

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: October 1, 2017
Sermon Title: True Communion
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scripture: Scripture Litany

Leader: We do not live by bread alone but by every word from God.

People: Yet we pray, give us this day our daily bread, our manna from Heaven.

Leader: Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."

People: But Jesus also said we are the leaven in the bread.

Leader: We remember when Jesus took bread, and he broke it and shared it with his disciples.

People: Jesus told us to remember him by sharing bread together.

Communion. Nice word, isn't it? Let me make it even better: *Holy Communion*. A little togetherness wrapped up in the sacred. That sounds nice, doesn't it? Who wouldn't want such niceness? We can throw in the word "community" (who doesn't like community?). Or Communal? Of course, we can go a step further with the basic root of the word, into "commune" and "communism."

Forget the political overtones of "communism" and the hippie image of "commune." Communion, commune, communal, communities—all these words are meant to imagine an experience of unity, of togetherness, of something special held in common. A Holy Communion.

That should be easy, right? What's not to like about unity? In America, it ought to be easy to agree that, yes, black lives matter, right there along with your life matters, my life matters, our lives matter. So, when things go wrong, as they do sometimes, it should be O.K. to agree that, by golly, black lives do matter. That's a nice thing to do. It's neighborly.

And, it should be a simple thing that when the National Anthem is sung, we stand, we sing or hum, we try to look dignified. We do it out of respect for principles and sacrifices and traditions, and for one another. That's a nice thing to do, and it's patriotic. And, going to a football game itself should be fairly unifying (at least for fans of the home team). You go, you cheer, you eat some bad food, and the overall camaraderie of cheering for the "home town team" should be like a gigantic communal hug. That's a nice thing and very sporting.

Sadly, we seem to be at 0 for 3. All too often black lives matter less. The American flag is being torn in a tug of war between competing forces of what's just. And football is being divided into as many camps as, well, religion. And isn't that a sad commentary on both? Fans, players, owners, sponsors, each with their own righteous indignation.

You know what the Bible says? That great old crotchety world-weary depressive author of Ecclesiastes remarked, "There's nothing new under the sun." Today's prejudices are rooted in yesterday's prejudices. Today's divisions are rooted in yesterday's divisions. Today's silliness is rooted in yesterday's silliness. Today's sin is rooted in yesterday's sin. "There's nothing new under the sun," which is, essentially, why we have Christ.

Nobody has walked out on my sermon, so it might be (I say, "*might be*") that we have a little unity here, a little agreement, that football should be fun, the National Anthem should be respected, and the lives of black people should matter.

In another setting, I'd be glad to chat with you about each of these, but I have mentioned them today *only* as a reminder of how elusive true "communion" is. Our "Holy Communion" is a remembrance of Jesus's "Last Supper." You know the part about the bread and cup. You may know about Jesus washing the Disciples' feet, and we've all seen Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper," all 12 Disciples reacting to Jesus's announcement that their "Holy Communion" was about to be smashed by disunity. And so, as the Last Supper ends, Jesus offers a prayer that is a powerful appeal for unity. This is what he says: "My prayer is for all who believe in me that they all will be one, just as God and I are one. May they [us] be brought to complete unity, I in them, them in me, so that the world will know that this is real." Notice his rationale: we are a reflection of him, good or bad, our unity validates his life. People look to us to decide whether they should bother looking at him.

Last week I told you a story that I admitted I had told 10 times before. Today I'll conclude with a story we've used at least five times. It's about that great Sally Field movie, "Places in the Heart." Listen to this: set in Texas, it features a destructive storm, a black man shot dead by police, economic uncertainty, and

a resurgent KKK. All that in 35-year-old movie. As the Bible says, "There is nothing new under the sun." But . . . the movie ends in Church . . . on Communion Sunday . . . Holy Communion. And in the final scene, the Deacons take those Communion trays out into the congregation, and the trays get passed person to person, and the camera slowly follows the trays as they pass along in the pew. And all of a sudden it hits you: everybody in the movie is there in the Church, in the pew, having Communion. The good guys and the bad guys, the living and the dead, the cop and the young black man, the poor and the rich, all together.

They've weathered the storm (pun intended), they've risen above all their prejudices of race, class, gender, you name it. They are the answer to Jesus's Holy Communion prayer that we "might all be one." I know it's only a movie. But it is absolutely the promise of our Christian faith.

There is a phrase Christians use in the Apostles' Creed that lists all the stuff we try to believe. It starts with "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son," then this statement and another statement and another until we get to "I believe in the Communion of Saints." *The Communion of Saints!* That's the Sally Field movie, the sense of unity among the living and the dead, the past and the future, the sinner and the saint all in communion.

Now, I don't know how old you are or the actuarial statistics on your life expectancy. But seriously, do we want to wait till we're dead to have a little taste of getting along across all the dividing lines we've turned into a blood sport?

We are better than that. That's all Jesus was saying: we are so much better than that.

Let's join together and sing Hymn No. 431, "Go, My Children, With My Blessing"

*Go, my children, with my blessing, Never alone.
Waking, sleeping, I am with you; You are my own.
In my love's baptismal river
I have made you mine forever.
Go, my children, with my blessing - You are my own.*

*Go, my children, sins forgiven, At peace and pure.
Here you learned how much I love you, What I can cure.
Here you heard my dear Son's story;
Here you touched him, saw his glory.
Go, my children, sins forgiven, At peace and pure.*

*Go, my children, fed and nourished, Closer to me;
Grow in love and love by serving, Joyful and free.
Here my Spirit's power filled you;
Here his tender comfort stilled you.
Go, my children, fed and nourished, Joyful and free.*