

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

Bible: **Acts 10:9-16, 23b-29 (NRSV)**

When: on World Communion Sunday, October 3rd, 2021

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube live streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we come to you, because of your abundant grace. We come to your table, because there is your unfailing love. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. World Communion Sunday

Many Protestant churches celebrate the first Sunday of October as World Communion Sunday. World Communion Sunday began at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in 1933. The Rev. Hugh Thompson Kerr and his congregation were looking for the unity of Christian churches beyond the differences of denomination, culture, and tradition. That’s because all Christians are one body of Jesus Christ. World Communion Sunday became one of six special Sundays of the United Methodist Church: Human Relations Day; UMCOR (United Methodist Committee On Relief) Sunday, formerly known as One Great Hour of Sharing; World Communion Sunday; United Methodist Student Day; Peace with Justice Sunday, and Native American Ministries Sunday. I hope for us to celebrate this first Sunday of October as World Communion Sunday.

2. Written Word or Voiced Word?

Today’s scripture reading is not from the lectionary. I chose Acts 10 for World Communion Sunday. To read the whole of chapter 10 would be best. When you have time, please read all of

chapter 10. Acts 10 is about the story of Peter and Cornelius. When I read this chapter, my focus is Peter's response to the Word of God. The most famous disciple, Peter, knew the Old Testament, which was the Bible for the Jewish people at that time. The Jews could not eat animals such as large four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds of the air. They could not visit a Gentile. According to the written word, Peter was a very obedient and faithful Christian. However, there was another voiced word that he heard. The voice told him to eat something that was unclean and profane. The voice told him that God had made them clean, unlike what he had learned from the written word. Then, the voice challenged Peter to visit a Gentile, which was against the teachings from the written word. Peter knew the God who had been with his ancestors. Peter had lived with Jesus Christ. Now the Holy Spirit came and talked to Peter. But somehow, the Holy Spirit challenged Peter! Peter was between the written word and the voiced word. Which one was the word of God to Peter?

I loved Peter's responses. Peter asked questions three times. Even though the new teaching from the voice, or the Holy Spirit, was not like what Peter had previously learned, Peter honestly responded to the Holy Spirit. Peter also followed the Holy Spirit humbly and gently. Peter came to Cornelius, whom he knew he should not visit. Peter also asked questions humbly, in order to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Based on this chapter of Acts 10, rather than it being the Apostle Paul, Peter was probably the first disciple to share the good news with the Gentiles and the first witness to see the works of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles.

3. The Holy Spirit and World Communion Sunday

What led us to celebrate World Communion Sunday? World Communion Sunday is not in the Bible. But we believe that the Holy Spirit is living with us, and still inspiring us here and now. We, the Methodists, have not only the Bible, but also tradition, experience, and reason for knowing our God. Even though World Communion Sunday began in a Presbyterian church, I believe that we can learn the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes us one in Christ. There are a lot of denominations in Christianity. Rather than competing with each other, we can learn from each other. World Communion Sunday is one way. Now it has become one of our traditions in the United Methodist Church. As you see in our church, we are all coming from different places. Our journey has started from various different faiths. But we are here to worship our Lord, because we are all children of God. Beyond color, beyond culture, beyond languages, beyond denominations, beyond our differences, we are one body in Jesus Christ. Then, how can we not celebrate World Communion Sunday?

4. Open Communion and Grace

We, the Methodists, practice open communion, which means all are welcomed to the table. This table is not mine, not yours, but God's table. Each denomination has a different focus on the faith journey. Some denominations focus on human weakness. Some might teach how to repent and forgive. Some denominations focus on the balance between God's work and human work. Their faith journey looks like the stock market. There are ups and downs. We emphasize grace. Grace is an undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God. While grace cannot be divided, there are three kinds of grace: prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace.

What made us come to the Lord? Do you remember when you encountered God as your Lord? And you are still coming to church and our Lord. In all of these moments, can you find God's grace? Maybe, there might be a lot of reasons why you would not come to God. But we have only one reason to come to the Lord: God's grace. Thanks to God's grace, we come to the Lord. God is inviting us before we know God. God is embracing us when we confess God as our Lord. God is leading, and sometimes challenging us to God's way and God's love. In all of our faith journey, God's grace is there and overflowing upon us. Nothing can stop us from coming to God and God's table.

5. All are welcome to God's Table

Here is God's table. All are welcome to God's table. We do not ask for your ID. We do not ask how old you are. We do not ask if you are a member of this church. We just welcome you as you are. That's because God welcomes all of us. Please remember that God loves you as you are. Please remember that God loves others as God loves you. Please remember that we are one body of Jesus Christ. And please remember that God's grace is here.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we come to you as one body of Jesus Christ. We come to you as we are. Please make us one in Christ. Please make us one with each other. Please make us one for the world. We are all children of God. In Jesus' name. Amen.