

Calvary United Methodist Church
October 7, 2018

A TABLE FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

Rev. Dr. A. Robert Cook

Children's Message:

1 Corinthians 11:17-26

I'll call the children forward to share in a time together. Good morning. Good to see you and good morning.

Life has a lot of challenges, right? Like getting up on Sunday morning, but you're here. Or school, do you have challenges in school already? You hate school? What's the hardest part about school? (Child speaks.) Oh, I thought it was recess. Recess is hard, isn't it? Right, doing all that work. What about you, what's the hardest part of school for you? You like school? Do you like cleaning your room? You do, very good! You do not? (Child speaks.)

Well, life has a lot of challenges and it presents us with challenges that we have to handle, because you can't just fuss and kick and cry and scream your way through life. A lot of people do. Let me hand a challenge to you. So, do you think it is possible for you to step through this piece of paper? No. So, what if someone said: figure a way to step through this piece of paper, what would you do? (Child speaks.) Push your foot through it? What if I said you could figure a way out to step through this piece of paper, would you believe me? (Kinda.) Kinda? You'll trust me? Alright, well, I certainly have had a lot of problems in my life and I find that it's best to look carefully at the problem to be able to think about it. It really helps to consult with other people and see what they have to say. Teachers can help with that; parents can help with that, because they have all had problems too and they know how to solve a lot of the problems that we just have to work with all the time. And as you do, you know, you have to figure it out. Like, a lot of times my father wasn't home and if I had a flat tire on my bicycle, I had to figure out how do you change it and my neighbor showed me how to change a bicycle tire and then I learned something brand new.

And I watched my father one night help some guy who had broken the cable from the gas pedal to his car and he drove home with a piece of wire pulling the gas through the window. That was kind of an interesting solution and lo and behold I had an old car and I had the same problem. I had speakers in there that were big heavy duty speakers and what I did was a simply took some speaker wire and hooked it up, back then we had things called carburetors, because I am an old guy, but there are a lot of old guys here who know all about carburetors so I'm in good company. And that's how I got home. And my father smiled at me.

Now, sometimes I would sit down and I would fuss if I had this problem and I wouldn't know what to do with it, so you look at it, you study it, you work with it and you can pray about it too and you find that the problems you have aren't really that difficult at all if you just be patient. But if you insist on kicking and screaming and crying and carrying on, nothing happens.

So, you are going to have a lot of school work ahead. They are going to give you exciting things to do; science and math and things like that. And you are going to say, "Oh, I hate this stuff." They are going to make you learn French or something like that, right? And you'll say, "I don't understand what the teacher is saying." But if you spend time with it and you work on it, then you can figure a solution.

So, would you like to step through this piece of paper? Go ahead. Look at that. Oh, come on, keep coming. Get your arm through there too and your head. There you go. See? All you need is a good solution.

In church we have the same things. You know, there are a lot of hungry people around us and we have to figure out what can we do? One of the things you can do is work together, so on their way out today everyone is going to get a bag like this and you know what they are going to do with it? They are not going to cut it up. They are going to fill it, right? How many of you are not taking a bag home? (I am.) Alright. (Wait, Mom will.) Yeah, your mom will, don't worry.

So, you know, God helps you come up with solutions and, well, there has been a lot of faithful Christians over the years that have come up with cures for diseases and problems and inventions. You just have to think, pray, study, work at it, you can do it.

Let's pray: Thank you, Lord, that you give us the gift of problem solving by giving us problems that help us to find ways and solutions and thank you for all of those who will help the hungry this week that we can end some hunger this week. Bless each one in the name of Christ. Amen.

And, if you are hungry right now, I have a little solution. Help yourself.

Message:

Luke 22:14-30

Living God, you have called us together today, on this special day, to share in this time with your people to remember that we are part of something far greater, bigger than ourselves, that we are part of your kingdom. And one day people from the north and the south and the east and the west will come together and celebrate your kingdom and we have a foretaste of that now. Guide us. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

On Sundays when we share in Holy Communion I most want to get to that moment when we take the bread and the cup. It helps you to have a shorter sermon too and hopefully it will be. You can let me know. But in taking the bread and the cup I remember that Jesus is not a part of the past, but he is right here in the present, right with me and you now. His presence, his life, is in us. And in the bread and the cup we realize his real presence. And as a pastor there is something very special for me that is so I think amazing and so intimate to place the bread in open

hands or together as we will today, we will share bread together and then the cup. Remember the words: This is my body broken for you; this is the cup of Christ poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Each faith tradition has something beautiful and meaningful and vital. But in the Christian tradition we remember that in Christ God has come to us; that in Christ God's Spirit dwells in us; that in Christ we are given a new life and a new future that in Christ God is immediately present to us, for He sent Jesus to us to heal and restore us to the glory that God intended for us.

I do like to think about Jesus' young life. I like to think about his mother, I really do. I've been reading about her of late too. Like the women of her day she was trained to know how to be basically a paramedic, a physician's assistant, an EMT. The women of her day did this. They knew how to set broken bones, how to deliver babies, how to staunch the flow of blood, how to take care of wounds that you would get in farm accidents or that children would get. They knew which herbs would cleanse a wound, which would serve as an amedic or cure a sick stomach, which would help an expectant mother to have a healthier child. And Jesus learned all of these things at his mother's knee. So no wonder he was cued in to be a healer, to minister particularly to the sick. God has sent him as our healer.

But Jesus knew that God had a much larger task of healing ahead and that is the healing of all creation and he gave himself to God for the healing of the world. On the night before he died he gathered with his friends in the Upper Room. They were there at the Passover table. He shared the bread and the wine and a new covenant together with them, for them and for the life of the world. And the next day then, he stretched his arms out to become the ultimate peace offering.

