

In the Body of Christ
May 4, 2014
Rev. Laura Hehner

So I was at the church yesterday, and while the guys worked on setting up our sign, out front,

I decided to fold under Willa and Quincy's pleading to play inside for awhile.

They for some reason wanted to get out of the sun,

and wouldn't believe me that it was much nicer under the light than under a roof.

At the time, I was getting ready to start the sermon

but figured I'd just bring my computer over
to the church and watch them while I *worked*.

(ha-ha)

See these are the thoughts that go through the mind of a woman who doesn't yet have children.

While I was staring at the blank screen, trying to think of what I could say about God,

I got distracted a *few* times by Quincy peeing on herself in the bathroom,

and needing her pants cleaned and dried,

Willa bursting from the window, exclaiming that her work was done as a rain fairy,

because she saw a drop, and was now going to retreat to the castle to make crafts...

---On the way into the playroom asking me in the sweetest,

most disarming of voices, not for a pack of matches,

but for one of those plastic bic torch lighters that doesn't drop a flame

unless you release your finger.

[(Of course I gave it to her. Long as she promised to only use it on the curtains.)]

I wasn't getting much work done, but was enjoying the time.

At one point, while I was still staring at the white of the screen, Willa ran up to me.

“---What are you doing?” she asked, her voice bursting with all of this fresh-life joy.

I told her I was writing a sermon, but hadn't gotten too far, yet.

Over my shoulder, she said, “how 'bout you just say, “God is precious to this earth.””

I looked at her, shocked. Amazed, really. ...Definitely impressed.

(She's a smart one, huh?)

And I started typing. She actually demanded I put it in the sermon, so there it is.

And, of course, if Willa hadn't said something of such profound theological significance,

I might've had a hard time working with the words, but...they actually fit perfectly.

Because all of these things, at once,

are actually what we've come together in worship, to think about today.

This morning, is a time to think about communion.

About the ways we connect with each other in God.

It's a moment to think about the meaning of the church,

and its importance to our lives while we each try our best to sort through our days, out there.

It's about finding a place of rest from the world,

while we work together to make this sanctuary known to others as a place of peace.

Where we're lifting our souls, today, is to a space where we can think about

how what we pass to each other, from hand to hand,
 from mouth to mouth, brings us *closer* to each other,
 And to the life which fills us---the Life of our beautiful and holy God.
 This God---this overwhelmingly gorgeous force of existence---
 --which is so precious to our experience of ourselves,
 And to the life of the world around us.

So, yes...what Willa said, actually did fill beautifully that blank space in front of my
 eyes,
 And tied into the message we'll share with each other,
 and even a bit into the words our scripture readings leave behind in our hearts.

Our Psalm from the Hebrew Bible, today—Psalm 116---
 ---it sings of this natural joy, and love, and care we find in the presence of God.
 ---The precious involvement of God in our lives.
 And our reading from the New Testament---the Gospel of Luke---
 Shows us the startling ways we encounter God in each other...
 ...not just as we walk about on our own, out in the world,
 But when we sit together in intimate places, and break bread in God's name.

The time we spend together, this morning,
 is supposed to be a moment for us to sit back in the quiet of God's peace,
 By each other's side---in community---and enjoy this precious gift of sharing between
 each other.

...This gift of a *moment* God left with us,

In those last days Jesus was here in body, with his disciples.

It's about this body of Christ, we live and breathe in, as the church.

But even more closely, it's about what we feel in our mouths then in our hearts,

As we take the bread passed to our fingers, and swallow it, damp with juice.

--That one second, afterward, when we feel the life inside of us reach out to God, to take God in,

And let God rest inside of us for awhile.

I have to tell you (I know I already have, but--),

God has led me to some very strange and beautiful places, since receiving the call.

I've been blessed to lead and share communion with people in a lot of different circumstances.

...All of them precious. Each of them holy.

The first time I was undeservingly given the gift of leading the moment,

was by the Jordan River, at the Baniyas, where I witnessed that baptism,

we discussed together, before.

(..Both of the sacraments happening maybe not-so-randomly on the same day,

in the same place, actually. I never really thought about that before)

The second, was with my best friend's mom,

who was suffering through the end stages of cancer, just before she died.

Others, have taken place in people's family rooms, next to table lamps,

the elements sitting over piles of *Us, Weekly*...

... others around kitchen tables, after long discussions of the paranormal,

or struggles people felt in the difficult tasks of their job.

A few times in the dark corners of nursing homes.

...Once in a circle stuffed with pastors...

A lot of times in different sanctuaries,

with friends anywhere between the ages of five and ninety-five.

More places and more times than I can count, anymore, actually.

With a lot of different faces... a lot of different eyes...

... all coming together with different experiences in their souls,

but all for the same reason... which is to feel God close.

...To feel God deep...not just in those inner places of the soul,

But also in an important *physical* way... down deep in the pit of the stomach.

But no matter how we give or receive it,

It really was a holy gift, Jesus left us with, before he went away.

Something that reminds us of him and what he said about God over and over,

Through every month, every year after he was no longer present to speak, himself.

What he left us with was his *words* in the bread.

And every time we accept it from the hand of another,

We're taking the same life and energy Jesus spoke with from his own mouth,

And placing it in our own...

...to sink in deep, down past our hearts, and into the very core of who we are.

It was a way for him to keep us all *together*,

still connected in each other's company as his disciples.

As his followers. As friends.

