

SERMON
WORLD WIDE COMMUNION SUNDAY OCTOBER 2005
How Big is your Table?
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The people of the church community were building a new church. It was a fine building, its pinnacle reaching to God. The architect had done a fine job of designing the structure, the board and the people had approved the design with little dissent, and what differences there were, were quickly forgotten or put aside for the common good.

There was excitement in the air as the foundation was laid and the first beams were put in place. Work days were festive events and the men, the woman and the children each in their own way contributed to the building, using their God given gifts and abilities to create the new building in which to worship and praise God.

There were many details to be attended to: The framing of the windows, the pews (dark or light), the color of the carpet, windows (clear or stained glass) the woodwork that housed the candles, the lectern and pulpit, the choir loft, and the communion table. There were a number of skilled craftsmen in the fellowship, among them skilled carpenters and woodworkers.

One of the carpenters was chosen to make the communion table and when he got ready to make the table he carefully selected the finest woods and began to sketch out a design that he thought would be fitting for the building as well as a tribute to the remembrance of Christ. He went to the project superintendent and asked how big the table should be. "How big should the communion table be? He asked.

The building superintendent said, "Well, I guess I'm not really sure, let's go and ask the architect." So they did.

They said, "How big should the communion table be?"

He replied "I'm not really sure, it might be not only a question of the size in the building but the theology of the church."

So they went to the Board, told them the problem and asked how big the communion table should be. The Board discussed it for a week and then decided to ask the minister.

"Pastor," they said, "We have a problem and we know that you have had vast and extensive training in these matters. Tell, us how big should the communion table be?"

The minister was gratified in the trust placed in him and took the matter very seriously. He thought about it for a week consulted some other churches and met with some of the ministers at the local coffee shop to discuss their understanding of the communion table; all without a satisfactory answer.

He told the Board they should appoint a committee to discuss the matter. It was proving to be a much bigger issue than he would have imagined.

It took the Board another week to form a committee and they met a week later and talked about it for two weeks, did a poll of the congregation, did some internet research, and then they decided to make some church visits. They made a chart on Excel, took their tape measures and went to a number of churches and composed an impressive list of

details, height, width, depth, length, types of wood, inscriptions and methods of constructions.

But they were still stymied. “How big should the communion table be,” and they still had no good answer to what was appearing to be a very important question.

The church had a Sunday school program that encouraged exploration and diversity in the midst of its biblical studies. Not only did they research and study the Bible stories and meaning in detail, but they also took time to study other cultures and traditions. For instance, they studied the way in which other cultures celebrated Christmas. And they studied other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Native American spirituality and Islam. The church felt it important that they know something about other faiths and peoples. They also taught respect for these faith traditions while at the same time upholding the value meaning and truths of their own faith.

Well, World Wide Communion Sunday was coming and the Sunday school classes were studying the sacrament so as to better understand it. The teachers had taught that the communion table held the sacraments for the worshippers. They had also discussed how communion was for the entire world, everyone could come, and celebrate the gifts of communion. They also talked about World Wide Communion Sunday and how all across the earth, all Christians everywhere celebrated the sacrament on this day.

As part of the learning process, one of the classes was making drawings of the sacrament of communion and the process of partaking. The pictures showed the communion table, bread and juice, candles and the people eating and praying. They were wonderful pictures. One little child took a very long time to complete the drawing but when it was finally finished the child proudly presented it to all of the teachers.

The drawing was quite large and quite different from the rest of the drawings. It depicted a communion table that was not contained within the church but stretched out from the center of the church through the church walls and wrapped around the entire earth, literally embracing the earth like a belt. Not only did the communion table enfold the entire world, but seated at the table were people of all colors and sizes and types sharing in the communion meal. In fact, not only were there Christians, but upon being asked, the child identified people from India who he said were Hindus and Buddhists, and people from Japan who studied Confucius and people from the middle east who were Moslems, and Native Americans, and people from all over the earth of every faith color and belief.

The teacher asked about the drawing and the child said, “Well, you said that communion was God’s gift for everyone and that whole world was invited.”

“Yes, I did say that,” said the teacher.

“You said, we Christians were hospitable people, welcoming and loving,”

“Yes, I did say that,” said the teacher.

“So I made the table big enough for the whole world and for everyone, no matter what.”

The teachers of course, knew that the church was wrestling with the question, "How big should the communion table be?" so they took the drawing and the child to the communion table committee and the drawing was shown and the child explained the communion table to the committee, who explained it to the Board, who explained it to the pastor, who explained it to the building superintendent, who explained it to the carpenter who explained it to the architect, and so began a new process of understanding in the church about its role in the world and the role of the sacrament of communion in the world.

Decisions were made, as a new understanding fell into place and the whole process instead of being labored and technically difficult and worrisome became a joy. It was as if God was making the decisions and had blessed the event. This is what the church decided to do, or maybe, God decided.

A stained glass artist who was a member of the church was commissioned to make a large stained glass window based upon the child's drawing and it became the center piece of the sanctuary. The communion table itself was not a table at all but a thick piece of clear Plexiglas that hung from the ceiling on thick invisible line in front of the stained glass window. When the bread and the cup of juice were set on this table, they seemed suspended in mid air and appeared to be sitting on the table of stained glass that stretched around the earth.

On the first Sunday when all was in place, it was very still and solemn in the church as the congregation absorbed the meaning of God's universal love spread before them. The title of the sermon was, "How big is your table?"

The scripture was read by the teacher, "Beloved let us love one another because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. Beloved, since God loved us so much we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us...we are the dwelling place of God."