

## **Children’s Moment**

Good morning, girls and boys. Today is World Communion Sunday. It’s a day when a lot of people in different churches around the world get together to celebrate and remember what connects us in spite of our differences.

What do you think that is? It’s Jesus. Jesus is the reason we come together to worship, give thanks and gather for the Lord’s Supper. That’s what we call communion. It’s a special moment when we remember what Jesus means to all of us, everywhere.

When we gather for the Lord’s Supper, we come to the table Jesus prepares for us. Jesus makes the arrangements. Jesus seats us at the table. Jesus serves us. Now Jesus isn’t doing this because he’s less, because he’s not. Jesus does this because he loves us. Jesus is showing us how to love and care for others. We’re to serve them the same way.

That’s what connects us. When I grew up, the church my parents went to wouldn’t let children take communion until they’d gone through confirmation. I remember sneaking extra bread and a few more sips of the wine when I could participate. Some of the adults may be chuckling right now. I’m not telling you this to make it seem less, but to help you realize communion is special. It’s one of God’s mysterious gifts.

When we eat the bread, it reminds us of Jesus’ body. He was hurt and humiliated for our sake. When we drink the juice, it reminds us of Jesus’ blood. He bled and died for us on a cross. The bread and juice are signs that point us to who Jesus is – our Savior, and what Jesus did – offer grace to re-establish our relationship with God.

These objects remind us Jesus is with us every day. For example, a cupcake might remind us how God’s words are sweet or a flashlight can remind us God’s light shines in our lives. As you go through your day, shift your thinking and look at objects we come in contact with as lessons and ways to remember Jesus and God’s love.

You may not understand what this means yet. That’s okay. There will be a time when you will. Trust God. Jesus loves you.

*Let’s pray ...*

**Message: “Legacy: With Open Arms”**

**Today is a weird day for us as a community of believers.**

World Communion Sunday is a strange day in many ways. If you were to go your friends, neighbors and relatives who don't go to church and say “tell me about World Communion Sunday,” what do you think you'd hear? Nothing. Nada. Crickets chirping. If you were to go to your friends who go to other churches and ask when World Communion Sunday is, you'd hear pretty much the same thing.

**That's the myth: today isn't a day that's on most people's calendars.**

That's not unreasonable. The Presbyterian church started the tradition in 1940. It was an attempt to get Protestant churches in the United States to celebrate communion more often. At the time, most churches were celebrating communion infrequently – quarterly at best and rarely on the same schedule.

**Eighty years later, the tradition lives on.** Fortunately, it has changed in recent decades to have a more global nature. You find different kinds of celebrations highlighting the diverse, multicultural world we live in. I've participated in services in Tongan, Korean, Vietnamese and English. That's a good thing. We can be open.

**But it's still strange to a lot of people.** It's like this story:

“A young girl was watching her mother bake a ham for a family gathering and noticed her mom cutting off the ends before placing it in the oven.

‘Mom, why do you cut the ends off before baking the ham?’ she asked.

‘Hmmm... I think it helps soak up the juices while it's baking. I'm not sure, though. That's just the way your grandma always did it, so I've just always cut them off. Why don't you call grandma and ask her?’

So, the little girl called her grandmother and asked, ‘Grandma, mom is making a ham and cut off the ends before placing it in the oven. She said that it's probably to help soak up the juices but wasn't sure. She said you'd know because she learned how to cook from you.’

‘That’s true. I do cut off the ends of the ham before baking. But I’m not sure why either. I learned how to cook from my mom. You should ask her.’

So, the inquisitive little girl called her great grandmother and asked, ‘Great grandma, mom and grandma said they learned how to cook a ham from watching you. Do you cut off the ends of the ham to help it soak up the juices?’

The great grandmother chuckled, ‘Oh, no sweetie. I just never had a pan big enough to hold a whole ham, so I always had to cut off the ends to make it fit.’”<sup>1</sup>

**You know the story.** It’s funny, yet sadly true. We have traditions we hold onto with little understanding of why they came into being and whether they matter to us today or not.

**Which brings me to my question: what does World Communion Sunday mean to you?** I don’t believe it’s an ancient dinner party that’s out of touch with the realities of our world. The idea of gathering in a small room for a meal with our closest friends is appealing right now, but it’s just not a reality if we care about those who are at risk.

**We need to examine what it means to gather at the Lord’s Table** while living in an era of isolation brought on by the pandemics of COVID-19, racism and prejudice. We are divided politically, socially and economically. We find it difficult to sit down and have a civil conversation with someone who holds a different position. That’s the power of the negative, polarizing and separating us.

**It doesn’t help that our church leaders** and theologians disagree about what communion means if we aren’t gathered together in person. I assure you, the acts we do and the signs we look to for our object lessons are not hollow. Our faith and trust in God is what wavers. The limits are in us, not in God.

**I wonder:** are we slicing the ends off the Passover lamb because our faith in Jesus is in our head and not in our heart?

