physical death. We are promised a dynamic, loving relationship with Christ here and now.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4

That is truly good news worth sharing, don't you think? By God's grace, we receive life that never ends because God's love is everlasting. God's love will take us from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the moon and beyond. To God be the glory, halleluia!

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12 (NRSV)

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet.” Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”