

Morning Meditation ~

During worship yesterday, we celebrated communion. The word is derived from *com-* "with, together" and *unus* "oneness, union." Another way to say this is that communion is playfully bringing together the words "common," as in the ordinary/everyday bread from our cupboards and juice from our refrigerators, and the word, "unity". Communion gives us a vision of common unity. Given that we are still in the throws of a contentious election, it can seem difficult to think about what can bring us together as people. But, perhaps, one possible truth is going back to basics of what we do share – the needs for food, shelter, and love. The human need for connection and care. It is often noted that human beings, on a cellular level, are 99% the same. Beneath the surface of skin color; language; places we call, "home,;" political understandings; where we find the holy; and all the other ways we categorize and compartmentalize each other; within us we are made of the same soil and star dust. But, you will correctly say, we certainly don't act that way! You are right. We don't. And the reasons why are complicated because we are complex. I don't always have rational or reasonable explanations for why I do what I do. Or, at least reasons I'd like to admit out loud to someone else. I remember when my kids were growing up and they did something I disapproved of I would ask, "Why did you do that?!" And they would innocently say, "I don't know." At the time I was frustrated by that response. But the more I grow, the more I realize that is the honest answer. I don't know why I do what I do many times. Words come out without thinking. Actions happen because I am on autopilot or fear has taken control of the wheel. On top of that, we are increasingly segregated into people who think like us (what is often called, "confirmation bias"). Add to that, if change is going to be too hard we justify why we'd rather NOT even start (what is called, "comfort bias"). Finding some sense of community or communion right now will be hard, holy work. It will take shattering the norm that we can't talk to each other. It will take risking listening to people who push our buttons. This moment is asking prayerful for maturity of both feeling our emotions honestly and then breathing through those initial reactions to stay in relationship. If your mind is like my, the initial reaction that what I just wrote shows the comfort bias we have. I think, "But what about this person whose racism or sexism or homophobia is too much?" Or what about that person, can I really change him? I am not sure. I am convicted by Ruby Sales who challenges us both to name where there is pain and to live the call of the redemption for all creation. I am convicted by Parker Palmer who writes when faithfulness is our standard, we are more likely to sustain our engagement with tasks that will never end: doing justice, loving mercy, and calling the beloved community into being. I will never complete the faithful work or justice/love/mercy, nor can I cease from prayerfully doing what I can, where I can. I am most certainly convicted by Jesus who broke bread and poured out wine with people who would desert, deny, and betray him. The one who both said, "Love your enemies" and then modeled that on the cross. I am not sure of every step on the path ahead. I will stumble and fall flat on my face. Most of all, I trust in God's grace and love that picks me up to take the next right step.

Prayer: May the truth of the communion table continue to work within my life this day and week. With God's love now more than ever. Amen.

Morning Meditation ~

In the year 2020, it is said that one day can feel like a week, one week can feel like a month, which is how I feel looking back at election day last week. On many levels the polarization, along with the pandemic and the problems of discrimination, have been overwhelming this year. Emotionally, I am drained from the rhetoric, all new experiences/encounters of living in the world right now, and the grief that has part of every day. Spiritually just trying to keep up as our faith goes digital and seeks to respond to the changes around us and within. Physically, we can feel tired either from being confined to our homes or when we do venture out worried about the rising number of cases across the country. I look at the mirror see the new gray hairs in my beard and think of what some members have said to me, "I earned those gray hairs!" Yup. One spiritual practice that can help us is a variation of the Examen each day. To ask, how am I doing? So often, in the blur of life, we don't really know how we are doing in our souls/hearts/minds. So often, amid the endless information in which we swim, we don't step back to ponder prayerful the state of our being and connection to God. We run from one event to the next or we constantly fill our homes with the chatter of the 24-hour-news cycle. And while there are many things that outside my control, there are still choices I do have right now on how I live. I can reflect on why I am feeling/doing/saying what I do. I don't need to race/rush to the next Zoom event, I can slow down. Today, I invite you to hold these questions:

1. What was one moment you felt close to God? When did the sacred shimmy down your spine or sing to your soul? Hold that moment in the palm of your hand.
2. What was one moment that seemed too chaotic or dissonant? When did you sense the nails on the chalkboard of your soul/mind/heart?
3. What is your prayer for the next right step in your life?

I pray you will lean in and listen to these questions today. Then repeat tomorrow. And the day after that and the day after that. Perhaps every day in this decade of a year we are calling 2020. Who knows, you might even continue this for all next year.

Prayer: God who invites us to live the questions that one day in Your love we might discover some answers, sit beside me as I ponder where You are and where I am and how we might be together.

