

Pastor's Message – 10/6/24  
World Communion Sunday  
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Little did I know, and I still marvel, how valuable that Typing Class was so long ago as a Sophomore in High School. How far we have come since hieroglyphics were scratched into stones or inscribed onto sheepskin. Even those of us living in today's world have seen incredible changes in communications.

Consider a brief history of communication.

Few of you, I expect, ever used a telegraph, invented in 1837, followed by the first commercially successful typewriter (1868).

Then Alexander Graham Bell said, "Mr. Watson, come here. I want to see you," and *everything changed* (1876).

Then came the phonograph (1877), the radio (1895), silent movies (1915), movies with sound (1927), television (1929) and the cassette tape recorder (1962).

Then came the aforementioned IBM Selectric typewriter on which I learned to type. And cordless phones.

Then came the personal computer and the software to operate it. And again, *everything changed*.

Then came the internet and the World Wide Web (1989) and again, *everything changed*.

Then came the iPhone (2003), and again *everything changed*. A rice farmer in Thailand walking his water buffalo through a paddy has one hand on the plow, and the other on his smartphone, checking in with the Bangkok exchange about rice futures.

At one point a long time ago, a message could be transmitted only as far as you could shout.

Now, we can tap in a sequence of numbers on a touchscreen and talk or text to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

And this is a brief history of communication.

God was, according to our Bible reading today, the first communicator.

First, long ago, God spoke.

God spoke in many and various ways (v. 1).

This divine speech was mediated or mouthed by the "prophets."

God also used angels who were "sent to serve" us back in those ancient days.

God spoke through prophets for a long time. Angels, too.

Then, God spoke through "a Son," (v. 2). *And everything changed*.

God, having thrown creation together in the most creative act of communication ever, now does something equally creative. God uses *human* representatives to speak to their own kind. God sends the Spirit of God upon them. God makes announcements and proclamations, sets boundaries, establishes nations, counsels kings, sets the agenda. In short, God does pretty much everything that can be done to give the human family all that is needed to walk faithfully and humbly, doing what is kind and just.

The greatest of the prophets was Moses. Through Moses, the law of God, present from creation and always in the heart and mind of God, was codified and chiseled into stone tablets. Through this prophet, God called out a nation. God created a community of faith through which God would express his nature and love.

Another great prophet was Elijah, a prophet who spoke truth to power. Never was there a prophet in Israel like Elijah!

And many other prophets stood in Israel's history to declare the mind of God: Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Joel, Habakkuk, and others.

God spoke through these prophets.

God communicated. God has always been a highly communicative God. God's pattern has not been to withdraw into his God-cave and refuse to speak. God has been highly eager to interact with and connect with us humans.

This is not a God who created humans and then left them to fend for themselves. The biblical witness affirms again and again that God relentlessly tried to connect with his human offspring.

And typically, these children rebelled.

So, God tried one last thing. And everything — EVERYTHING — changed!

Though he [Jesus] was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.  
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being. (Phil. 2:6-7b)

Talk about a creative act of communication! Everything changed. The world got turned upside down. God's arrival on planet Earth in a little Jewish settlement south of Jerusalem was the pivotal, hinge-point in human history.

*He was known as the Son of God.* He was the "reflection of God's glory, and *the exact imprint of God's very being*" (v. 3, emphasis added). This Jesus was superior in both his work and being to the prophets, to the created and natural world and even to the angels in heaven.

*Jesus was superior to the prophets* because the prophets were human and only human. They were fallible, prone to breakdowns, tantrums, confusion and sometimes, rebellion.

Jesus was human, but not just a human.

Still, he was a human being, and as such, subject to all of the tests, temptations and trials human beings suffer. Yet, he was without sin.

As a human, he was our brother "in every respect" (2:17), and as our brother he was able to represent us and shoulder all of our wrongdoing upon himself. No prophet was ever in a position to do that!

*He was superior even to angelic beings.* (See 1:5-14.) The angels worshiped him. He did not worship angels. He was present at creation and "founded the earth, and the heavens [were] the work of [his] hands" (1:10).

God is a God who communicates.

- Not distant, but with us.
- Not silent, but speaking to us.
- Not harsh, but full of grace and truth.

