

I Corinthians 10:16-17, 23-27 (NRSV)

16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

23 "All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. 24 Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, 26 for "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's." 27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

John 14:1-7 (NIV, adapted)

[Jesus said,] "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In God's heavenly house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to God's salvation except through me. If you really knew me, you would know this fully. From now on, you know God as you have seen God in me."

"Setting the Table"

It was the week after Thanksgiving of 2010. I had the privilege of serving as interim pastor of Adirondack Community Church in Lake Placid. Upon checking my email one morning, I found an encrypted military email sent to me from an undisclosed location in Iraq. After going through all of the security protocols, I was able to read the message from Lt. Col. Michael Oeschger. He explained that he was serving his second tour of duty in Iraq, but was planning a surprise for his wife. Their 25th wedding anniversary fell on New Year's Eve. Since their family had a tradition of a holiday visit to Lake Placid, he had arranged with his eldest son to have the family go as always. Michael would make a surprise appearance there, and wondered if I could arrange to have an informal renewal of their marriage vows on New Year's Eve at the church. Are you kidding? I was weeping just reading his email! Of course I would do that!

So, as we planned it, at 10pm on New Year's Eve I turned on all of the lights in the sanctuary of that beautiful church on the shore of Mirror Lake. In a little while a family entered saying that they had always wanted to see the church, and since the lights were on, they thought they would try the door. As I showed them around the sanctuary, and told them a little about the history of that sacred space Michael entered ~ to embrace his family for the first time in 23 months. Well, it took us all a while to recover from that precious reunion. But when we did, I invited them to come to the chancel area, and shared with Pamela that Michael thought it would be lovely for them to renew their marriage vows, and I was more than happy to oblige.

After those sacred moments, they mentioned that some friends were meeting them at a local restaurant, and they wondered if I would join them, even for a little while. When we arrived at the restaurant, a private room had been set for the gathering, and it was set in a style reminiscent of some of the family gatherings of my own past. There were two long tables surrounded by chairs. One table was set elegantly with a sparkling tablecloth, a floral centerpiece, fine china, silver, crystal, and flutes filled with champagne. The other was set with a plastic table cover, plastic plates and utensils, and small plastic cups filled with fruit punch. It was pretty obvious that one table was for the adults, and the other for children. The places at the adult table filled quickly and completely. At the children's table, however, there were three unclaimed seats. I volunteered to sit with the kids, as it seemed that someone had anticipated a setting that allowed them have more fun without getting into trouble! It was a delightful evening of feasting and celebrating together...with persons I had just met for the very first time!

This is World Communion Sunday. Within the 24 hour span of the earth circling the sun, most Christians around this globe will come to the table of Christ's grace to share in remembering the ultimate sacrifice of Christ's life as a ransom for our salvation.

In our scripture text from John's gospel, we find Jesus having a conversation with disciples who were confused and dismayed. Jesus had been sharing some tender moments with those disciples, washing their feet and giving them a living example of humble, servant leadership. They discussed betrayal, and Judas, after being identified as "the one," made a hasty exit from the dinner table. But the discussion of betrayal and Jesus' future continued in a way that must have made the disciples' minds spin with dismay. And so, we pick up the story with Jesus then offering comfort to those trying desperately to understand. Jesus anticipated their need to

hear words to reassure them that they were loved, would not be abandoned, and would have a place in eternity with the triune God.

Now this passage is NOT unfamiliar. We often hear it read at memorial or funeral services, precisely because of its comforting nature. And what is so comforting about it? Jesus is speaking of a future that is unknown, unseen, unfamiliar. But Jesus reassures the listeners saying:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

***In God's heavenly house are many rooms;
if it were not so, I would have told you.***

I am going there to prepare a place for you.

***And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come back and take you to be with me
that you also may be where I am.***

You may notice that we shared the New International Version, rather than the more familiar New Revised Standard Version translation of the scripture. Typically we are told to "believe in" Jesus. Here, we are told to "trust" Jesus. For some, "believe in" denotes a blind assent to a doctrine. "Trust," however, signifies a personal relationship built on a foundation of faithfulness. Jesus goes on to promise that there is plenty of room in God's eternal home, and that Jesus -- Jesus personally -- has prepared a place for each of us and all of us, that we might join Jesus in that state of eternal presence.

When we gather to remember Jesus' teachings, death, and resurrection **for us**, we come to a table of grace. The invitation conveys in a variety of ways that Christ invites us to the table **prepared** for us, and for all who seek a loving relationship with the God of our salvation. And it seems that there is always sufficient room for all who choose to partake and an ample supply of all the provisions we need.

Sometimes, the way the table is set can help to determine the comfort and spiritual connection of those who may gather at the table. Today, the children have had an integral role in "setting the table" for this holy feast. How can we resist the invitation to this table, set by these precious children of God, that we might recognize the presence of Christ in the youngest and oldest, in the wiggly and still, in the confident and the unsure?

We, too, are called to set a table for the ministry of Christ in the world. We do that by enabling the ministries of Christ's church to continue to touch, transform, comfort, and brighten the lives of those we encounter

with the love of Christ. As setting a table sets the stage, so to speak, for the celebrations that will follow, so the offering of our gifts equips the church to expand the circle of influence for all those who are sharing divine love in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Now, at the beginning of this year's stewardship month, we are each asked to consider if we are intentionally setting the church's table to accommodate those unanticipated participants, those added to the guest list at the last minute, and those we do not even know that God will send our way. And if the response is, "Yes, we feel called to expand the church's ministry, to make room for more, to be prepared to reach those we have yet to meet," then we need to set the table accordingly.

When reading this scripture and meeting face-to-face with the need to expand the church's ministries, there is one particular song that swirls through my mind. I think you will recognize the lyrics (and tune):

**In this very room there's quite enough love for one like me,
And in this very room there's quite enough joy for one like me,
And there's quite enough hope and quite enough power
To chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus ... is in this very room.**

**And in this very room there's quite enough love for all of us,
And in this very room there's quite enough joy for all of us,
And there's quite enough hope and quite enough power
To chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus ... is in this very room.**

**In this very room there's quite enough love for all the world.
And in this very room there's quite enough joy for all the world.
And there's quite enough hope and quite enough power
To chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus ... is in this very room.**

Amen!