

October 1, 2017 • World Communion Sunday

## “Going Deeper: The Interests of Others”

Sermon by the Rev. Patricia Farris



*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.*

Today is the special Sunday in our church year we call World Communion Sunday. Begun some 80 years ago in 1936 through the efforts of the Presbyterian Church, in that moment between the two World Wars, World Wide Communion Sunday as it was first called, was created to bring our hearts together in love, to remind us of all we hold in common with our brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world, and to re-commit ourselves to the well-being of all God's children in every land.

The great teacher and reformer of the church, Martin Luther, taught that having shared this sacrament together we actually become part of one another. We become “brothers and sisters, he said, “fellow heirs with our Lord Jesus Christ.” By eating the same bread, Luther preached, we become one. We become part of one another. We become one bread, he said. The needs of the other become our own. The welfare of the other becomes our own—needs for food, for security, and for love.

Today as we share in this sacrament of World Communion, we are one with over three billion Christians in this sacrament of unity and life. In the United Methodist family alone, we count some 12.8 million spanning across six continents, with different cultures, ethnic traditions, national histories and understandings of Christian faith and practice.

Awesome, isn't it? Three billion others with whom, this day, we are one. All kinds of Christians. We gather at this one table—all cultures, all languages. We are American, Mexican, Canadian, Native American. We are Iranian, Brazilian, French, Vietnamese, and German. We are Armenian, Palestinian, Filipino, Persian and Chinese. We are Hawaiian, Japanese, Korean and Indian. We are Russian, Austrian and Australian. We are Haitian, Puerto Rican, British and Zimbabean.

One in Christ Jesus, we hear and understand the Word each in our own language, in our own, culture, our own context, and together we serve God in the world.

During World War II, Rev. J.B. Phillips, a British Anglican priest was serving as pastor of the [Church of the Good Shepherd](#) in London. He was so disappointed to find that the youth in his church did not understand the Bible, that he began to paraphrase the New Testament in [modern English](#), while sitting in the [bomb shelters](#) during the [London Blitz](#). The youth were drawn to his translation because they could finally understand what the Bible was saying.

But Phillips knew that reading of the words was not the end of the disciple's journey, but the beginning. In a later book he wrote: “suppose Christianity is not a religion but a way of life, a falling in love with God, and, through [God] a falling in love with our fellows. Of course, such a way is hard and costly, but it is also joyous and rewarding even in the here-and-now. People who follow that Way know beyond all possible argument that they are in harmony with the purpose of God, that Christ is with them and in them as they set about [God's] work in our disordered world.”

Doing God's work in our “disordered world...” One of the powerful things about remembering this morning that we are a world church is that we can instantly imagine the incredible wealth of resources God has strategically placed globally for the work of mission in this disordered world God so loves. We are one congregation here in Santa Monica, but we are hardly alone.

We are connected in a holistic way that makes it possible for us to take on, for example, the eradication of malaria, or the providing of safe drinking water, or the rebuilding of homes and communities after earthquakes, hurricanes and floods and know that we can instantaneously connect with people and churches and resources and expertise wherever God needs us to go and to be and to serve. We are one.

We embody in our ministry and mission, in our understanding of who we are in the world, what can best be described by a new word that's come into usage: *glocal*. A combination of global and local, it refers to the relationship between global and local issues, needs and developments. Christians are glocal people, for every congregation, every member is also intimately bound to one another, here in our community and all around the world.

As our sermon series continues—*Going Deeper; Faith for Such a Time as This*—it strikes me that this sense we are to feel in our bones and in our hearts of being one, being bound together, has never been more important, more critical for the sake of the world itself. We are so deeply divided and fearful of one another. So many are suffering terribly from the devastations of nature, famine, and war.

How will these disasters, and our responses to them, shape who we are? We will truly be our brother's, our sister's keeper? Will we resolve to invest our faith, our hope, our resources in the healing of the world?

Our United Methodist pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Plano, Texas, remarked in the last week: "Disasters erase the lines that divide us." Maybe. We would hope so. We've all heard incredibly moving stories from Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, Mexico of strangers helping strangers, ignoring all dividing lines of race, age, ethnicity, language.

As Christians, our faith adds a deeper and critical layer of faith and insight to that basic humanitarian impulse that should call us back, if ever we are tempted to turn away from another's need. We are all one, through the grace and love of God. All of us children of the one God, made one at the holy table of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

For us Christians, this unity is the reality that should be normal, and should shape how we think and how live in our battered and hurting world. As we commune on this World Communion Sunday, it is our privilege and our bounden duty, to remember that the Christ who lives for us here in this sacrament lives for each of us as well as for all our dear sisters and brothers wherever this meal is celebrated this day. That through Christ, we are one with each other and one in ministry to all the world.

We who seek to live as Christ's followers, Paul says to us today, are to "look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others." Or as JB Phillips translated these verses: "...if your experience of Christ's encouragement and love means anything to you, if you have known something of the fellowship of his Spirit, and all that it means in kindness and deep sympathy, do make my best hope for you come true! Live together in harmony, live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you."

So let us prepare to receive this sacrament, and as we come forward this morning, let us see in our mind's eye, that we are part of a great procession, a very large family, streaming forward to this table from the four corners of the earth.

May the Lord Jesus Christ increase our faith this very day that we, transformed, one bread, one Body, might witness to the world this love that can break down all dividing walls and cause wars to cease, forging swords into pruning hooks, this love that can free the slaves and heal the sick and mend the broken-hearted and open the eyes of the blind, this love that opens our hearts and our pocketbooks and our sense of what is possible, this love that can make all things new.

May God increase our faith this day and make us one.

Amen.