What kind of God would deign  
to put on human flesh,  
to taste the saltiness  
of tears, or know the weariness  
of too long days  
spent walking dusty roads?  
What kind of God with rough-hewn hands  
caresses blinded eyes to sand  
away their darkness?  
What kind of God enfolds  
the anger-frozen heart in fiery grace,  
melting into nothingness fear's unforgiving brittleness?  
What kind of God befriends society's dregs,  
the marginal folk who live outside  
its bounds by choice or chance?  
What kind of God greets hatred with compassion;  
offers raw, nail-torn hands to hold?  
What kind of God ... ?  
The one true God,  
who saves us from ourselves;  
who wove us in our mothers' wombs;  
Creator, Spirit, human God  
who knows us as we are  
and loves us still.

We have been created in the image of God. Our destiny is to be restored into that image. In our Wesleyan theology, we are moving on to perfection. God came to us in the form of his Son, Jesus, to restore us to God's divine nature. In this way, the Jesus transforms us into flames of spiritual fire. To become spiritual fire means to become like God. Even the smallest flame of fire is fire and has all the qualities of fire. This does not mean that our spirit is God's spirit, as some pantheists and philosophers suppose. We are not fragments of God's spirit. We are not God. God is distinct from us, but our souls can only find peace in oneness with God.

Consider how a sponge lies in the water and the water fills the sponge, but the water is not the sponge and the sponge is not the water. It is the same when we immerse ourselves in God. God fills my heart and I am in complete union with God, but I am not God and God is not I. We are distinct though not separate.

This Sunday, every 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in October, many churches will celebrate World Communion Sunday. The grace we receive in the breaking of the bread and drinking from the cup extends worldwide on this Sunday. The words of institution will be said in different languages, at every hour of the day, in every kind of church, with every kind of bread on

plates and in baskets. We all, with all our differences, as the scripture says, "have one Father" (and Mother) in God. This Sunday, our unity in that is emphasized.

The roots of World Communion Day trace back to 1936 in the United States, where it began in the Presbyterian Church. The idea was simple yet profound: to create a day that would emphasize Christian unity and encourage congregations to experience communion as one body of believers. The original intention was to bring churches together in a shared observance that transcended individual congregations and denominational boundaries, reflecting the universal nature of the Christian faith.

By 1940, the National Council of Churches adopted the observance, and it quickly spread to numerous Christian denominations worldwide. The ecumenical spirit of the day resonated with many, as it provided an opportunity for churches to affirm their connection to one another and to the global body of Christ. Today, World Communion Day is recognized across many traditions, symbolizing a shared commitment to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the unity of His church. Whether celebrated in a small rural chapel or a large urban cathedral, the essence of the day remains the same: a collective reaffirmation of the bond that all Christians share.

In today's increasingly interconnected world, where differences can sometimes overshadow commonalities, World Communion Day serves as a powerful reminder of the central truths that unite us. In an era where divisions—be they cultural, political, or theological—can often seem overwhelming, this day brings us back to the core of our faith: the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a day that emphasizes what we have in common rather than what sets us apart.

World Communion Day highlights the unity of the church in a tangible way. Regardless of our cultural or denominational backgrounds, we share a common belief in the grace and love of Jesus Christ. By participating in this global celebration, we not only honor Christ's command to "do this in remembrance of me" but also affirm our bond with Christians everywhere. This unity is not just symbolic; it is a lived reality that reflects the universal nature of the Christian faith.

Moreover, in a world that is often divided, World Communion Day is a powerful testimony to the possibility of unity. It shows that despite our differences, we can come together in worship and fellowship. It reminds us that our shared faith in Christ is stronger than any division, and that through Him, we are all part of one body.

World Communion Day is not just another day on the church calendar; it is a call to unity, understanding, and mutual respect among Christians worldwide. It reminds us that, despite our differences, we are all part of the same body, bound together by our faith in Jesus Christ.

As we remember and observe World Communion Day, let us remember that our unity in Christ is both a gift and a responsibility. It is a gift that calls us to celebrate our shared faith and a responsibility that compels us to work for peace, justice, and reconciliation in our world. May this day inspire us to live out the values of the gospel in our daily lives, as we seek to be instruments of Christ's love in a divided world.