

“Come to the Table”

“In this ‘Come to the Table’ series, we hear the call to dine with Jesus – an invitation that means much more than a simple eating experience. It never was with Jesus. **The table was the place where he not only fed people, but challenged them to acts of hospitality that reflect God’s Way.** When we say ‘yes’ to the place at Christ’s table, we accept a way of life that embraces God’s definition of love, peace, grace and joy.” (From the Worship Series, *“Come to the Table”* from www.worshipdesignstudio.com. by Marcia McFee.)

The following video shows the importance of the Table among all believers and for everyone in this world. [The video, *“The Table”* was shown.]

As we consider the importance of the Table for the Church – the Body of Christ and for this expression of it, there are a number of important Scriptures, for us to examine. First, there is the theme Text for this Worship Series, **Matthew 18:20, when Jesus taught and promised, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”** So, as we think about what it means to be the gathered community – the people, who come together at the Table of the Lord, we need to remember Jesus’ promise – he is with us – that he is with us when we are the gathered followers of Christ. Our Lord and Savior – the Son of God is with us when we gather around his Table – when we are together in his name. We humans are not alone!

That being the case, how are we to relate with or treat one another? Jesus not only taught about how we are to do this but he actually gave his Original Disciples and us a physical example, the washing of the Disciples’ feet, which revealed the basis for our interactions. **John 13:12-17 reported how during his last night and supper with his disciples, “After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. ‘Do you understand what I have just done to you?’ he asked. ‘You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you. I am telling you the truth: no slaves are greater than their master, and no messengers are greater than the one who sent them. Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice!’** We are to serve, support, and help one another! The Community of the Table is not a place or group where we are to be demanding service but serving one another.

Since we are to gather in the presence of Jesus and serve one another, how are we to be the Worshiping Community – the People of the Table, when there is animosity among us? We do have a policy based on Jesus’ instructions for how we are to resolve complaints or disputes. If anyone needs a copy of that, please let me know. What is more insidious, is the problem of when one person is so controlled by anger or hate that he or she either refuses to come into the community, which includes someone she or he dislikes or he or she participates with great unhappiness within her or his heart and spirit. Let’s remember Jesus taught in **Matthew 5:23-24, “So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.”**

Our Teacher and Savior also taught his disciples – that includes us – to take the opposite approach from the way the world encourages us to interact with one another. We see this in **Mark 10:42-45, “So Jesus called them all together to him and said, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, you must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be**

first, you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.” Indeed, the Community of the Table – the Body of Christ is not limited to just certain people like ourselves! Even people, who are despised by our Society or who are looked down upon as somehow of lower class or inferior, are invited to the Table – to be part of the Church – the Body of Christ. **Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, for many years, has joined in the United Church of Christ’s “God Is Still Speaking” emphasis, which affirms all people are invited by God and Jesus into the Community of the Children of God – the People Gathered around the Table of the Lord!**

During this past week, we saw some extraordinary expressions of this inclusivity of the Body of Christ in the news. There were inspiring funeral service celebrations for two historic figures in the life of our Culture and of the wider Church. **One was for Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul and the other was for Senator John McCain.** Both funeral celebrations included Worship Leadership by a wide diversity of people. Senator McCain’s was perhaps the more striking because of who he included. During the Saturday Service at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., he had his two former adversaries, who had defeated him in his Presidential Campaigns, give his eulogies. **In the Service in Phoenix on Thursday, he had both political allies and adversaries speak.** Tommy Espinoza, a family friend and President and Chief Executive Officer of the Raza Development Fund – a democrat spoke about how he had been repeatedly surprised by republican McCain’s requests over the years for him to speak on his behalf. The Senator made him his friend and welcomed him in the face of the divisions of society. Former Vice President of the United States, Joe Biden, a democrat, had been a friend with McCain for decades. They had been supportive of each other outside of politics over those many years. One common experience their families shared was Biden’s son and Senator McCain both died of brain cancer. Larry Fitzgerald, Jr., [show photo of him] wide receiver for the Arizona Cardinals, who was not supportive of the republican party policies, also spoke of his surprising friendship with the Senator. Yes, there were also republicans, whom McCain had speak at his funeral, such as Grant Woods, the former two-term Attorney General for Arizona. **My point in talking about who spoke at the McCain services is to celebrate the wonderful example of including everyone in our gathering around the Table – our Worshiping and Serving, which Senator McCain provided to Arizona, the United States, and the World.** Hopefully, such a great example, will encourage many people to seek out that inclusivity in their spiritual journeys. We may even welcome some ourselves!

Finally, our Scripture Reading from Paul’s Letter to the Romans gives us some very practical instructions for how we in the Community of the Table – the Body of Christ are to relate with one another and with all people. **Paul wrote in verses 9-10, 15-16, 18, and 20, “Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another warmly as Christians, and be eager to show respect for one another. ... Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep. Have the same concern for everyone. Do not be proud, but accept humble duties. ... Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody. ... Instead, as the scripture says: ‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame.’”**

“The meal of the kin-dom of God is for all. Saint, strangers, those who persecute and betray you, those who are joyful and those who weep.” Our Scripture from Romans “reminds us and invites us To do as Jesus did — ‘do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good.’ In the words of Jesus, ‘take up your cross and follow me.’ This requires that we follow God’s Way in offering a good meal at God’s table for all of God’s guests.”

Let us come to Jesus’ Table inviting and welcoming all people to join us – especially, as we share in the Feast of Christ – Holy Communion! Amen.