It was always people making offerings and sacrifices to the gods, but this is what is so remarkable, that in Christ, God makes the sacrifice, He becomes the sacrifice and offers it to the world. And then in the resurrection, Jesus offers us not only the peace of God but a reconciliation that we cannot achieve on our own. And then he shared with his disciples in those forty days between the resurrection and Pentecost the way that he lived before them, his teachings, his understandings of this life in those three and a half years they travelled together. He repeated all of those things. And ten days later at Pentecost he poured his Spirit out, not only to his friends, but he set the Spirit loose on the whole world and that his disciples would continue his work as the Spirit paves the way.

So the one who invites us to this table this morning is the one who reminds us that we are to live here the way he lived among us, that we are empowered to find our reconciliation with God through Jesus and then we are compelled to seek reconciliation with one another. And accepting the invitation to come to the Lord's Table demands that we actively seek reconciliation instead of holding on to conflicts and divisions between ourselves and our neighbors.

You know the things that divide us. You know the things that make real conversations so diffi-

cult for us in this day. We've just come through a couple of weeks that were divisive, difficult, risky and almost anybody is offended by almost anything these days. You really must be careful what you say, when I think that someone somehow has to intervene in this terrible cycle. And Jesus became our intervention. So now what he does is he calls us to follow, to be the intervention in the world. But here, if we don't do this, who will? Who will then bring people together? Who will then bring a message of God's hope to people? Who will then bring people together to find ways to seek peace? If we don't do that, then I don't know who will do it. I believe God would raise someone up, but He's called us.

In 1 Corinthians, that John had read earlier, Paul is writing to Christians who were fussing with each other, fighting, acting out, acting nothing like people who know Jesus and they were just plain ugly to one another. This was what they learned growing up, this was the way of the world. Paul shared with he learned of Jesus and he invited them to experience Jesus in their worship by becoming the least, by preferring others above themselves. He reminded them that Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed, acted as a servant for the fussy, self-centered friends he'd had, to wash their feet. He poured out the wine, gave them the break: my body broken for you, he said. My blood poured out for you and for many. So what Jesus does is he brings us together in love around his table and then as he brings us together, love, forgiveness and reconciliation, we are to go and to do his work as his body in the world, that you and I really are called to bring people together.

Yes, we can easily be offended, we can get all cranked up about politics, local or national or international, we can blame it on this, that or the other person, but that is not your calling for mine. This is our calling: to bring solutions in this problem plagued world and to bring the healing and reconciliation of Christ to our families, to our friends, to our communities, to our nation and as far as God will send us in the world we share. Now, this is not an easy calling, but it is your calling and it's my calling and it has a lot of problems so we can kick and fuss and say "Can't it be done?" Or you can look, you can pray, you can study, just like I told our kids.

To fulfil this calling, I think first of all that means a deepening of our love for Jesus and an expanding of our understanding of his presence in everyday life and to spend time in his teachings. You cannot adequately do his work his way apart from a growing connection to him. That's just as plain as I can say it. You can't do it in your own strength. You need him. But as we do this we bring his grace and his healing as we've received it to other people. You see, Jesus changed the world at a table.

Many years ago I served a three point charge about fifty miles above here in the Hegin Valley and in three churches there were two that went pretty well together, but they triangulated against the third and every time we had any kind of joint meeting with people it was Ouchy, fussy, itchy. They were always complaining and it was contentious. The parking lot talk was always about the differences and you know it just got tiresome. And yet I really liked each of the people of these three churches. They were really good people. I enjoyed them very much.

I was learning from them too. And I began to pray about how do we heal this division and I wondered maybe if a table might make a difference. So, I put this as a prayer and then talked to Shirley. You know, the parsonage had an unfinished basement. It was just an old black basement for a house built in 1965. We decorated it, got four long tables from the church, one of the churches anyway, and we invited all the leaders of these three churches to sit down for a meal. Shirley decided that it would be a good thing to make a Pennsylvania Dutch meal because they were really dutchy, and this would be the food they loved. And you know around the table, if we have good food, that really helps. So, as we gathered, I seated everybody and when I think about it now, I mean it was really the homeliest basement, but we seated everybody. I prayed a blessing over the meal, asked Jesus to be with us and then I said, "I'm not kidding about this. No one speaks English at this table but me. The rest of you have to talk in Dutch." Well, that was a no brainer. They grew up speaking Dutch. You know, I was introduced to that church in Dutch. I thought they were speaking in tongues.

Well, it kind of started out slow, but then they started sharing reminiscences and school stories and church stories and they found that some of them were actually related. They started sharing their stories and after a while there were smiles, there was laughter. They were saying things about me I had no idea, you know, but from that table something really wonderful happened, that they began to work together as three congregations. It was really a lovely thing. They developed friendships that healed and blessed. That simple meal just created the basis for them to do some mission projects together and those trips actually made a real difference both for them and the places that they did those mission trips.

You see, I think that you can change the world around the table because Jesus did. He sets a table for the whole world.

Now, as we share Holy Communion today, think about what it would mean if every time we celebrated Holy Communion we remember that if we want to be a part of Jesus then we are a part of each other too, not symbolically, not to be forgotten as soon as you leave the building, not to be forgotten when you are stuck in traffic or in classes or at work or you are confronted with racism, poverty, hunger, not to be forgotten when we are tempted to put up walls between ourselves and others. Instead we remember that Jesus is with us and then around the table we begin to cool things down. We share words of peace; we seek reconciliation with one another.

You see, because of Jesus, we are one body. We are his body together. There is only all of us. Do you know what I mean? And if we can remember this, then surely we can rediscover God's mission for this church and as we do this, then the mission and the ministry of this church will flourish. In God's supply of all that we need will be unending and overflowing and a blessing for generations to come. Amen.