Morning Meditation ~

Today, November 11 is Veterans Day but originally this day was called, "Armistice Day." On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month (i.e. November 11, 1918, exactly 102 years go today), the truce was declared that ended World War I, then known as "The Great War" and "the war to end all wars." "Armistice" is from the Latin *arma* ("arms") and *sistere* ("stand still"). Initially Congress said this this day, "should be commemorated with thanksgiving and prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace through good will and mutual understanding between nations." What a powerful statement for this year. Today, you can start with thanksgiving. I give thanks for my dad who served in the Navy, my father-in-law who was also in that branch of the military, for those who also wore the uniforms of the Army/Air Force/Marines/National Guard/Coast Guard. I give thanks for members in our church who worked at the Pentagon, those who left family to go to overseas, most recently to

Iraq or Afghanistan, and those who are stationed around the world right now. I give thanks that service to our country comes in many forms from medicine (those working on a vaccine right now and in hospitals) to teaching to leadership to fixing the potholes in the roads and making sure there is clean water from our faucets. We need many gifts of many people to make our communities function (which is really what politics is about). After you make the list of thanksgiving, I invite you to pray. Pray for our veterans, especially those who live in pain physically and emotionally. Pray for the medical staff around the world. Pray for those who are on the front line of this virus in stores and classroom. Pray for our leaders. Pray for your neighbor, especially the one you struggle to love. Then, listen – lean into God’s prayer for you today. Finally, find a way to exercise peace. There is that great line in “Let there be peace on earth,” that reminds us that peace begins within each of us. What a great invitation that we can live today. Peace found in our words and actions.

In honor of my dad’s service, I close with the prayerful words of the hymn “Eternal Father Strong to Save,” which is often called, “The Navy Hymn”.

Prayer: please pray/sing with me:

**Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm doth bond the restless wave,
Who bids the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.**

Amen.

Morning Meditation ~

Two weeks from today is Thanksgiving. For me, it doesn’t quite feel right because I know that Thanksgiving this year will be unique. I am wondering what sorts of plans you are making for that day? I know I won’t be joining church members at a restaurant for plates full of turkey and pieces of pie. It will be quieter and perhaps more somber given the state of the world with the pandemic. Yet, I know that the first Thanksgiving perhaps wasn’t the feast we now associate with the day (I will say more on that in the sermon on November 22nd – which is a total shameless plug). Yet, this year I am being invited to give thanks, not because I have to or because everyone else is, but because such an **act is life giving**. For me, thanksgiving isn’t just a day, it is a state of being. To be sure, it is a state of being that at times eludes and evades me, especially this year. At moments giving thanks can sometimes feel a bit forced. But when I begin to think about the blessings and my gratitude, it shifts my attitude.

How does such a shift of attitude toward gratitude start? Great question, I am glad you asked!

Recently I made a list of 50 things that bring me joy as part of a class I am leading on Zoom. Others in the group did the same. We shared some of our lists. It was a blessing. It was a moment that both gave voice to what brings me joy (family, ice cream, writing, reading, walking), but also hearing others ideas reminded me of additional experiences that bring me joy (like vacation or chocolate – not sure how I forgot those in my initial list).

I encourage you to think prayerfully about how you will approach Thanksgiving in a few weeks. I encourage you to sit down with a piece of paper, number one to fifty, and begin to make your list of what brings you joy. Note that you may need to start the list, pause, walk away, and come back. You may need to talk to others and share your lists with each other to be reminded of what warms your heart too. You may find some things on your list that you want to include on the Thanksgiving table – like chocolate and pizza – just because this year is different. Or things you want to do that week – like going for a walk and taking a photograph – to prepare your heart. As we turn toward Thanksgiving in a few weeks, may your heart and mine be open to God's grace and love every day.

Prayer – sing/pray with me: Praise God from whom all blessing flow; praise God all creatures here below; praise God above ye heavenly host; Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen!!

Morning Meditation ~

I started the week with communion and want to end the week with this sacrament. Specifically, Jesus' invitation that every time we take bread, break, and eat, we do so in remembrance of him. This isn't just confined to a sanctuary and communion where a minister is present. The communion table connects and extends to your dining room table when you take bread into your hands and break it. One of the blessings from digital worship is that you are living the priesthood of all believers. *You* are blessing the bread and consecrating the cup. Plus, the fact that your dining room table becomes an altar is an affirmation that I pray continues for years to come. There are two truths I hear. First – you are blessed by God and can celebrate communion any time you wish. Second - your home is a sanctuary and today at breakfast, lunch, and dinner is a holy meal.

The image that comes to mind is when I am eating a bowl of soup, there is always just a bit at the bottom I cannot get. So, I take a bite of roll to soak up the last little bit of goodness. That is a holy act.

I think seeing our dining room tables as communion tables reminds us of our connection to Christ every day and wherever we are. You are re-membered, which means re-connected and re-joined to the sacred, every time today you break bread and drink juice. I need reminders every day of the holy hovering and hanging around me. When I let this wisdom get a word in edgewise, I start to slow down at meals and savor what I am eating. I sense the connection to the good earth that yielded the apple or grapes or tomatoes that made the soup. We are interconnected to the soil that is in our souls from the food we eat and to God who crafts, creates, and loves into being all that is seen and unseen. I pray these words might sing to your soul and stay with you every time you pull a chair up to the table to eat today – for indeed, that is a holy moment of communion.

Prayer: Come to the table to grace, come to the table of love, come to the table of peace, your table is Christ's table, come and remember who/whose you are. Amen.