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.executiveforum.com/cutting-off-the-ends-of-the-ham/>

**What I’m saying is this:** we can embrace church culture and household traditions, yet have little understanding of why we gather at the Lord’s Table or what it means to our life and the life of our community. We can say kind words, be a good person and do good things, yet not be in a relationship with God.

**Our faith isn’t in what we see, the bread and the cup.** Our faith isn’t in the gestures, the candles or the specific words we say. Our faith is in what we can’t see, our spiritual relationship with God and Jesus, our Redeemer. As one Bible writer puts it, “*Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see*” (Hebrews 11:1).

**Why do we celebrate communion?** We do so because it’s one of the best ways we can connect to God, the source of life. Communing with God opens us to receive God’s love and grace. We admit we need God. We have intentionally done wrong. We are broken by the stress and strain of life. We need healing. The Lord’s Table is a place where we can *always* receive God’s love, without condition or limit. That’s what grace is. We can’t earn it. We come and accept it.

**Faith goes hand-in-hand with belief, trust, love and hope.** The terms are interchangeable. The faith of Christ makes our relationship with God possible today. Jesus established a new way for us to be in relationship with God. We don’t need the old laws and rules. We need a relationship because we can’t pardon and heal ourselves from what limits and binds us, our own selfish, sinful selves.

**Jesus invites us to join him at the table.** Jesus is replacing the negative narrative with a stronger, positive narrative that changes our lives for the better. All are welcome. The feast we find nourishes everyone, spiritually and physically. Best of all, we don’t have to make the arrangements! Jesus sends the invitations, arranges for a table with space for everyone and welcomes all who accept the invitation with open arms. May our legacy be passing on God’s love with open arms.

**Not sure about the neighbor who plays that kind of music and has a political sign in the front yard?** Jesus washed Peter’s feet, knowing Peter would deny him in a few short hours. Let’s not deny Jesus or anyone else, but openly invite them to receive God’s grace.

**Not sure about the person who speaks another language or who has a different ethnic background or the same sex couple living down the street or the cashier at the store who is of another faith?** Jesus invited all the disciples, knowing they would run away and abandon him to a mock trial and death on a cross. Let’s not run away when we’re faced with people and situations we don’t understand or fear. Show you care the same way Jesus cares for you and wait for your opportunity to make friends.

**Not sure about the co-worker who makes fun of you or the relative who says they don’t want to have anything to do with the church or your friend who is done with religion?** Jesus washed Judas’ feet and shared bread with him, knowing Judas would betray him to the authorities in two or three hours. The opposite of hate isn’t love. It’s apathy, being silent when injustice is done. Those who have questions and doubts aren’t without hope. You don’t have to change their mind. Just love them the same way Jesus loves you when you’re filled with doubt, uncertainty, anxiety and sadness. Rely God for love.

**This year, let’s own our communion celebrations!**

**I invite you to reflect on all of the good things you have in your life,** the ways God has helped you – in good times and bad. Let’s be grateful for what God has done in the past and remember the gift we have in Jesus.

**I invite you to look for God today.** God is present. Be still and you will see. God is revealed in the beauty of creation. Jesus is revealed in the joy of this season. The Holy Spirit is revealed in the companionship we find in our marriages, family and other close relationships.

**I invite you to reflect on the promise God gives us for tomorrow.** We don’t have the answers. That’s okay. God will be with us, no matter what happens, working in every situation to bring good out of bad. There is no power on heaven or earth that can separate us from the love of God. Trust God. Believe in Jesus. Have faith in the Spirit.

**God’s blessing passes from one table to another.** Wherever you are today, you are connected to the grand, heavenly table that waits us. Open your arms wide and invite everyone to come with you!

**Psalm 19:7-14 (CEB)**

The Lord's Instruction is perfect,  
reviving one's very being.  
The Lord's laws are faithful,  
making naive people wise.  
The Lord's regulations are right,  
gladdening the heart.  
The Lord's commands are pure,  
giving light to the eyes.  
Honoring the Lord is correct,  
lasting forever.  
The Lord's judgments are true.  
All of these are righteous!  
They are more desirable than gold -  
than tons of pure gold!  
They are sweeter than honey -  
even dripping off the honeycomb!  
No doubt about it:  
your servant is enlightened by them;  
there is great reward in keeping them.  
But can anyone know  
what they've accidentally done wrong?  
Clear me of any unknown sin  
and save your servant from willful sins.  
Don't let them rule me.  
Then I'll be completely blameless;  
I'll be innocent of great wrongdoing.  
Let the words of my mouth  
and the meditations of my heart  
be pleasing to you,  
Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

**Romans 14:1-12 (MSG)**

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with - even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for *God's* sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's *God* we are answerable to - all the way from life to death and everything in between - not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.

So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly - or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture:

“As I live and breathe,” God says,  
“every knee will bow before me;  
Every tongue will tell the honest truth  
that I and only I am God.”

So tend to your knitting. You’ve got your hands full just taking care of  
your own life before God.