

“FAMILY DINNER”
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Elkton United Methodist Church
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WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

Ephesians 4:1-6

Mark 14:22-25

So, late last week, I was doing what I do at the end of every week, putting in a load of laundry, when I bent over to pick up the laundry basket, and felt a twinge - not just any twinge, mind you; but the twinge that I immediately knew meant I was in trouble with my back. A number of years ago, probably 25 by now, I was in a car accident where the driver behind me failed to see the line of traffic in front of him stopped, and he plowed right into the back of me. And ever since then, I've had a touchy back. And every once in a while, it goes out for a few days. Luckily, the last time it happened was nearly 13 years ago, right after I came here to Elkton, and I stupidly had spent all day moving books up and down on bookshelves.

But last week, it happened again, and sure enough by the next day I was down and out. And was I ever down, not just physically but emotionally. Because last Sunday was a big day in the church - two sermons, nine two members, a baptism and the church picnic. Could I have picked a worse weekend to miss?

Thank God for George Leathrum! All it took was a phone call and he was ready to go. So after taking care of a lot of the details and emailing back and forth with George about everything that would happen that day, I finally started laying around waiting for healing to take place.

Let me tell you - laying around gets old after a few days. And it got really old on Sunday, because I found myself constantly looking at the clock thinking about what was going on over here. Actually, the recliner I was in is by the family room window, so I was watching to see how many cars were coming in here, and when they were leaving. And I saw some of the people taking tables and grills and such over to Meadow Park.

And then, just after 12, I watched the mass exodus of cars leaving here to go to the picnic, and then I really started feeling sorry for myself. Of course, being the control freak that I am, I was texting messages to people at the picnic double-checking on things. I emailed Rick to make sure that someone was taking pictures.

And they were.

And not much later that day, my smartphone signaled that something new

had been posted, and there they were - pictures in living color of the church picnic. And they were fabulous. A brilliant blue sky, bright sunshine, and nearly 200 people having a wonderful time. There were over 50 pictures and I looked at every single one of them, and I was thrilled. Because there were people of all ages there. There were babies, and great-grandparents, and all ages in between. There were people that have been in the church for more than fifty years, and there were people who had joined church that very day. There were kids making crafts, and youth playing soccer, and groups sitting around in lawn chairs, and smiles everywhere! And of course, food, food and more food!

It looked absolutely wonderful. And it was, a wonderful family dinner - our family - our church family. It made me smile, and I know God was smiling too!

Why do I know that? Because family dinners, meals, have been a part of our Christian tradition from the very beginning. How often do we read in the Gospels about Jesus and meals? We know the famous story of when He went to dinner at the home of Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus; and about the day He called Zaccheus down from the tree and went home with him for dinner; and that day on the hillside you heard about last week, where thousands had a meal together; and the morning He made breakfast for His disciples when He appeared to them after the resurrection. Meals and the fellowship around them were an important part of Jesus' ministry.

And no meal was ever more important than the one we remember today - Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples. It was, also, a family meal - for they were, for all intents and purposes, Jesus' family. They gathered together around the table, and talked about life, and He talked about what was to come. And then, they had this meal, which was a Passover meal, continuing in the tradition of their forebears from centuries past.

But this time, it was different. This time, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God for it, but then He broke it and said, in essence, every time from now on that you break bread, remember me - remember my body broken for you, for the forgiveness of your sins. And he lifted the cup of wine, gave thanks to God, and said, every time you drink from the cup, remember my blood poured out for you.

And to this day, so we do. We gather around our table, this communion table, for a family meal, and with humility and deep gratitude, we remember what Jesus did for us. We gather as family - brothers and sisters in Christ - one family in Christ.

And on **this particular** day, World Communion Sunday, we remember that we don't do it alone - because on this day, Christians around the entire world, share this holy meal with us. It is perhaps the one day a year that we know all

Christians share in the meal on the very same day.

So today, as we kneel, we'll know that just a few doors down, the people of Elkton Presbyterian Church are breaking bread and sharing the cup as well. And across the bridge, the people of Immaculate Conception Church are as well.

But the table stretches even further. I know of one of our college students who has gotten really involved in a church right near her university in West Virginia, and she'll be kneeling at that church today for holy communion - part of the one great table, the one great family of Christ.

And no doubt, our friends from our mission trips to Kentucky, who are having their first service since their pastor Rev. Steve Springer retired last week, they too are sharing this very same meal today.

In Africa and the Philippines where the church is growing by leaps and bounds to Europe and parts of our own country where it's struggling, in all those places, our Christian brothers and sisters kneel for communion just as we do this morning.

In untold numbers of languages, and all the colors of the spectrum, and in places of worship too diverse to name - all over the world, in the name of Jesus Christ, bread is being broken today, and wine poured, and this great family meal is being shared.

And, there's one more I want to add today. As she nears the end of her deployment there, I pray that Vivian Gaz and her battalion in Afghanistan have celebrated communion today with their chaplain, and I pray that she feels our prayers for her and them. We kneel with them at the same table today.

One meal, one table, one family around the world.

This is a special day, yes, but my friends, every time we come to the Lord's Table is special. As the elements are broken and blessed this morning, I invite you to remember that, in a way, all of us are broken and blessed as well. We come to the table as sinners standing in the need of grace, each of us broken in some way, each of us needing God's healing touch in our lives.

And then through this holy sacrament, we remember again how blessed we are to be loved by a God who gave His only Son for us and for our salvation, and that through Him, our brokenness is healed. How blessed we are by this meal, a very real reminder that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus - nothing. And how blessed we are to be a part of a table that stretches around the world, and to be a part of a family that includes all of God's children.

Thanks be to God! Amen.