

Sermon Title: **“World Communion Sunday”**

Bible: **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on World Communion Sunday, October 4, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

Opening Prayer

Almighty God: from the ends of the earth, you have gathered us around Christ’s holy table. We come to feast together. Have mercy on your church, troubled and divided. Renew us and make us one. In the name of Jesus. Amen. (From a prayer from ‘431 World Communion Sunday’ in *the United Methodist Book of Worship*.)

1. World Communion Sunday

Today is World Communion Sunday! On the first Sunday in October, many Protestant churches celebrate World Communion Sunday. This day began in 1936 by Presbyterians in order to recognize our ecumenical oneness in Christ and to bring Christians together in a spirit of unity and peace. Many United Methodists also celebrate this Sunday. We are one of many. If we were not sheltering-in-place, I wanted to invite you to bring your traditional foods. To represent some of us, along with the regular bread, I prepared naan, which is an Indian traditional bread, and a tortilla, which originated in Mexico. At God’s table, we are all one in Christ beyond borders and denominations. And the United Methodists practice an open communion, which means that all are welcomed to the table of our Lord. Nothing can separate us from God’s love and grace!

2. The Lord’s Supper in Corinthian Church

Today's scripture reading is from some parts of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. The Apostle Paul wrote many letters to the church in order to give teachings and instructions. Through today's passage, Paul shared some guidelines for the Lord's supper. When we look at the Lord's supper in the Corinthian Church, it is very interesting. First of all, it was a real meal. The Lord's supper was combined with the real community meal. Verse 21 says "For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk." How can people become drunk from communion? How can people be hungry, without communion? That's because their communion was not only a ritual but also a real meal, a real community meal. Some people brought food and drinks to the church. But they did not wait for others to arrive. And they did not spare some food for others. They ate up and became drunk. Those who arrived late could not eat, because there was nothing leftover. Then, they went hungry. Verse 22 says "What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" In the Corinthian church, some had nothing to share. They might be late for communion, which was the meal, and they could not bring anything. Then, they could not help but be hungry.

In this situation, Paul's instructions in verses 33 and 34 make sense, "When you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home." Some people could work 9 to 5. They could prepare food and bring it to the church. But some people had to work all day. Then they had to arrive late and could not bring any food. This suggests that there were the poorer church members in the Corinthian church. In other words, in the Corinthian church, there were socioeconomic differences among church members. Some were rich and others were poor.

Some could choose when to work, and others could not choose when to work. Their hourly wages would be different. Some people might not be able to earn minimum wages or could not get a job. How could all of these people be a church together? It might be very challenging to understand each other and to have a fellowship together.

In verse 27 and 28, Paul said, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” How does this sound to you, after knowing the situation of the Corinthian church? This is not about our own spiritual life. It is about our love and care of one another, beyond our social and economic differences. When we love each other, when we care for each other, we become a church more and more.

3. God’s Table in Gilroy UMC

We celebrate God’s table in our church, even during this difficult time in many ways. That’s because we are the church who has God’s love. We remember each others’ names in our prayers. We share our love and care in various ways; email, text, phone call, card, doorstep visitation, sharing food, and so on. Our church gives generously to those who need help, because of the COVID-19 and wildfire. Paul did not commend the Corinthian church, but I am sure that Paul would commend our church.

It is not easy to get through this difficult time. When we take a bread and the cup, let us remember that our God is with us and that we are the church. God’s love is overflowing through this table. Nothing can separate us from God’s love. Likewise, nothing can stop us from loving each other.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, the whole world suffers together. The whole world needs your healing and love. When we observe World Communion Sunday, please be with all of us, and please use this church for this community and the world. We want to share your love beyond the walls, beyond borders, and beyond the virus. Please use us as your church. In Jesus' name. Amen.