

Title: One Bread, One Body
 10/4 Sermon - World Communion Sunday (Year A)
 Rev. Lindsey Odom
 First Reading: Psalm 34:1-10
 Second Reading: John 6:51-59

One of my SMPC favorite mission traditions is our annual food drive for Nourish Up. I love it because it is one of those mission opportunities that truly involves everybody. Before the food drive even begins, our youth help assemble the bags and attach the tags that tell us what food is needed. They even create little scenes and displays out of canned goods to advertise the food drive and remind us to participate. Then those bags go out into the congregation, and people of every generation take part. Children go with their parents to the grocery store. Individuals and families fill one bag, or two bags, with canned goods and other needed items. Week by week, the food begins to pile up here at the church. And then, at the end of the drive, our children, youth, and families have the opportunity to help load all of those bags onto the Nourish Up truck. I love watching that part because you can actually see the difference all of our contributions make. Dozens of bags begin to fill a truck. And a truck filled with food bags becomes meals for our hungry neighbors.

There is something holy about watching an empty truck become full. No one person fills it. No one family fills it. It takes all of us. Each person in our community of faith brings something, and somehow all of those individual offerings become something much larger than any one of us could have accomplished alone, as we help fill our neighbors' need for food

Our first Scripture reading this morning from the book of Psalms gives us an invitation, as it says, "taste and see that the Lord is good." I love that the psalmist does not simply tell us to understand that the Lord is good. The psalmist does not say, "think about God's goodness," or "learn about God's goodness." Rather, the invitation is much more embodied than that. The psalm says, "taste, see, and experience for yourself the goodness of God."

In the Gospel of John, Jesus takes that embodiment even further when he says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever (v. 51)." Jesus does not simply tell the crowd that he has bread to offer them. Jesus says that he, himself, is the bread of life. Jesus has just fed a crowd of thousands with five loaves and two fish. Their physical hunger mattered to Jesus. But as John 6 continues, Jesus moves the conversation from the bread he has multiplied and given to the crowd to the bread that he himself is. Jesus is not simply a provider of bread. Jesus is the Bread of Life. The food eaten by the crowd satisfies their hunger for a time, but Jesus offers something enduring: himself, the living bread given "for the life of the world." Jesus is both the source and the sustenance of life.

The theologian Norman Wirzba writes beautifully about Jesus as the Bread of Life. Jesus, he says, is not simply someone who provides bread; rather, Jesus reveals the fullest meaning of nourishment itself. To receive Christ is not simply to consume something that satisfies us. We receive Christ and are changed by Christ. We abide in Christ and Christ abides in us. And that transformation turns us outward. We are fed so that we might attend to the hungers of our community and world.

Ben Durham, who is one of our SMPC youth, and like every teenager in North Carolina who wants a driver's license, needed to complete sixty hours of supervised driving with a parent. That is a lot of time in the car, especially for a busy teenager. But Ben and his mom, Julie, found a way to turn that inward need of required driving hours into an opportunity to serve someone else. Before Ben graduated, Ben drove with his mom weekly to deliver the one hundred bagged lunches that our church prepares each month for Roof Above, where those lunches help feed neighbors experiencing homelessness.

Think about that transformation for a moment. Something Ben needed for himself became an opportunity to meet the needs of somebody else. An hour that could have simply been about accumulating driving time became an hour spent making sure another person had a meal. Ben still got his driving hours. But the circle became bigger. What began with, "*What do I need?*" became, "*How can what I need also become an opportunity to care for somebody else?*"

I think there is something profoundly Eucharistic about that. Because Communion asks us to undergo a similar transformation. We come to God's Table hungry. We come because we need grace. We need forgiveness. We need strength. We need Christ. Christ invites us precisely because we are hungry. But Christ does not feed us so that our faith can end with the question, "*What do I need?*" Christ nourishes us and sends us out from the Table to love and serve others.

Today is World Communion Sunday, a day when Christians across cultures, languages, denominations, nations, and communities gather around the communion table. We come to the same Christ. We receive the same grace. We are nourished by the same Bread of Life. We are reminded that the body of Christ is so much bigger than the people gathered in our sanctuary.

John Calvin affirmed this as he understood the Lord's Supper not simply as a private encounter between an individual believer and Jesus, but as something that binds the whole body together. Calvin writes that because Christ has one body "of which he makes us all partakers," we too are made one body through our participation. The bread itself represents this unity. For Calvin, Communion is a "bond of love." We are joined to Christ, and because we are joined to Christ, we are joined to one another.

That means the Lord's Supper gives us an opportunity to practice unity in a world that is so often defined by division. Around the globe, Christ-followers gather around one shared purpose, around one Table, receiving Christ together. Paul puts it another way in 1 Corinthians: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

One bread. One body. That is important because our communion table is not a Presbyterian table. It is not SMPC's table. It is the Lord's Table. We do not gather because we have earned our seat or because we have somehow proven ourselves worthy of the meal. We gather because Christ invites us. God is the host. We receive Christ and are nurtured and nourished by Christ. And the Spirit gathers the Church across every time and place.

We know how to feed and nurture and nourish those inside our circle. But what about outside our circle?

What would it look like if the nourishment we receive at this Table did not stop at the edge of this sanctuary? The grace we taste through the bread and the cup changes the way we encounter

people. Nourished by bread and cup, we nourish the person whose story we do not know, or to make room for the person who does not look like us, think like us, worship like us, speak like us, or come from the same place as us? At the table we are seen and fed, so that the person whose hunger has become easy for everybody else to ignore, we notice and take care of. If we proclaim Christ as the Bread of Life while ignoring people who do not have bread to eat, something about our proclamation is incomplete.

That is the challenge and the gift of World Communion Sunday. Christ is constantly widening our circle, feeding us, nourishing us, sustaining us, and loving us so that we can do the same for others.

But do not only taste and remember. Christ is calling us to taste and be changed.

We do not come to this Table simply to remember Christ's sacrifice and receive Christ. We come to abide in Christ so deeply that Christ begins to reshape how we live. The nourishment we receive at God's Table becomes nourishment we offer to others. The welcome of our open communion table becomes the welcome we extend to all God's children. The grace we receive becomes the grace we share. The love that gathers us around this Table becomes love carried out the doors of the church.

One bread. One body. One Table stretching farther than we can see or comprehend.

Come to the Table. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Receive Christ who is the Bread of Life. Be nourished by God's grace. Be joined again to one another. And then rise from this Table and go into God's hungry world, ready to feed, nurture, nourish, welcome, and love. Because Christ, the living bread, has been given not only for us, but for the life of the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.