When he passed that bread and said this is my body,

and then each around him took that piece of him into their own,

What Jesus did was he created the very foundations of the living church:

A group of people standing together, living and breathing as one, in the world...

...no matter how close or distant on a map.

A group of people living and breathing his life, long after his arms and legs left our sight.

In the bread we find a beautiful intimacy,

not only between our soul and the heart of God, but between each other.

Reminding us of who we are, and where we came from.

And reminding us of all of the unseen places ahead of us,

Where God calls each one of us to go, so that we might see others,

and share that intimacy with them, too...

...Spreading the love of God every time that chunk of grain

passes from finger to finger, and words pass quietly from mouth to mouth.

...I have to say that the spiritual intimacy we, as Christians,

experience with each other in communion is among of the most intimate I've ever felt.

Now, of course, I mean when it's really done.

Not just a moment of going through the motions.

("Body and Blood of Christ. Right. Amen. *Shuffle off*")

It's *different* from other intimacies we feel in our lives;

And its power and strength are different from other moments of closeness we feel,

because it's not something only shared between two or a few

(like the intimacy we feel in our love for our spouse or our family).

But something larger, so much bigger, than even this.

Even as we take communion here, together,

as our Deer Park congregation, on the side of 285 in Bailey, Colorado....

...What we share in the passing and swallowing of the bread

doesn't just happen here, in this place,

But in all things. All places. Spreading a warmth

through the whole of our living world.

And I think this is true for a couple of reasons:

The first, is that this intimate moment with God isn't confined, but spread wide past ourselves,

into the eyes, and mouths, and hearts of all of those people

we can't see around us (from one corner of this earth to the other),

all reaching out to touch into the same thing.

All, for just a brief moment, feeling the power of the embrace

of the same holy life wrapping into us all.

And the other reason is this truth that when we reach out and take the bread,

When we dip it in the juice, if we're *really* doing it, not just mechanically moving---

---with thought, with consideration...

...with the love we feel for God in the deepest part of our heart---

Our eyes look out into the world, seeing every little bit of the wide life before us,
in a changed way. ...With fresh sight.

Like when you've had a real rough day with the rest of the world,

And you come home, just broken down in shambles, and someone you love
doesn't say a word, but just takes you in their arms and holds you.

And you're both quiet for a moment, and all of that other stuff seems to just go away,
...Your mind and heart wrapped up in something warm, which lifts from down deep
and into your eyes as they open over that shoulder.

Refreshed. New again, looking out. With love, and no longer with fear.

This is the moment which is ours, when we share in communion with God.

The world becomes something new to us again. A place for fresh life. New movement.

A place of hope, not of despair.

And we see all of this---this intimacy, this fresh sight, this connecting---

--in our reading from the Gospel of Luke, right?

From verse 28:

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, [Jesus]

Remember, whom they still didn't recognize while they walked.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, [Jesus] walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

And this recognition after breaking the bread changed their hearts...the way they see.

They finally recognized the life of God, right there in front of their eyes.

Then from verse 33:

33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Cleopas [CLEE-o-puhs] and his companion, here,

lifted into a refreshed sense of life, and joy, and energy.

And in this new life, not seeking to keep it contained within themselves,

but to reach out to the others,

sharing what they saw and felt as they broke the bread,

and connecting with all of those around them, seeking the same thing.

In this bread, in the body of Christ, we're given the energy

to celebrate the life inside of us and around us,

And our eyes and our hearts are opened to each of the faces near, sharing in that same love.

This communion--this shared experience-- reminds us that

together, our hearts beat in the body of Christ....

...We find life in the body of Christ. ...We're changed in the body of Christ.

And we celebrate in that one holy moment as different pieces of that body,

all of those things, together,

as our soul rejoices on its own, for the presence and peace of that single life inside.

In the body of Christ, we find ourselves, again.

...Left with a renewed spirit, connecting us with each of the lives

touching into that one sacred thing.

...That Life of God, precious to all of this earth, and each person in it.

The bread we share helps us to see what we're so often too blind to notice.

And it brings us together into a single prayer,

shared by each of the hearts pumping blood to the fingers reaching out.

..This single act, happening at different times, in all of these different places,

Drawing each soul together into a whole---as God's church---

---no matter where we stand on the outside.

Whether we're sitting on the side of a river, or in a dark corner of a nursing home,

or between the white walls of a hospital room, or over sofas or kitchen chairs,

We all enter into the same space, sharing in a singular,

overwhelmingly powerful love, between God, and between each other.

And there are few intimacies greater, larger, more profound than this.

So yes... as I sat in the fellowship hall, staring at that blank white screen,

Glancing from time to time out the window

while Charles, and Pete, and Dave raised the sign for the church high

so it could be seen by all who pass by...

... And as I heard sweet little Willa tell me over my shoulder that God is precious to this earth,

Pretty much every point in this sermon had already been made.

...Because I was able to see the living and breathing reality
of the bread we'll share together today ...

That act of reaching out. And taking in. Of passing on. And sharing, together.

That beautiful act of communion inside each of us, in the same spirit.

Each of the different lives here in this church, along with all of those lives
far beyond these doors also seeking the sacred love of the holy, together,
and spreading it as far as their arms can reach...

So today, as that bread slides down your throat and into the pit of your stomach,

Let the peace of God fill you. Let the warmth of God wrap you up.

And let the love of God spill back out of you into the world,

in each of the places you stand as we leave this sanctuary together, as one in the soul of
God.

Let yourself remember that God is precious to you,

And that you are precious to God.

Amen.