

Sunday October 4, 2009 – World Communion Sunday
Sermon by Susi Kawolics

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12 - NRSV

1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,

1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

1:3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

1:4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

2:5 Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels.

2:6 But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?"

2:7 You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor,

2:8 subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them,

2:9 but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

2:10 It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

2:11 For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters,

2:12 saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

Today I've chosen to leave the gospel of Mark for a week – mostly because I couldn't figure out how to tie the reading about divorce into the celebration of World Communion Sunday! The reading from Hebrews makes much clearer connections, so I decided to take the easy way out.

This passage starts by saying that long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets. These prophets communicated God's desires, God's vision for the world. But then, the writer goes on to say - in these last days God spoke to the people by sending Jesus, who is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being. Jesus came to tell people about God, and about God's kingdom. He not only modeled for us a compassionate, loving and forgiving God, he also taught how to recognize God presence in this world. Being human, we need tangible signs, real experiences and examples to know God. Jesus provided that real experience. He also taught about the Kingdom. Because this Kingdom, or Realm of God cannot be described in concrete terms, Jesus used parables to tell us what it is like. He gave glimpses of it, so people could see it in their midst, and could also imagine God's vision of it, and work towards the building of it on earth.

Today, we no longer have the historical Jesus present with us, showing us how to live, teaching us about God's Kingdom. But building on what Jesus taught, and what the writer of Hebrews says, I think there are ways we can continue to glimpse God's Kingdom, and recognize it in a unique way through the celebration of World Communion Sunday. And then we can move beyond the recognition of God's realm to the working towards the fulfillment of it on earth.

This Sunday is all about coming together to celebrate as a global community of Christians, and treating each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. There are times when we know we are family, even though we are separated by distance. There are other instances when we don't recognize that we are brothers and sisters, even when we are together. And then there are occasions where we treat each other as family even though we may not be related. These three examples all provide glimpses of the Kingdom of God.

In the first example, the Kingdom of God is like a family where members are connected even when they're physically far apart. This has always been my personal experience of World Communion Sunday. I grew up a first generation American, with no relatives in the US, only in Switzerland and Italy. On my mother's side, in Switzerland, my grandfather was the minister who baptized me. I have an uncle and some cousins who are also ministers there. Therefore, throughout my life, this Sunday in a very real way, has always reminded me of how connected I am with these relatives far away. I always imagine my relatives serving Communion or taking Communion on the same day that I do. It reminds me that, although we are separated by physical distance, we are connected spiritually.

The second example is just the opposite. It is the image of people who are physically close together, and don't realize that they're related. A few weeks ago, there was a real story in the news showing a glimpse of what it is like to discover we truly are brothers and sisters. It was a story about a furniture mover from Maine named Gary, who had been working for a company for seven years when a new employee named Randy joined the ranks. Randy looked so much like Gary that customers asked whether they were brothers. This got Randy, who had been adopted, thinking and researching. He found out the names of his biological parents and also learned that he had a brother and what his brother's original name was. One day he asked his co-worker Gary if his birthday was June 10, 1974 and Gary just about fell over. It turns out that the two men were given up for adoption as babies about 35 years ago, then attended rival high schools and even lived in neighboring towns on the Maine coast before working together. They came out with the story, and after all the media attention this story received, a half-sister turned up with copies of her birth certificate. The joy felt by these siblings is a wonderful real life image of what it is like to discover that we are all brothers and sisters, that we are part of a bigger family than we ever imagined.

Whether or not we are connected through birth or our family tree, we have communities where members who are unrelated treat each other as family. This is a glimpse of the Kingdom as well. It is like members of Bainbridge Community United Church of Christ who pulled

together after an unexpected situation and produced a musical, gifting the congregation with a joyous, uplifting performance. The Kingdom is glimpsed when this community surrounds its members who are suffering with compassion and needed help and resources to get through their difficulties. We saw a reflection of the realm of God in the members who donated their time and treasure to the CROP walk last week. These are tangible expressions of the work of God right here in the midst of this church.

This is the foundation of the Kingdom of God: working towards a world where we recognize and treat each other as brothers and sisters. And once we have a glimpse of what this is like, we are called to expand it into the world. Our reading today puts it this way: For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified **all** have **one** Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Today we see the Kingdom of God as a table where the global family gathers. When we gather around this table, there is sharing by all and scarcity for none. Our gifts are offered to God, and our human hungers are satisfied. On this celebration of World Communion Sunday, we are reminded of our connections not only with our own members, but with Christians throughout the world. By celebrating here, and seeing the different cultures of the world symbolically represented by the different breads, we have a glimpse of our interconnections, and of our connectedness to the earth.

All over the world today, people are using the resources of this earth as elements in their Communion celebration. They are using grains and grapes to prepare Communion meals to share. All the ingredients for the breads that we eat come from one source – our earth. All the grapes for the juice or wine that we drink, come from one source – our earth. The breads may taste and look different, the drinks may be different as well, yet at their core, they are connected. This one earth provides everything that we need. It is the only place we have to get that which physically sustains us.

God has made us stewards of this earth. Hebrews tells us that God has made us for a little while lower than the angels; crowned us with glory and honor, subjecting all things under our feet. Now in subjecting all things to us, God left nothing outside our control.

This is an amazing gift, but also a huge charge. We live on this planet, which some have called “spaceship earth”, a fitting image, because all we have to live on is what this earth can yield. All humanity is traveling through space on this one planet and we must find a way to share what we have so that we can all live. It is a great responsibility, especially for those of us who have more power, who have more resources. This World Communion Sunday reminds us as we share bread at the table, that we must practice sharing bread in our everyday lives with those who are less fortunate.

We come together to celebrate our connectedness, our Communion with the rest of the world. We recognize although we are united, we have our differences. We acknowledge that if it weren't for these differences, there would be not be a reason to have “World Communion Sunday.” We are geographically divided, we are doctrinally divided, yet there are threads that hold us together. Our ultimate communion is not in our specific beliefs and creeds, in our church polities and policies, in our structures and our goals. Our ultimate communion as Christians is in our connection to God through Jesus Christ. Because Jesus came and shared humanity with us, he united all humans. This unity, this connection with all the world is our celebration and our hope in our sacrament today.

As we celebrate this World Communion Sunday, let us celebrate the way the Kingdom of God is already present. It is here through our care for one another in our families, in this community, and in our response to the needs of others in this world. Let us also demonstrate our hope for the furthering of this Kingdom. May this sacrament be a reminder and a glimpse of what we aspire towards: A world where we offer compassion and support to those in need, a world where the gifts of the earth are used to provide nourishment for all, and a world where all are treated and cared for as if they were part of a loving family.