

From East and West  
Luke 13:22-30  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
October 2, 2022  
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Queen Elizabeth died recently. Following her death the procession of her casket began in Scotland. Scotland was a land she loved. It was a place where she and her family had a long history. Her home in Scotland is where she died. Meanwhile, many Scots want out of the UK, they want their country to be independent of the United Kingdom and they will again get to vote on this next year. Listening to an interview on Monday morning, it was interesting to hear people reflect on both their desire for Scotland's independence from the UK and the monarchy, *as well* as their deep love of the queen. Perhaps these feel like statements that are in conflict with one another, but it was a reminder to me that even across deep divides, places of unity can be found.

And it's not only the death of a queen that can bring that about.

Days like today are also reminders. Today is World Communion Sunday. And I know many people for whom today is a favorite day of worship.

Perhaps it is because the table is set so beautifully with textures and tastes that really do represent the diversity of the world.

Perhaps it is because in this polarized time when it seems difficult to even get along with some neighbors...when we have too many examples of nations attacking nations...when allies seem fewer and farther between...maybe today stands out as a reminder that there are times and ways we can come together.

Perhaps for some of us, even if the ideas of World Communion Sunday seem a bit far fetched, this day is a day of hope as we picture the world as God's intends.

I am reminded by this piece of artwork, which we created late in the summer, of the importance of each one of us. You might remember, if you worshiped with us that day, that we heard the passage from I Corinthians about the body and how one part cannot say to another that it is not important. That passage even goes so far as to say that the parts we think of as less honorable are really the parts to which we offer more honor.

And, as we wove together a ribbon representing each one of us, it helped us to see the truth of that passage. The reality is that my one little ribbon dangling in my hand is not nearly as impactful as all of ours woven together. We are better together.

And World Communion Sunday reminds us that there is a whole world full of people God loves and that the fullness of God's kin-dom is based in God's love for all of them.

But, friends, that can be hard for us. It can be hard for us to hear and even harder to live into. Because so often we focus on the differences. After all, those differences are often what lead to hurts and conflicts. So, it's no wonder we remember them and feel hesitant when we are aware of them.

But today we are reminded that even across deep divides, we have a God who holds us together.

And today's scripture is an interesting one. Because it starts in the place we often do - with the dividing out of people. In fact the reading begins with the question, "will only a few be saved?" (Luke 13:23, NRSV). And then Luke tells us that Jesus answers with talk of the narrow door and the closed door and people not being recognized. And, friends, this is often where we get caught, it is often where we stop paying attention.

Perhaps we get caught there because we are ready to proclaim our list of who the people are who get shut out.

Perhaps we get caught there because fear can stop us in our tracks and we are afraid it might be us.

Perhaps we get caught there because we have grown up in a culture that has motivated many people with threats of punishment and exclusion.

But I don't want us to miss where this passage ends.

"Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29, NRSV).

Here is Jesus. At this stage in Luke's gospel, the end of his life is drawing ever more near. More questions are being asked about the end times. He has said many things that turn people's expectations on their heads as he has reinterpreted laws and scripture through a lens of love and freedom rather than control.

And Jesus ends his answer to this question by telling the people that the banquet will be large, and the people present will come from all over, and just when they think they know what to expect they will have to think again.

And maybe that's our take away from this table. Maybe the important thing we need to hear is that the reach of God's love extends so much further than we can fathom.

I know we say things like this all this time...pretty much every week. But, friends, what if it's really true? Because even though we say it in our comfortable sanctuary doesn't mean we feel it or live it in our daily lives.

So, what would happen if we truly learned to love as God loves?

What would happen if we truly extended welcome the way God does?

On my desk sits a stone with these words carved in it: Just love everyone. I'll sort them out later. -God

I don't know what kind of sorting God does or God does not do. But I am challenged each day by that first sentence - just love everyone.

We say again and again that there is room at the table for everyone. And this day challenges us to mean it.

Some of this we embrace easily.

Is there room here for those who identify as LGBTQ+? Absolutely.

Is there room here for children? Yes - they are not only welcome to feast at this table, but to serve from it.

Is there room here for seekers? Sure there is, after all we are invited to experience God's love here regardless of what we know we believe or understand.

Is there room here for a spectrum of understandings and theologies? There better be...after all, we Disciples continue to claim that both unity and liberty are core values and that we are better together because of the diversity of those who come to this table.

Is there room for your annoying neighbor? That gets harder, doesn't it?

Is there room for the person who voted differently than you? In a democracy, yes. But in our hearts? Not always...especially when we feel wounded by what those votes mean.

Is there room for someone who speaks another language, follows other customs, comes from a different tradition? We usually say "yes" but we are often challenged by that reality when they bring their full and authentic selves rather than quickly assimilating to be like us.

And so the work of helping to usher in the fullness of God's kin-dom is ongoing work. It is not something we have yet perfected...perhaps not something we ever will. But it is the work that we are called to today as we worship around this table breathing in all that it reminds us of...as we claim again that God's love is expansive and that God's table is wide...as we are reminded that the people of God aren't all just like us, but they come from everywhere and God loves us all. Amen.