

World Communion Sunday/Year C

October 6, 2019

2 Timothy 3:14-17; Galatians 3:23-29; John 6:48-51; Acts 2:42-46

“Book, Bath, Bread”

2 Timothy 3:14-17: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Galatians 3:23-29: “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

John 6:48-51: “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Acts 2:42-46: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,”

Pastor: The Word of the Lord. **People: Thanks be to God!**

World Communion Sunday is an ideal time to remember that you and I are people of the Book, people of the Bath, and people of the Bread. Today, I invite us to think about what it means to live our lives guided by the Holy Scriptures of the Bible, the good Book, what it means to live as the washed clean, claimed, and baptized followers of Jesus, and what it means to be welcome at God's table, fed, loved, and sent forth to serve. Book, bath, bread, these are important for us in our walk with God.

One of the things that unites Christians in this world, no matter their culture, doctrine, or tradition is that we are people of the Bible. People in my life have told me ever since I can remember that the Bible is God's word to us. They used words to describe the Bible such as holy, sacred, and authoritative. I can remember as a little child, my dad's parents, my Nanny and Papa going on a trip to the holy land and bringing me back my own small Bible with an olive wood cover. I treasured it and believed that it must have been one just like Jesus read! None of my friends had anything like it, and so I enjoyed making a big deal about it and kept it in a treasured spot in my room.

How about you? Is there a Bible that has a treasured spot in your life? Why? What does God's word mean to you today? Will you allow yourself to consider the idea of falling in love either for the first time or all over again with God's word?

This is part of what the Apostle Paul is doing when he writes to his protégé Timothy. Paul invites Timothy to fall in love all over again with God's story of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is something to be treasured each and every day of our lives, and the stories of Scripture throughout the 66 books and letters of the Bible are a never ending staircase of possibility for us to explore in life.

God's Word comes to us as a gift from God and is specifically "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."

Other than here at church, when is the last time you read the Bible or your Bible? Is Bible reading a regular part of your daily routine? If it is not, let's not judge one another. But I would urge us to take steps to get engaged in God's Word daily. I personally prefer the early morning to read the Bible as I begin my day. For years I have enjoyed the American Bible Society's daily Bible reading that comes via email. You can easily sign up for it. Try it out.

In addition to a daily reading, you and I grow in our discipleship when we explore God's Word together—in worship, in small groups, in Sunday School classes—with others who know more than us and less than us. I want us to spend time and energy to go deeper into God's Word in the months and years ahead of us, but that means some of you need to take time to step up and teach, and many of you need to make time to attend a group or study. Please be in prayer about this aspect of our lives. John Calvin said, "The more we know about ourselves, the more we know about God. The more we know about God, the more we know about ourselves." The Bible is God's written word to help us know about God and in so doing we learn more about who we are.

In addition to being people of the good Book, we are people of the Bath. The water of baptism is our entry point into the Christian community, God's family. What does it mean to you that you are baptized, marked with water, claimed by God, a member of God's own family, in life and in death? This meant so much to Martin Luther centuries ago that as he put on his coat and hat before he left his home, he touched his head as he looked in the mirror and exclaimed, "I am baptized. I am baptized."

One of the great joys for me on sabbatical was to wander into all kinds of churches when we were in Rome, most of them Roman Catholic, and at the entry of all was a font with water in it. It is there for Christians to dip a finger in and mark their forehead with the sign of the cross to remember their baptism. When Sarah and I worshipped on the island some during the summer, I loved pausing at the baptismal font at St Peter's on the way to communion so that I could mark my self with cool water just before I received the bread and the wine. They serve real wine!

Baptism is a very big deal for Christians, and for us Reformed Presbyterians it is one of our two sacraments. One main reason baptism is so important for us is that until Jesus comes the only way to be among God's elect is by birth. You were either born Jewish or you were not. When Jesus comes, he opens the door wide for all who want to follow. Repent of sin, get baptized, and follow. All of us are one in Jesus: Jew, Greek, Slave, Free, Male, Female, Rich, Poor, American Citizen, Immigrant, Foreigner, Gay, Straight, Trans, Questioning, White, Black, Latino, Asian, Cuban, Canadian, Russian, the list is very long...all of us belong to God. Baptism means there are no second class citizens in God's kingdom. None. Zilch. Zero.

One of the things we hold dear about the grace-drenched claims of baptism is that even little babies who are not able to confess their sins, can be baptized. Scripture tells us more than once that entire households are baptized because God's grace is something to be celebrated; it is earned by no one other than Jesus and freely given to us to receive in faith, and faith, too, is God's gracious gift. Will you remember your baptism right now, this week, for the rest of your life? If you or your children have not been baptized, please talk to Pastor Julie or to me. We would love to pour God's water upon you and proclaim God's grace.

Both the Bible and Baptism, the Book and the Bath, teach us about grace, and so does the Bread we eat at our Lord's Table. The Bread of Holy Communion is special for many reasons. In the Upper Room long ago on the night of Jesus' betrayal, he and the disciples are observing the Passover, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They remember the saving acts of God from the time of Moses when God rescues God's people from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh.

