

World Communion Sunday

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 02 October 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Raymond Joso

John 6: 24-35, 31; Luke 17:5-10

Contemporary Reading: *The Table With No Edges* by Andrew King

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under "Sunday Reflections" tab

Today we celebrate World Communion Day, a day where it encourages us to celebrate Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation. On this day we also make time to focus and observe the Lord's Supper.

The Holy Communion consists of the ordinary elements, bread and wine, the table, and the people invited to that table. It takes on extraordinary meaning in the Christian sacrament of Communion. For Christians around the world, and for everyone. For everyone.

I invite you today to reflect with me why we do take communion.

Ask yourself, why do I take communion? ...

See, for me, I take communion because I am reminded of my own limitation. I am not perfect. I am reminded of my own hunger.

Everyone in this world. You and I, the person sitting next to you. In this world everyone, no exception, live as hungry people. Not just physical hunger, but hungry and searching, looking for something that will sustain and nourish life. Something that will feed and energise, something that will fill and satisfy.

The images of hunger are based in human experiences of deprivation. It recognizes the need for things that come to people from outside themselves, from the surroundings, from external sources.

If the need expressed in hunger is not met, then eventually it will culminate in death if we don't eat. Physically we will die. Don't try this at home!

This pattern enables the image of hunger to function as metaphors for the human need to relate to God in faith.

I want to use this image to show that we have an inherent need for God. We do need the Divine, We do need the Creator, We do need the Sustainer, We do need the Spirit, We do need the Giver of Life... because everyone one of us is looking for that "food", that "bread and wine". But if we get it from the wrong places and not from God...we're in trouble!

Jesus shared with his disciples this "bread and wine".

Bread of love, forgiveness, kindness, generosity, joy, peace. Jesus shares this, not just with his speech, but with his actions.

The problem is not just that we are hungry, but the kind of “bread” we eat.

What kind of bread do we take in to our life?

Think about the various spiritual and thinking food being taken in our spiritual lives and in our community today.

When we watch television, we hear the radio, we read the news, we surf the internet, we sometimes hear shouts of discrimination,

shouts of racism,

negativity,

violence,

war,

betrayal,

hostility,

resentment.

See our community continues to keep eating these kinds of bad food that de-personalizes another human being.

We eat the bread of fear, of loneliness, of isolation, bread of sorrow or guilt, bread of power and control, or bread of revenge, selfishness - we eat ALL kinds of bad bread.

Our community here in Sydney city is full of bread and yet far too many live hungry, empty and searching.

That says something about our appetites and the bread we have eaten.

It's a sure sign that the bread we have eaten cannot give real life. Jesus said it is perishable bread that nourishes only a perishable life.

It leaves us wanting only more of the same.

Not all food sustains and grows life. Not all food is nutritious. If you want to know the nutritional value of the food you have to look beyond the appearance. You've got to ask: where did it come from? What are its ingredients? Racism did not just come in by its own. Where did it come from?

If you look at children playing with each other, they will not look at their skin colour and say *“Oh I'm not going to play with you; I'm not going to talk with you because you don't speak the same language.”* They will just play. It comes from somewhere. There are ingredients towards it.

That's what Jesus is teaching in today's gospel. The people have shown up hungry – in John 6. If you read the previous story, just the day before Jesus fed 5000 of them with five

loaves and two fish. The next day they show up and their first question is, "*Rabbi, when did you come here?*"

So, Jesus yesterday fed 5000. Yet not a single person acknowledged that miracle. Acknowledge and give thanks for God's generosity. The next day they come and say "When did you come in?" It sounds to me like they are worried they might have missed the next meal, instead of God's generosity. It sounds to me like they are worried that Jesus started without them and they are too late. They saw no sign, no miracle, in yesterday's feeding. They saw nothing more than fish and bread. They either refused or were unable to see beyond the fish and bread. They are interested only in their own appetites and Jesus knows it.

They seek a material solution to their spiritual problem. Therefore, Jesus tells them, "*Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you*" (6:27).

The comment also warns us that those who make perishable food the ultimate object of their life have set a direction that will end in their own deaths.

Now we can hear this when people tell their stories. One of my favourite questions that I normally ask people is not: *how are you*, because normally there's a default answer to that. If you say "*Hi, how are you*", they say "*good!*" and they walk away. Whether they're good or not, we don't know. So normally I say "*tell me about your life?*"

If the stories of their life only fix on finite and perishable food; for example defining their life with what they have, what people say about them, or even what they do as an occupation, then it turns them away from the divine giver. If you introduce yourself, or someone is introduced to you, and if you ask them: "*tell me about your life?*" And they will start talking about their job or I'm an accountant or I'm a Minister or I'm a this or I'm a that. The moment that kind of job or that kind of possession is taken away – life becomes empty. And that is why this reflection at this World Communion Sunday allows us to reflect on who we are. And why do we need that source of life? Why do we need that Creator, that Sustainer?

You see, if we all know that we are the beloved sons and daughters of God – and that is our identity, then it doesn't matter anymore what you do, or what you have, or what people say about you. It doesn't worry you anymore because whether you are Jew or Greek, gentiles, Indonesian, Korean, Malawian or Australian, free or slaves, women or men, gay or straight, we are all one in God. Doesn't matter anymore. You and I are the beloved sons and daughters of God. We are all in ONE family of God.

Just like in the second reading today, from the Gospel of Luke, I can see that the Body of Christ goes far beyond those who circle the table in our church. It is an extension to those whom we will most likely never meet – which in turn compels us to live in the world as if every person is a brother or sister in Christ. And every cell or being of my body, of your cell in your body must act with gratitude for the gift of Christ.

Jesus in this story that we found in Luke, instead of taking a place of superiority, sitting exclusively and taking a place at the table, Jesus encourages us to prepare and put on an apron - to serve lovingly, inclusively. And in the Luke gospel, when some leaders protest that tax collectors and sinners should not be welcomed into God's family, Jesus defends their place at the table by telling the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost children. Jesus will defend those people because he believed in inclusivity.

When we believe in Jesus, eating, ingesting, and taking him into our lives, we live differently. When we eat this bread and drink this wine, we make a commitment that we live differently. We make a commitment that is different! We see ourselves and one another as persons created in the image and likeness of God ... rather than as obstacles or issues, or something we can manipulate, or something that can be overcome. We see it differently. We see God in every single creation.

We trust the silence of prayer rather than the words of argument. We choose love. The Christian faith encourages us to look at love; forgiveness rather than anger and retribution. We relate with intimacy and vulnerability rather than superficiality and defensiveness. We listen to God's voice rather than our own. Ultimately, we seek life rather than death.

"I am the bread of life," Jesus tells the people. *"Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* He is offering the people himself. His life story is the imperishable bread that nourishes and sustains imperishable life.

Jesus makes us the same offer. He offers himself to us in every one of our relationships: family, friends, strangers, enemies, those who agree with us, and those who disagree. In every situation and each day of our life we choose the bread we will eat, perishable or imperishable. In so doing we also choose the life we want. What kind of community we want.

So I wonder, this World Communion Day, what bread will we eat today?