

“It Is God At Work In You”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, October 1, 2017
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Readings from Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7 and Phillipians 2:1-13

Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?’ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?’ So Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.’ Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’

Philippians 2:1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take the words and images that we carry within, the words that we've offered in song and in prayer, the words we've heard read from sacred scripture, and the words that you've laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless, and transform all of these words into the word of Christ, the word of life, the word of hope, and the word of peace that resides within each of us by the power of the Spirit. Transform all that we are, all that we think, so that we might become this word for others, that we might be your peace, and mercy, and grace in this world. All of these things we pray in Christ's faithful name. Amen.

Today we get to celebrate World Communion Sunday, a Sunday where Christians around the globe gather to share in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or Communion, or Eucharist, whatever they call it in their tradition. For us, we call it the Lord's Supper. We understand that it is Christ Jesus who invites us to this table, who welcomes us into this fellowship. And through the bread and the wine by the power of the Spirit, it is Christ who offers himself to us so that we might know that we are the people of God, that we're blessed by God, and loved by God, and cared for by God, and as the scripture said, so that we might know that it is God who is at work among each of us and us as a community, enabling us both to will and to work for God's good pleasure. This is a day where we not only are aware of our blessings, but we are mindful that those who gather at table around the globe are also blessed, whether it's a table like this in a beautiful sanctuary with choir and organ or it's a table gathered together in the midst of a disaster area with elements that are scraped together in order for people to gather and worship and to share on this World Communion Sunday, the sacraments.

We're blessed. We're blessed to have this place and this time. We're blessed to find ourselves in the condition that we do. And we're blessed that on this Sunday and other Sundays throughout the year, we have the Lord's Supper to remind us who we are as the people of God and what matters most. It matters that we are welcomed and fed. And for some of us, the image of our Christianity, if it is the cross, our image is brought forth here when we realize that Jesus says, "This is my body broken for you. Take and eat." There's always been something magical, and religious, and sacred about eating bread together and sitting at table. These are important things where we know that we are in fact welcomed into someone's family, welcomed into someone's presence, that we are cared for, and that we are loved. And today we celebrate that we are together.

Earlier this week, Jani and I had the privilege of attending a birthday celebration for the friend of a congregant. We were invited to a dinner at Sunset Country Club. The only person that we knew was the one who convened the dinner. We didn't know anyone else there. When we got there we were a little bit nervous. Would we know where to sit? Would we know who these people are? Would we know what to do? Would we embarrass ourselves? I went around the backside of the tables looking for our little nametag, when all of a sudden the guest of honor said, "David, you're right here next to me!" So Jannie and I went up and we sat down. We ordered some drinks. We had dinner. And there were 10 people around that table, only one of whom I knew well before that meal. But I can tell you, sitting at table with those strangers, the six others that Jannie and I didn't know-- because we were there at table, sharing a meal and conversation, we had one of the best times that we've had in a long time. Because there's something magic about sitting at a table with people, eating and talking, sharing stories, watching a story grow from one anecdote to another as everyone kind of chiming in. At one point we even talked about religion, which is relatively taboo in today's world. The people across from us were Roman Catholic and they told us the story of how they came to see themselves as missionaries. A pastor friend of theirs had come up just before a season the Christmas and said to the husband, "Hey, would you take one of these cards and sponsor a family?" He said, "Yeah, I'll do that." He sells insurance. He can afford to help out. So he took the card and he read it and the gifts that were wanted were underwear, and sweatshirts, and new socks. Children whose Christmas wishlists consisted of the necessities of life. He said that as he saw this, he kind of had a lump in his throat and he said to the pastor friend, "Hey. Why don't you give me four more of those?"

He and his wife continued to do this sort of ministry, and at one point she said she went to Aldi's to figure out how she could buy some food for these families and surprise them, even though it wasn't on their list. She said one year she went and found out that Aldi's had ham on sale for like \$2.39 a pound if you got the special on the Wednesday between 3:00 and 4:00 pm. I mean, she had it all figured out. And she went to the manager of the store and she said, "Well, how much ham do you have?" He's like, "Well, I got this here in the case and then I've got a whole pallet in the back." She's like, "I'll take the whole pallet." And he said, "Are you serious?" and she's like, "Yeah." And then she leans into the table. She said, "The best part

is it wasn't even 75 bucks [laughter]!" But she was able to buy a bunch of hams and make a whole bunch of people happy.

