



Proper 18, The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jonathan Stepp
September 6, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

A young priest was just starting out in his first curacy and he wanted to freshen things up a bit, so he decided to say something extra during the serving of communion. As he came to the rail the first person he served was a five year-old girl. He placed the wafer in her hands and after saying, “the body of Christ, the bread of heaven,” he added “God be with you.” With wide eyes the girl then carefully ate the bread.

Later, at home, she told her mom she wanted to play church and be priest. The girl took a piece of bread, handed it to her mother, and in her holiest, most priestly voice she said “God will get you!”

Holy Communion isn’t exactly the subject of our scripture readings today, but it is very much on my mind because this is the first time we have been together to receive Communion since March 8. If you’re counting, that’s six full months! And even though we are finally able to be together today, to pray, to hear the Word of God, and to receive the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood, it is still under very unusual circumstances – with masks on, gathered outside, and physically separated as we are.

And if all that weren’t enough, we will also be receiving Communion in one kind only – taking only the bread and no wine. I realize that this represents a difficult moment for some of us. We are so accustomed to receiving both the bread and the wine, and to experiencing the fullness of spiritual nourishment that comes from it, that we feel a deep sense of loss to have only the bread. Perhaps it will be some comfort for us to be reminded of what we, as Christians, believe about Holy Communion.

First of all, we need to remember that while Christ is present to us in the bread and wine of Communion in a special way, that is different than anything else in all creation, Christ’s presence is not in any way confined to Communion. The whole creation, the cosmos itself, and each one of us lives and moves and has our being in Christ. He sustains all things by his powerful word and through him all things have come into existence and have their life. Christ’s special presence in Communion is a reminder to us of his presence every-

where and in all things. Whether you receive the bread and wine or only the bread or are, in some way, prevented from receiving either one, Christ is with you at all times and in all places.

Secondly, we need to remember that Christ is fully present in both the bread and the wine. The special, real presence of Christ that makes Communion holy, is a presence that is not divided between the two. It's not as though we receive half of his life when we take the bread and then the other half when we take the wine. When we stretch out our hands to receive either portion of Communion, Christ gives himself fully to us in that portion we are receiving and with the giving of himself he fully gives us all the gifts of Communion in each portion: the gift of communion with God, communion with our brothers and sisters in the faith, forgiveness of sins, healing from our infirmities, and the promise of eternal life.

Over the centuries there have been many reasons why individuals could not receive both the bread and wine. Some people can't drink wine, for physical or psychological reasons. Some people are so sick that they can't receive either one, either out of physical weakness or because their bodies cannot tolerate food in any amount. And sometimes, in times of plague such as now, it has not been safe to share the common cup.

In all these times and places, and in this time and this place, here at All Saints Franklin, Christ is present. Christ is sharing his life with all of us. Christ is in communion with us, we are in communion with Christ, and we are in communion with each other. Whether we are able to receive both bread and wine, or just one of the two, or neither, the prayers of consecration, the lifting of the cup, and the raising of the host, are all reminders to us of God's faithful love and unending connection to us.

Therefore, the benefits of Communion are not confined to our eating and drinking. To just be present here with God's people, on this holy ground; to pray these prayers and to hear the scriptures; to look with reverent awe on the cup and the host, is in and of itself to receive the strength of Christ into our lives along with the communion, forgiveness, healing, and eternal life that Christ gives to us. Holy Communion is so filled with the presence of Christ that to even look at the chalice or to see the bread is to receive God's life in Christ into our hearts, minds, and souls.

As our liturgy says, these are the gifts of God for the people of God. May we know and believe that in these gifts God is giving us all of himself in this moment of connection, worship, and Communion.

Amen.