

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: October 2, 2016
Sermon Title: World Communion Sunday
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

David's Message "On Welch's and Wine"

When I was growing up, Holy Communion was very serious. In some Churches I know, the Deacons, all men, wore what are called morning suits, almost tuxedos. There were rules and traditions and all those special Communion table linens, embroidered cloths, silver and pewter trays. Communion was sober, dignified, and kids weren't allowed to have it. Not until you were confirmed.

So in my Church in Queens, as soon as Communion was over, my buddies and I would run into the Church kitchen and gulp down all the unfinished grape juice from the little cups, from the chalice, from the Welch's Grape Juice bottle. It felt as though we were doing something very adult.

Through the years, I've done Communion a hundred ways. One Sunday we offered milk and honey. That's an old, old form of Communion, based on God's promise that the Promised Land would be a "land flowing with milk and honey." It seemed like such a good idea, filled with symbolism, healthy, and tasty. I stood up in front of the Church, very dramatically filling a glass pitcher with milk, then pouring in honey, thinking they would blend. They didn't. But the symbolism worked.

And when Jesus had his "Last Supper" with his friends, symbolism was very important. Remember, they were Jewish, and that night was already a special night for the Jews: Passover. When Jewish people have their Passover dinner, it's like Thanksgiving, when we have lots of special food. Around here, every Thanksgiving you just know is going to have turkey, potatoes, gravy, squash, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. And every Passover has certain foods: radishes to remind people of the bitterness of slavery; apple walnut Haroset to remind them of the bricks they made as slaves; salt water for their tears; celery, for spring; unleavened bread, to

remind them of their quick escape from Egypt; and wine, to represent the promises of God.

Wine, the fruit of the vine. Since the beginning of time, people have taken those grapes and like that old "I Love Lucy" show, they squeezed those grapes into juice and stored it, saved it, for just the right time. Most of the foods at Passover are to remind us how bad things were: slavery, bitterness, tears. But the wine is to remind us how good life will be. During the Passover dinner, the people remember that God said, "I will free you . . . I will save you . . . I will redeem you . . . I will take you . . . I will bring you . . ." (Exodus 6:68) And with each promise, a little "sip of the grape," as folks used to say, a taste of God's promise.

What Jesus did at his Last Supper was to add a layer of meaning, first to the bread, then to the wine. Jesus made it personal. He took that bread and that cup of wine, and he said it as clearly as he could, "This is about me, about me and you. This broken bread, this red, red juice, this is me giving my all for you."

You know we have this house band that plays at our special services, often using straight-out rock 'n' roll music—Prince, U2, Springsteen. Mumford and Sons. Why? Because their lyrics often speak straight to the soul. The line between a love song and a worship song can be really thin. Here we are, thinking about what Jesus's Communion juice means, and I'll leave it to a song by John Legend called "All of Me." The chorus declares

*'Cause all of me
Loves all of you
Love your curves and all your edges
All your perfect imperfections
Give your all to me
I'll give my all to you
You're my end and my beginning
Even when I lose I'm winning
'Cause I give you all, all of me
And you give me all, all of you*

That's true of our love for our loved ones; that's true of Jesus's love for his loved ones: us.