

CONNECTED THROUGH FAITH

World-Wide Communion Sunday Oct 2 216

At the heart of the Christian sacrament we call Eucharist or Communion is *connection*. Through this sacred act, Christians world wide connect with God and one another through the risen Christ. We do this in memory of him, as he invited his first disciples to take the bread he broke and drink the wine he poured at the last supper. “Do this” he said “in memory of me. This is my body, broken for you, this is my blood, shed for you.” millions of people have found meaning in this symbolic act for over 2000 years in so many countries, in so many different cultures! Despite our many differences, it is one act that continues to connect us.

In the breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine, for believers, God becomes present. I don't know how you feel this. For me it is experienced as a Presence, an inner vibration. For many it comes with deep feelings of love and gratitude for Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. We know we are connected through God's love. This is like a miracle in times of *disconnection*.

Just as the early followers of Jesus lived in turbulent and violent times, we too experience disconnection in *our* troubled times. Richard Rohr in his essay “From Disconnection to Connection” described it well when he wrote:

I am convinced that beneath the ugly manifestations of our present evils-political corruption, ecological devastation, warring against one another everywhere, hating each other based on race, gender, religion or sexual orientation- the greatest disease facing humanity right now is our profound and painful sense of disconnection. We feel disconnected from God, certainly, but also from ourselves (our bodies), from each other and from our world. Our sense of this fourfold isolation is plunging our species into increasingly destructive behaviour and much mental illness.

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Disconnection is a strong theme in today's biblical texts. The authors expressed the pain of disconnection in our first text from Lamentations. The people of God felt abandoned by God when they were defeated and exiled from their homeland. The Babylonians destroyed their beloved city of Jerusalem in 587 BC and the people felt disconnected from God. The touching lament we heard this morning was for the overwhelming loss of home and country. It ended, however, with hope for the continuing steadfast love and mercy of God. The author in verse 26 encouraged the people to wait quietly in faith for the salvation of the Lord.

You and I know how difficult it is to wait in faith when our life feels like it is falling apart. It is hard to have hope, hard to have faith, when we face trials and tribulations.

We can only imagine how the Hebrew people felt when their captors asked them to entertain them, to sing songs from their homeland, while being transported to Babylon. The people had hung up their lyres because they could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land. They were disconnected from home, from their culture and from their God.

In our third reading from today's Epistle, or letter, we heard from 2 Timothy. Paul's poignant letter to Timothy continued the theme of disconnection. Paul was imprisoned, disconnected from his followers, including Timothy whom he loved, but he was still strongly connected to God through his faith. He wrote this moving letter of encouragement to Timothy and the early Christian community, explaining that his suffering and imprisonment were the result of God's appointing him as herald, apostle and teacher. This God-given role threatened the Roman occupiers who imprisoned and eventually killed him and many of the early followers of Jesus.

Passing his teachings on to his follower Timothy, Paul encouraged him to guard what he had given him, writing "hold on to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the Holy Spirit living in us" (2 Tim. 1:13).

Set in the context of suffering, like this morning's texts from the Hebrew scriptures, 2nd Timothy offered hope for believers to stay connected to one another, to Paul, to Jesus and to God with the help of the Holy Spirit. These verses can help us, also, in our time to feel connected, such an inspiration to us.

I can only imagine how difficult it would be to be disconnected from all that one loves, to be imprisoned and tortured. How difficult to stay connected through faith! I confess I have had my faith tested many times in my long life and I have learned my human limitations. It is one thing to have faith when life is going well, but quite another in times of trial.

I am grateful for my admittedly limited faith which has helped me through many life challenging situations, and I attribute that ability to a power greater than myself. Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit within me, nourished by prayer and faith in God, I have hung onto faith. Sometimes it does however feel as small as a mustard seed! And that must seem a risky but honest confession coming from one who has spent many years in active Christian ministry....

In our fourth biblical text today, Jesus assured his followers of the mighty power of faith, even that which was as small as a mustard seed. Even such a small faith could perform powerful actions like uprooting a mulberry tree and planting it in the ocean! Jesus illustrated his teachings with such colourful stories, perhaps humorous and more meaningful to his hearers than to us in our day. We can appreciate the story of the mans

faith helping him to heal but the story of the slave isn't as easy for us in our time where slavery is not socially accepted.

Perhaps if we replace the slave with a 'caterer' we can get the message that we are being asked to have humility. A paid caterer and those who hired him or her would just get on with their job without expecting reward. We wouldn't invite the caterers to sit down and eat with us! We need to serve God and others without expectation of reward or feelings of entitlement. For our faith to grow, we need humility.

We also need gratitude, like the Samaritan whom Jesus healed, who returned to thank Jesus. Jesus said to him "get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well". The lesson here also was also a criticism to Jesus Jewish audience that the Samaritan, who was not Jewish, was the only one who returned to show his gratitude.

Faith the size of a mustard seed.... is that all we need to find and sustain connection to ourselves, to one another, to Jesus, to community, to Creation, to God? Does participating in communion feed and nourish that faith, that feeling of connection? I believe that for many people it does but not for all as I shared at the beginning of today's reflections.

I acknowledge that there are followers of Jesus who experience connection in other ways. There are people of other faiths, and other spiritual practices who experience connection to self, others and God through other ways. Thankfully God has given us many paths that create connection.

I am going to give the last word on connection today to scientists who are connecting science and spirituality. As much as we *experience* disconnection, the truth seems to be that it isn't real! A great spiritual truth is that We are One. Another way of saying that is to use the words of scientists in our time who recognize this truth.

In a well written and informative book by neurosurgeon Eben Alexander, called Proof of Heaven (there are copies in our local library) the author wrote about his near death experience and journey into the afterlife from a scientist's point of view.

He acknowledged that we experience separation of objects and people and planets that interact but remain separate but he believes all are actually connected.

He writes:

On the subatomic level however, this universe of separate objects turns out to be a complete illusion. In the realm of the super-super-small, every object in the physical universe is intimately connected with every other object. In fact, there are really no 'objects' in the world at all, only vibrations of energy, and relationships (150)--- each of us are intricately, irremovably connected to the larger universe (155).

Such a profound message! What connects us, to use that other profound image of God given to us by theologian Paul Tillich is “the ground of our being”. The energy that connects us, the vibration that was present at Creation, is the force that holds it all together. We are one, connected by God, the Holy Spirit that flows between us, keeping us connected!

I am convinced that what can save us at this time is the return to the knowledge and experience of that energy. It is within each of God’s created beings, like a mustard seed, waiting to grow. Like a seed it needs to be watered and fed-through prayer, contemplation, meditation, deep periods of silence out of which will come God-guided and informed, compassionate acts of social justice.

We are not *disconnected*. We are one!

Let us pray:

O God, we thank you for your gift of faith, planted within each one of us. Help us in humble gratitude to tend our seed-like faith through an active spiritual practice as well as deeds of compassion and justice. Be with us now as we invite your presence with us, in a brief time of silence.....

Amen.