

“Many Tables, One Household”
October 4, 2020

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1
Galatians 6:1-10

The words of Jeremiah this morning speak to us with a disturbing directness: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”

We speak in faith and say that this is a fallen world—that we are alienated from God, from one another, even from the best in ourselves. In this fallen world, summers come and summers go and we are not saved—we have not found the wholeness of life that we desire.

Especially this summer. Marches and protests continue—as does racial injustice—and the president has been reluctant to condemn even violent white supremacists. The political turmoil that was with us in June has become an inescapable vortex with the president’s illness now throwing our nation and indeed the world into even greater chaos. The economic problems that require bipartisan cooperation go unaddressed. As Covid-19 cases in Iowa surpassed 90,000 last week, global deaths from Covid-19 have topped one million, and now our president is hospitalized.

“We are not saved.”

In addition to speaking for us, the prophet seems to speak with us, as we, too, would cry: “For the hurt of my people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me...O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night.”

As we find the courage to look beyond our own suffering to the hurting world in which we live, we see our deeper connections with other people. And we begin to see a new way forward.

The biblical hope of redemption is for the healing, not only of the individual, but also of the world. Our concern is, in the ancient words of the Nicene Creed, what Jesus did “for *us* and for *our* salvation.” God’s salvation—God’s wholeness and restoration—is cosmic in scope. It includes all of creation—of which we are blessed to be a small part.

We listen when Paul encourages us: “Let us work for the good of the members of the household of faith” and understand that this “household” is greater than our small, much-loved congregation. The word “ecumenical” finds its root in the Greek word for household—*oikos*. From its start in the twentieth century, the ecumenical movement has been a peace movement, seeking to establish bonds of compassion and mutual concern across and beyond national borders. It cares for the worldwide household of faith.

This table, then, is where we begin the work of bringing healing in every sense of the word into the world. This table is where we return again and again to be nurtured in that work, work that we are incapable of doing on our own strength.

We come to the table together—and what do we find?

Wheat ground down and made into bread.

Grapes crushed into wine.

Signs of suffering. Signs that in Christ, God has joined all of us in our sorrow and suffering and still promises to be faithful.

We come to the table, not because everything is all right, but because we hurt, because we know others suffer, because the summer is over and still we are not whole, the summer is over and still the world suffers. We come because at this table the anguish of God meets our human suffering.

So World Communion Sunday turns out to be far more important than we might ever have realized.

As we work for the good of the household of faith, the ripples expand outward.. Paul's full words are, "As opportunity offers, let us work for the *good of all humanity*, especially members of the household of faith." While we seek to love one another in this congregation, while we continue to work with and pray for others around the world who gather around tables like this one today, we know that our real calling is not so sectarian and limited. As far as we are able, we work for the good of all.

And we come to this day and we live our lives with a certain humility as well. We are called to be, not so much a *solution* to the hurts of the world as a *sign* to a hurting world—individuals and a community that point toward what God is still doing.

We find today that our various tables in our various places hold all of the gifts of God.

We share a meal that in a small and particular way ends our separation from God and one another and reconnects us with all creation.

We find at our tables food and drink that in a small and particular way offer the nourishment and joy needed that we might once again love our neighbors as ourselves.

Food and drink and meal and table connect tell a particular story of the way in which God is bringing about a new creation through death and resurrection. And when we tell this story in this way, we are brought back into relationship with all people who gather to eat at all tables and with all living things that are fed by the care of God.

This meal, in which bread is broken and wine is poured, in which we remember God's mighty acts in Jesus, this meal nurtures our faith and our life together. It prepares us for the work that is still ours to do in these days of unraveling—weaving a new fabric of justice and well-being and compassion so that we might be a part of the realm of heaven that God is creating among all people.

The table is where we begin. The table is where we return again and again to be nurtured in that work, work that we are incapable of doing on our own strength.

In faith at our tables we affirm that God is with us in our suffering and leading us to the hope of the resurrection.

In mercy God does much more than help us to feel good again and get on with our lives as they always have been. God comforts us—that is, God gives us strength in adversity—so that we in turn might bring strength and consolation to others as God's people in this weary world.

The mercy of God is an empowering force that calls us forward into God's new creation. This mercy forgives us for the wrong that we have done. This mercy forgives us for the good that we have failed to do up to this point. And even more, it then lifts us up and turns us toward the new day that is dawning, so that we might wait for the salvation of the Lord, the wholeness and well-being that God gives.

We wait by working for the very things that we await. We work for the day when the hungry are fed and the homeless are sheltered. We work for the welcome of the refugee and the outcast. We work for interracial understanding and cooperation. We work for the renewal of all creation.

We who are many are one body. When we come to our tables, we find that they are indeed the Lord's Table. In this household we learn to care for all.

Come, for all is ready.