

World Communion Sunday

Today is World Communion Sunday. A day that several Christian Denominations around the world are joining together to take Holy Communion.

I have always enjoyed World Communion Sunday. When I take part in Communion on a day like this, I think about the millions of others taking Communion everywhere - all reflecting on this gift from God.

Holy Communion means different things to different people. To some, it is to reflect on the sacrifice Jesus made for all of us. For others, it is a way to get closer to God or even a way to touch God. For others yet, it is a way to show an outward sign of receiving the inward Grace God gives to all of us.

Most of the Christian denominations basically do Holy Communion the same way, but we all have some differences.

In some denominations you can't take Communion unless you are a member of their church, in others you must be baptized, for others you have to go through 12 weeks of classes.

For us, as United Methodists, we look at the scriptures, like the ones that Noel read for us, and nowhere did it say that you must be Baptized before receiving Communion.

Nowhere did it say that you must take a 12 week class in order to receive Communion. And absolutely nowhere does it say that you must join a certain church before receiving it.

It says, “Take this ALL of you and eat it.” Or take this ALL of you and drink it- THEN Jesus said that, “This is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.”

When I read that I think.... Wait – Jesus didn’t say that this was a new covenant only for a few select people of one denomination, or only for a select group who has been through a certain class – but he is telling us that it is for many people.

So, as United Methodists, we truly believe that Holy Communion was a gift given by Christ for us to get closer to him in a new way. To accept him into our lives. We shouldn’t be placing religious “Red Tape” between us and God.

Let’s enjoy this gift - the way Christ meant for us to enjoy it, by allowing anyone – of any age – that wants to accept Christ into their lives for the very first time, or for the millionth time – let’s allow them to take part in this celebration.

And if that person is too young to understand who God is, or maybe they are older but they haven’t accepted Christ yet and aren’t sure if they believe or not, these people as well should be able to take part in Holy Communion if they want as a way to assist in their seeking and their search for answers.

Holy Communion is a wonderful gift from God – one that is meant for us to share with others, not to keep all to ourselves.

Holy Communion is something we do have in common with most other Christian denominations.

Most Christian churches use a chalice and some type of bread. Some use little wafers that taste like cardboard, in another denomination you are actually supposed to kiss the pastor's hand when you take Communion.

In other churches you drink real wine right from the chalice and share germs with the people that drank before you - and in some churches they serve only grape juice – instead of real wine.

As United Methodists, we believe that anyone who wants to voluntarily take Holy Communion should be allowed to. For this reason, it was decided a long time ago to use grape juice.

Because there are many recovering alcoholics that want to participate in Holy Communion and because we allow children to receive Communion, it was decided to use grape juice, which in essence is nothing more than unfermented wine.

It started in 1869 when Dr. Thomas Bramwell Welch, a physician and dentist, successfully pasteurized Concord grape juice to produce an unfermented sacramental wine for fellow parishioners at his church in Vineland, NJ – where he was the communion steward.

I could leave off right there and it would be a nice story. Dr. Welch – “Welch’s Grape Juice” – created the first unfermented wine for use at his church.

But that isn't the whole story. Dr. Welch didn't start off his career as a physician or dentist. He first graduated from a Wesleyan Seminary and was a minister for the Wesleyan Methodist Church in New York.

After two appointments, his voice started to fail so he went to and graduated from medical school. Then, because the physical requirements of being a physician were too demanding, he became a dentist.

Before leaving his dental practice, he made a small sample of this unfermented wine simply to give to his church and the other Methodist Churches in his area. He thought it would be a good alternative to using wine. It was meant solely as a gift for local churches.

But demand grew – and grew some more and grew even more. So much so that the Welch Grape Juice Company today is the principal manufacture of unfermented wine (grape juice.)

When I think of this story it just amazes me. Here was a man who wanted to do something good for his local church – and maybe a few of the churches around him.

From reading about him, I don't see this man wanting to be a big captain of industry. I see a simple man that was strong in his faith.

This man was just trying to do something nice. He had no intentions of creating one of the largest juice and jelly distributors in the world.

Think about this – as he started to get contacted by other churches around his state, what do you think his reaction was? Maybe a little surprised that others were interested, maybe humbled a little, maybe unsure how to proceed or even if he should proceed with this.

Dr. Welch had a successful dental practice. Why would he want to give that up to start making unfermented wine – grape juice?

I think he realized that Holy Communion is a great gift from God that should be shared with as many people as possible. He was trying to do his part as a believer in Christ and realized that nothing should stand in anyone's way of enjoying the gift of Holy Communion.

So he closed his dental practice and made Grape Juice.

As a tribute to Dr. Welch, we always use Welch's grape juice for our Communion services here at Sanctuary.

Dr. Welch knew that when Jesus said, "Take this, all of you and drink it", that all of you really means all of you.

So as United Methodists, we earnestly believe that this is a gift that is available for anyone and everyone who is seeking a relationship or seeking a deeper relationship, with God.

Besides the wine and the bread, many Christian Denominations also have different ways to help parishioners prepare their hearts and minds to receive Holy Communion.

I used to be Roman Catholic. The Catholic church is full of beautiful rituals that are used to prepare the parishioners for Communion. They have creeds that everyone repeats before receiving, and a lot of liturgy or specific words they use as well.

Now, even among Methodist churches the Communion rituals vary. Even here at Sanctuary we vary how we prepare ourselves for Holy Communion from month to month.

Sometimes the sermon will just flow right into the breaking of the bread. Other times we might read liturgy or read a creed together.

Today, we are going to start off with a visual reminder that Holy Communion is a gift for everyone and anyone who wants to receive it.

There is a song that may be familiar to many of you and we will be placing it up on the screen in a moment. When it comes up, let's all sing it two or three times as the bread and grape juice are brought forward.

Normally we share in one loaf of bread – as a reminder that the bread represents the Body of Christ and that we are all part of that one Body.

Today, we are using several loaves of bread – they are red, yellow, black and white. This is to remind us that everyone is invited to be part of the one body of Christ no matter where we are from, how old we are, or what our skin color looks like.

Communion is a gift from God. It is important to remember that God loves us and wants us to accept Him and his gifts with our whole heart.

Let's remember our Christian brothers and sisters around the world that are taking part in World Communion Sunday and let's remember to pray for them this week as I am sure they will be remembering us in their prayers.

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