When I walked into church this day, someone handed me-- Bob Snyder-- a new business card, and said, "You might need this this week." It says, "I am the father of the bride. Nobody's paying much attention to me today, but I can assure that I am getting my share of attention, for the banks and several business firms are watching me very closely [laughter]." I kid you not. There it is. Yes, this week especially, I get to be the father of the bride, as many of you know. And like the card says, I'm the one who's watching the dollars and tens of dollars and hundreds of dollars flow out of our checking account very freely. But this Wednesday, family starts to come, and then Thursday even more, and I realize that what I'm most paying attention to is "What are we going to eat?" and "How are we going to get everyone together?" I love to cook. I love to see people come together. It's almost like we're having a little family reunion. But I realize that when we gather together, it'll give us the opportunity to reconnect with each other. Some of these folks, we haven't seen or five or six years. Some of them haven't seen each other in that long as well. And so when we come together and have the opportunity to break bread, in a way we have the opportunity to bless each other and to remember that we are loved and cared for, not just by God, but by family also.

On Thursday night, I get to host the annual or the George Banks Backyard Barbeque. In 1991, there was a remake of the famous Spencer Tracy 1950's classic Father of the Bride starring Steve Martin and Diane Keaton. Steve Martin is the father of the bride and he kind of goes berserk in anticipation of marrying off his oldest child, his only daughter. At one point as he's totally frustrated with the amount of attention he's been getting from businesses and others, he goes to the grocery store to buy hot dogs and buns. You may have remembered this scene. He's in the bread aisle. A stockboy comes up to me or comes up-- there is a Freudian slip [laughter]. If you're at Schnucks this week and you see me in the bread aisle, just come over and give me a hug, okay [laughter]?

A stockboy sees George and comes up to him and says, "Excuse me, sir. What are you doing?" George has a package of hot dog buns and he's ripping it open and trying to get out four buns. And he says, "I'll tell you what I'm doing. I want to buy eight hot dogs and eight hot dog buns to go with them. But no one sells eight hot dog buns. They only sell 12 hot dog buns. So I end up paying for 4 buns I don't need. So I'm removing the superfluous buns [laughter]." Stockboy, "I'm sorry, sir. But you're going to have to pay for all 12. They're not marked individually." "Yeah. And you want to know why? Because some big shot over at the wiener company got together with some big shot over at the bun company and decided to rip off the American public because they think the American public is a bunch of trusting nitwits who will pay for everything they don't need rather than make a stink." Manager says, "Can we get security?" George says, "Well, they're not ripping off this nitwit anymore because I'm not paying for one more thing I don't need. George Banks says no!" The stockboy says, "Who's George Banks?" And George says, "Me." Hopefully, he doesn't say David [laughter].

By paying attention to what we'll be feeding our guests, in a sense, we're paying attention to how we might allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine forth through our activities, and our intentions, and our time, and bless those who will gather together with us. This is why we are being fed communion, in order that we might be reminded of the blessing that comes to each of us, and that we might have that light of faith shine within so that when we go out into the world, we can be a blessing for others as well. World Communion Sunday, we gather here in this beautiful space and yet others gather where disaster has occurred. One of the members of Presbyterians Disaster Response team is named Isabel Santana Rivera. She lives in Puerto Rico and sent this email just a couple of days ago. She says "Hi. We're okay. This was and is a horrible experience. I do have a good house and I did everything that needed to be done before the disaster. Nothing prepares me for this experience. With no communication, it is really hard to help the people. There are lots of needs. We're working with FEMA 12 hours and when I finish, then I am a survivor again." She's a volunteer through PDA with FEMA in Puerto Rico. "My family is okay. Thanks,

God for that. Please continue your prayers for us. We really need it. Love, Isabel."

So as we gather this day to share bread and cup remembering that Christ blesses and loves us, let us also remember that there are people who are gathering in the midst of disaster in Puerto Rico who are taking this bread and this cup with us for we are one body in Christ forever, amen.