According to John, Jesus takes the form of a servant and washes their feet, and then he gives the bread new meaning, saying, "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." The bread becomes a metaphor for the body of Jesus Christ who lives and dies for your sin and mine. Jesus breaks the bread to feed others, and that sacred act reminds us of all the sacrificial ways Jesus shares himself with us and the world.

Some traditions believe that when the Words of Institution are spoken, a miracle occurs and the bread literally transforms into the body of Jesus. When we eat it, we are feasting upon his presence in a powerful way; it is still bread in substance but in essence it is Jesus himself. This is called Trans-substantiation.

Other traditions, ours being one of them, affirm the symbolic meaning of the bread, that in essence and substance, the bread represents or symbolizes the body of Jesus, our servant Lord. When we feast upon it, we share in the mystery and wonder of the Holy Spirit in an unexplainable way. This is called Con-substantiation.

No matter the tradition, the sharing of bread is holy, and the Lord's Supper is one of our sacraments because Jesus commands us to feast upon the bread and to share his love around his table. Many churches do not agree on how often this sharing should take place. The Lord's Supper happens at every single service of a Catholic Mass as well as at Episcopalian and Anglican services. From the Protestant Reformation until now (500 plus years), some churches observe the Lord's Supper once a quarter to once a month.

I hope that we will remember according to our lesson from Acts 2 today that the early disciples of Jesus shared the bread every time they gathered, along with prayer, and when they went to their homes and shared bread they did so with “glad and generous hearts.” Will you share your bread that way?

World Communion Sunday is a time of coming together, of pure Spirit-blessed ecumenism, where we put our unity in Jesus Christ as brothers and sisters ahead of our doctrine and traditions. Millions of Christians across the globe share the bread and cup of Jesus today in the hope that God will help us become stronger in our unity. What a much needed and glorious thing!

We at First Presbyterian Church of Fernandina Beach observe the sacrament of our Lord’s Supper on the first Sunday of each month and on special holy days of the year such as Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve. We also offer it more frequently during the seasons of Advent and Lent, and we take it to our homebound and hospitalized members often.

When you feast upon the bread of Jesus today, please examine yourself seriously and seek God to reveal to you ways to serve with gratitude. What does the bread of Jesus mean to you? What can it mean as you strive to grow in your faith?

As people of the Book, bathed in the Bath of baptism, and fed with Bread of Jesus, we are so very fortunate. Thomas Troeger, pastor and hymn writer, reminds us of how fortunate we are with these words of a hymn he wrote, such a wonderful picture our sacrament. Listen:

Look who gathers at Christ’s table! Hear the stories that they bring. Some are weeping; some are laughing; some have songs they want to sing. Others ask why they’re invited, burdened by the wrong they’ve done. Christ insists all are welcome. There is room for everyone.

Clouds of light surround the table; ancient followers appear, saints confessing how they wrestled with their guilt, their doubt and fear. Peter tells of his denying Christ was ever in his sight; Paul relates his fruitless efforts to obliterate the light.

Their sad stories are repeated in a thousand different ways, but they share one thing in common: they all end in thanks and praise for the host who has invited north and south and east and west to converge around this table, where all life is fed and blessed.

Bring your joy and bring your sadness, and prepare to be surprised by the host whose hands are wounded, who will open wide your eyes, when he blesses bread and breaks it—truth and manna from above!—and then passes wine that wakens in your heart the taste of love. (Hymn # 506, *Glory to God*).

To God be the glory.

Amen.

Notes:

Book of Kells: 340 folios, calfskin and vellum, containing in Latin the four gospels, dating back to the 800s. Monks worked on the book on the isle of Iona, Scotland, and it was a unique treasure. Vikings raided the island and abbey. It was moved to Dublin Ireland in the late 1600s (Trinity College).

Gutenberg Bible, first moveable type press 1400s. 180 Bibles were made; 49 still exist, 21 are complete; 11 are in the USA. 4 in the Library of Congress. Last one sold in 1978 for \$2.2 million, and in today's market a single complete copy would bring \$25-\$35 million!

John Calvin, "Wherever the Word is faithfully proclaimed and the Sacraments rightly administered, there you will find the true church of Jesus Christ."

World Communion History:

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Communion_Sunday)

World Communion Sunday is a celebration observed by several Christian denominations, taking place on the first Sunday of every October, that promotes Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation. It focuses on an observance of the Eucharist. The tradition was begun in 1933 by Hugh Thomson Kerr who ministered in the Shadyside Presbyterian Church. According to Presbyterian Outlook:

Davitt S. Bell (the late Clerk of Session and church historian at Shadyside) recalled that Dr. Kerr first conceived the notion of World Communion Sunday during his year as moderator of the General Assembly (1930). Dr. Kerr's younger son, the Rev. Dr. Donald Craig Kerr, who is pastor emeritus of the Roland Park Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, was sixteen in 1933. He has related that World Communion Sunday grew out of the Division of Stewardship at Shadyside. It was their attempt to bring churches together in a service of Christian unity—in which everyone might receive both inspiration and information, and above all, to know how important the Church of Jesus Christ is, and how each congregation is interconnected one with another.

It was then adopted throughout the US Presbyterian Church in 1936 and subsequently spread to other denominations. In 1940, the Federal Council of Churches (now the National Council of Churches), led by Jesse Moren Bader, endorsed World Communion Sunday and began to promote it to Christian churches worldwide.