

## **From Taking to Receiving**

Psalm 51:10-17, Matthew 6:19-21, 2 Cor. 5:20b-13

Valentine's Day Communion by Patty Friesen (Feb. 14/21)

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and it is traditionally recognized with the reading of scriptures reminding us of our mortality and our need for God. In our Zoom gathering, we will think about the gift of our lives and what reflects our values as we share the scriptures, songs, poems we would like used at our funerals. No pressure about the sharing part – folks can pass. Then we will conclude with anointing our foreheads with the sign of the cross. And this begins 40 days of intentional reflection on deeper meaning in our life with God.

Our scriptures today are all about hearts, returning our hearts to God, creating new hearts or clean hearts and opening wide our hearts - fitting for a Valentine's Day communion service as we talk about all kinds of love today. Love between friends, love between partners and spouses, love in families, and Christ's love for us personally and as a church body as expressed in the ritual of communion. Here's a reflection that helps shape how we *receive* this gift of love in communion this morning by Peter Marty from the Christian Century, From Taking to Receiving.

“When my daughter requested some sample vows to look over for her wedding, I sent her the customary sheet of various traditional vows I give to all couples. If a couple seems interested in writing their own vows, I encourage them to consider phrases from the traditional and matching in their own words. When Rachel and Dave returned their vows, it was the opening line that caught my eye: “I *receive* you, Rachel/Dave, to be my wife/husband.” I've performed nearly 400 weddings and this is the first time anyone has suggested using the verb *receive* in their vows. Every one of the sample vows on my sheet begins with the words, “I take you.”

When we *take* something, we feel possessive about it. If I'm standing at the Dunkin Donuts counter selecting a baker's dozen, I point at the trays and say, "Let's see, I'll *take* two chocolate frosted. I'll *take* three blueberry glazed," and so forth. But a spouse or partner for life isn't something we possess or take. In truth, they're more like a gift we *receive*.

Receiving is a virtue that most of us struggle with on a daily basis. When we give, we're in control. I can give you a compliment, a letter of reference, a Starbucks gift card. In each case, I'm setting the terms. I have power and options and discretion. When we receive, that's not the case at all. We're vulnerable and not in control. That's why receiving something can make us feel uneasy, dependent, or under obligation. Especially when we receive something for nothing, we often calculate how to return the favour. "The next lunch is on me," we say. Who wants to be indebted?

"Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it," said Jesus. Think of children as champion receivers. By necessity. They're little bundles of need, totally dependent on the grace of grown-ups willing to look out for them. They happen to be much better at receiving than the rest of us.

"What do you have that you did not *receive*?" Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians. "And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" When I hear Paul talking like this, I think of the peculiar deliberation of some people in church wondering whether or not they should take communion. You don't take a gift any more than you take a spouse. Both are lively realities that we graciously *receive*, even when we don't comprehend or approve of every aspect within them. (Nov. 4/2020, p. 3)

16th century Anabaptist Conrad Grebel said, "Ordinary bread ought to be used for communion, as well as an ordinary drinking vessel. This would do away with the adoration of

the elements, since bread is nothing but bread. Although it is simply bread, it is to be *received* with joy.” Hans Denck said, “For as bread supports our physical life when it is broken and chewed, so communion supports the life of our souls through the power of God when it is chewed and spiritually eaten.” It has been interesting how the bread and cup we receive has changed during the pandemic. Sarah Guenther used to make our delicious communion bread with a thimble and then Edna made it gluten-free – God bless her and there was love in our communion bread. Now we at home have rich creative communion with strawberries or cinnamon buns and coffee. I like these foods that we have raised or made reflect God’s love for us. Here in the sanctuary we are stuck with pre-packaged dry wafer and a shot of grape juice but we will imagine God’s love through these sterile elements as well.

Mennonite theologian Marlin Jeschke encourages Anabaptists to rework our theology of the Lord’s Supper from an effort to pull ourselves out of sin to make ourselves worthy of communion towards an understanding of grace and forgiveness *received* at the table. This means we *receive* communion as grace and forgiveness so we can freely confess what we need to live into the full life Christ is giving us and calling us to.

Led by Mennonite children’s minister and theologian Elsie Rempel, there is a growing understanding that we all grow into our faith and that we don’t have it all figured out whether we are 6 or 86. Elsie proposes that children who are included in the rituals of the church, including communion, will feel like they belong in the church - that regularly participating in communion leads them to baptism. She says we have to first *feel* like we belong to Christ in communion and in the church, before we *feel like being* baptized and then feel like *behaving* like a Christian in a community of faith. We have been practicing open table communion here at church for baptized and unbaptized alike in the hopes that our young people will grow into faith and baptism.

In our Faith Exploration Class, our young people feel like they belong to the church. That's to the credit of their families and Sunday school teachers and mentors and youth leaders. As they have been growing up in the church during these past years of open table communion, they have been taking communion and experiencing the love of Christ in their lives. Now they are exploring baptism. Even if they choose not to be baptized – they still belong. Belonging is the first step to believing and behaving like followers of Christ. (Belonging, Believing, p.33 )

So we invite all who feel the call and love of Christ to *receive* the bread and cup this morning, at home and here in the sanctuary with joy for the belonging we share all in Christ. Let us join together in the prayer of preparation for communion...#937