

“The World at Our Table”

John 17:1-5, 20-21; John 1:35-39a; Psalm 34:8a – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – October 6, 2024
World Communion Sunday

*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that as we gather at your table,
our hearts and our lives might grow to match your love. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.*

Have you ever been to an awkward dinner party? Honestly, I'm not sure we have enough of these in our lives. Given our Christian convictions, we really ought to be doing that sort of thing more often. You would think, with as large as awkward dinner parties loom in popular culture, that they would be a somewhat common occurrence. But it seems to me that we've grown so averse to any level of awkwardness that we have learned to structure our lives so that such things rarely happen. Who even has time to host dinner parties anymore, let alone ones with the potential to make everyone uncomfortable?

It's unfortunate, really, because awkward dinner parties would be really good practice for following Jesus. What is World Communion Sunday, after all, if not an awkward dinner party? If we say that we're gathering at this table to share in the life abundant offered by Christ Jesus and that doing so unites us with fellow Christians all around the world, why would we be surprised if things get a little messy? Jesus is kind of famous for putting people on the spot, asking difficult questions, exposing hypocrisy, telling, you know, the truth, even when it wasn't polite. If we're inviting the world to our table, this table that is really Christ's table, why wouldn't we expect to hear him

asking those same hard questions of us, through the voices of our global neighbors?

The gospels are full of stories of Jesus seeing people more clearly than they saw themselves. Nathanael being snarky and Jesus exclaiming, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” instead of just saying “you don’t really think before you speak, do you?” The woman at the well, describing her experience with Jesus by saying, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” Why would we think our encounters with Jesus would be any different?

The thing about the unity in Christ that we celebrate today is that it’s both invitational and confrontational. “Come and see!” “Taste and see!” But also, “that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe.” We are invited to this table. And everyone else will be there too. We are invited to see Christ present in every face, in every voice, in every witness shared at this table. We are invited to listen to the voice of Jesus, as it comes through our dinner partners, opening our hearts to difficult truths that we’d rather ignore. It may be that our global siblings in Christ know things about us that we haven’t dared to face.

What could our fellow Christians in Congo, struggling to get mpox vaccines for their communities, teach us about resisting a health care system that does not serve the people? What could siblings in Christ in China teach us about the importance of keeping our faith separate from the empire we live under? How could our hearts be broken open if we listened to the cries of Christians in Palestine? Kairos Palestine issued a statement yesterday titled, “Still Another Cry from Palestinian Christians.” They

remind us that their suffering is funded and enabled by our country, among others.

They note that they are “saddened by the lack of solidarity in so many quarters of the global church,” asking, “what more must we do to stir your attention and action?”¹

Did you know you were coming to an awkward dinner party today? Is there a reason we don't expect that every Sunday? “Taste and see that God is good,” we proclaim, but there is so much we must swallow before the sweetness registers in our system. This unity we celebrate is invitational. The question is whether we're prepared for what it's inviting us into. Come and see! Come and see how Jesus is turning everything upside down, and how marvelous it is! Come and see what the world could be like if every child of God was cherished and given the dignity they deserve. Taste and see what it means to truly live in full liberation, neither exploited nor exploiting others. Taste and see how precious life becomes when we truly listen to one another, not just those who tell stories we recognize as our own, but also to those whose stories challenge our understanding of the way the world works.

We are in a moment in history when we, as the church, need to take our ministry of invitation seriously. If the church has a credibility problem, it's because we have forgotten who we are called to be. Jesus prayed that we might be one, so that the world might believe that this movement he began was of God. Our unity is our witness; and our unity is broken. We stopped listening to one another, as the siren calls of national security convinced us our siblings in Christ were people to be put on watch lists. We

¹ https://www.kairopalestine.ps/images/Kairos_Palestine_statement_-_Oct_7th_2024_English.pdf

stopped breaking bread with fellow Christians, as the depth of the world's suffering made us close up our hearts. Our unity is broken, so our witness is faltering. We are failing to offer anything different from what the rest of the world is selling. An awkward dinner party can be a hard sell, so we gave up. But still... "taste and see that God is good," we murmur. Somewhere in there, we want to believe that there is glory beyond the awkwardness. Somewhere deep inside, we know that when siblings in Christ from across the globe tell us truths about ourselves, it's as if we met Jesus at the well, refreshing, bracing, liberating. "The truth shall set you free," he said, and though it's terrifying, we know he's right.

We can stand to be part of this awkward dinner party, precisely because we know this is the Table of Grace, where the broken bread is what makes us whole, and the cup being poured out is what draws us together. So let us sit and listen and feast and love and weep and laugh and listen some more. Let us taste the goodness of God, together with our neighbors from far and near. Let us lay down our arms and take up our cross, that we might be faithful followers of our Gracious Host. Come and see!