

Sermon - Turning the Tables

March 7, 2021 - The Rev. Rose Ann Vita - First United Church, Waterloo, Ontario

SCRIPTURE

The Gospel According to John, Chapter 2, verses 13 to 22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, Jesus drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and **overturned their tables**. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" Jesus' disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" **But Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body**. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

SERMON

Introduction - Eating Alone

- March 11 is one year of the pandemic
- For over one year, I have been eating alone . . . three meals a day x 365 days . . . a lot of eating alone
- But today we won't be eating alone . . . we will be sharing a common meal in our communion.

What is Communion?

The word "communion" is defined as the act of sharing or holding in common. For example,

- A group of persons having a common religious faith; association; fellowship; a religious denomination: like the Anglican communion.

Communion, in the Christian faith, is a religious ceremony or ritual regarded as imparting divine grace. In most Christian faiths, it is regarded as a sacrament in which blessed bread and wine or juice are consumed as memorials of Christ's death or as symbols for the realization of a spiritual union between Christ and the person receiving communicant.

What is a Sacrament?

The word "sacrament" in its broadest sense, as the sign of something sacred and hidden . . . the Greek word is "mystery."

It can be said that that the whole world is a vast sacramental experience . . . all material things are signs of things spiritual and sacred, even of Divinity itself.

- In Romans 1:20 (from the Message) we hear: *But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal Divine power and presence. The world contains the mystery of God's Divine being.*

In the Christian context: A sacrament is a religious ceremony or ritual regarded as imparting divine grace. Different denominations acknowledge a different number of sacraments, the most common are Baptism and Communion.

The traditional place where Communion takes place is in a church at the communion table, a table set aside for concentrating or blessing the bread and the cup. The communion table has roots in the ancient altars which were elevated places or structures, as mounds or platforms, where religious rites were performed or upon which sacrifices were offered to gods.

Today's Sermon Theme: "Turning the Tables"

Today in my Sermon I want us to look at Jesus overturning the tables in the temple and ask ourselves "where does communion take place?"

Let's look at the text . . .

First it is from John 2 . . . not John 20 . . . We would expect to read about what is traditionally called, the "*Cleansing of the Temple*" in chapter 20 where the other three Gospels place this radical act in the last week of Jesus' life, the week that the church calls "*Holy Week*."

In this text, we see that Jesus goes into the temple, really the outer courtyards, what we would think of as "the lobby" of the temple, and actively confronts the system in place, and overturns the money exchange tables. Here is where people who wanted to make a sacrifice for "the forgiveness of their sins" would exchange their local currency for temple currency so they could purchase an animal to be sacrificed on the altar to appease the gods in atonement for their sins.

In this text, we see that in John's Gospel, in the very early days of Jesus' ministry, he begins his ministry by challenging the traditional way the temple functioned as a place for sacrificial offering for redemption of sins. Without the money changers, there could be no sacrifice in the temple. Jesus challenged the use of the altar by shutting down the place where forgiveness took place. Jesus basically said, my body is the place where forgiveness happens.

Needless to say, very early in Jesus' ministry he got into trouble with the traditionalists.

And I would venture to say that very early in my ministry with you, I am going to get into trouble for challenging "the way we always did things here."

You see, my position description states that

Whenever possible, worship services should be used as an opportunity to lead the congregation in exploring new ways of worship and should include lay leadership.

And so today, I challenge us to engage with a new understanding of where communion and forgiveness take place.

Communion does not need to take place at the communion table in the church.

In fact, that is why we are on ZOOM today, and I am in my home, and you are in yours. We are not in the church, and we will have home communion together, at home church.

The COVID pandemic has been an opportunity for us to develop the capacity for online worship and has opened up the possibility to "Turn the Tables" . . . communion can take place at your table . . . in your home . . . home communion . . .

From the definition that we heard earlier

The whole world is a vast sacramental experience . . . all material things are signs of things spiritual and sacred, even of Divinity itself.

And just as Jesus challenged the traditional understanding that "forgiveness of sins" can only take place on the sacrificial altar by his saying that his body is a temple, **I am saying that we, as the Body of Christ, have the potential to be agents of forgiveness.**

But much more than forgiveness . . . of reparation. reconciliation, restoration.

This week, Cameron Trimble wrote that

"I'm sorry" are the two most important words in the English language. Without the possibility of restoring trust and mending broken fences the inherently flawed experience of being human would feel impossibly tragic. A good apology is deeply healing while an absent or bad one can compromise and even end a relationship.

I am saying that it takes much more than saying, "I am sorry."

My son-in-law is a person of colour, and this week he was saying to me that he is upset when white people ask him to forgive them for 400 years of slavery. He said, "what do you want me to do with that?" And I said, "I feel guilty . . . or bad . . . about what has happened in the past." And he said, "that is not my problem."

This reminds me of my broken relationship with my brother. Right now, there is a rift between us. I believe it is a result of "my position of power" . . . you see I was born first. I, a female, took his position in an Italian family. The male is supposed to be the first born . . . so wherever my brother went, he went in my shadow. I stole his name, his name is "Rose Ann's brother." I stole his identity by the mere fact that I was born first. An act for which I had no control. And so, for order for him to have his own identity, he did just the opposite of whatever I did. He has different friends, a different lifestyle, etc., and now it is hard for us to find anything in common to bring us together. We need to find a common focus or value around which we can mend our relationship.

You see, by my simply saying, "I am sorry" to my brother for my being born first is meaningless. A deeper healing is needed. A deeper acknowledgement of the harm and hurt that is part of our fractured relationship needs to be worked through. A way of our finding atonement . . . an "*at-one-ment*" with each other . . . is the work that lies before and between us. We both need to take responsibility to build a better future for us and our families.

This concept of mending broken relationships is known as **reconciliation** . . . it is much bigger and broader than mere forgiveness. More complicated than just saying, "I am sorry." It is about

Restoring relationship. Repairing. Renewing.

And reconciliation is a topic that we can explore in a future sermon. Reconciliation it is complex and complicated and needs more time that we can give to understanding it today.

So, this brings me back to communion.

Communion: the act of sharing or holding in common which has the potential of imparting divine grace and forgiveness.

Communion: the act of finding something in common which has the potential of imparting grace and bringing healing.

Today I would like to propose that this sacramental act often happens beyond the walls of the church, beyond the traditional communion table.

I want to propose that there are other communion elements . . . other things we share in common . . . that restores us to God and to one another.

I would like to share with you a video about *Homeboys*. A ministry that brings people who literally would main and kill one another together around the common element of making bread together.

Father Greg Boyle started an industry that brings together gang members . . . let's watch the video.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wb-SG4J7EgQ&ab_channel=KCET

The message that I would like us to take from today's sermon is that "*We are the Body of Christ*" and that through our finding "communion elements" . . . common things around which we can share as a means to build healing relationships . . . is a way to restore and bless the world.

This miracle can happen anywhere . . .

- in our church as we strive to find a common vision and mission which will bring us together as a community . . .
- in our homes where we gather around our dinner tables to listen respectfully to one another and share about our days and dreams . . .
- in our neighbourhood as we connect with others around a common vision in an effort to build a better world.

Let's spend time this week pondering on how we can turn the tables and be the *Body of the Risen Christ* --- where we can be the place of reconciliation and healing for the world. Amen