

Denice K. Leslie
World Communion Meditation
October 1, 2006
I Corinthians 11: 23 – 28
Matthew 26: 26 – 30

A few years ago a nationwide poll asked, "What word or phrase would you most like to hear uttered to you, sincerely?"

Can you guess the first thing people want to hear? You're right: "I love you." The second, "You are forgiven." Number three, believe it or not: "Supper is ready."

How long has it been since we have heard these words spoken to us?

"I love you" -- God's unconditional love.

"You are forgiven" -- God's unmerited grace.

"Supper is ready" -- God's unsurpassed invitation.¹

We find all three of these things offered to us, ALL of us, at the Lord's table. ALL OF US. What does that look like? It looks like the Kingdom of God.

Robert Benton's Academy Award-winning film *Places in the Heart* ... is the story of a young woman, widowed within the first few minutes of the film, struggling against principalities and powers of evil incarnate in the everyday life of central Texas during the 1930s.

Forces work to take away the only thing her husband has left her and her two small children - a small farm.

Lynchings, brutality, infidelity, racism, greed, duplicity all of these are woven into the lives of those who make up the tapestry of Benton's story.

The film ends with a communion service. At first the camera shows you a few of the good folk in town. Next, some of the not-so-good. Then the banker and others who conspired to take away the farm.

¹ With thanks to James A. Harnish, "Walking With Jesus: Forgiveness," Tampa, Fla., March 22, 1998.

The camera continues to move with the cups of wine. There is the faithful black farmhand who helped bring in the crop so the white widow might pay her mortgage; next to him, the blind boarder.

The plate passes to the children, then to their mother. She is seated next to her late husband.

As you are trying to take this in, the plate moves to the young man who shot her husband. They commune, and each responds: "the peace of God."

All are gathered at table, to share the bread and cup of salvation.

Suddenly this is more than Sunday morning; this is the kingdom, eternity captured in time.

This is not a human point of view. The camera gives us a look at life, the way Jesus said God looks at it.

In Jesus' Supper, God has done something to enable everyone to come home, to have a place at the table.

The apostle Paul says it this way: "In Christ, God was reconciling us (to himself, not counting our trespasses against us" ²

ALL of us. Today is World Communion Sunday. A good day to remember how God sees the world and who God welcomes to the Feast: the good, the bad and the ugly.

You fill in the blanks. The names change with each passing generation but we know who the "they" are. The THEY are our loved ones who have preceded us in death. They are those we hold dear in this life but who may never darken the door of the church, or who live far away OR who are with us here now. They are ALL those we love.

² -Fred R. Anderson, "The mystery of being new: Can we go home again?" The Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City, March 22, 1998. Mapc.com/1998c/lent04yc.htm

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The they are the bad. Our enemies personal or randomly or intentionally criminal, political or national. ALL the bad.

The they are those we ignore, pass by, hold of no account, and do not see. The poor, the marginalized, the homeless, the migrant, the disabled, the powerless nobodies, the very young, the very frail, the very ill, the very disabled. ALL the ugly.

The loved, the bad, the enemy -- to someone else in this world—all of these, whom we define as THEY, are US. WE are beloved, we are enemy, we are ugly in someone else's eyes.

But in God's eyes, we are ALL human. We all belong to God. And God announces in communion that supper is ready! Everyone is welcome home. This is God's unmerited grace.

ALL of us gathered together, forgiven, loved and freed—freed from want, misdirected living, hate, malice, greed, self-centeredness, despondency, hopelessness.

Freed from disease, disability and death.

Freed for goodness, wholeness, loving relationships with others and freed for joyful expectancy. The biblical vision is a feast of fat things for all God's people served at a table large enough to hold the whole human race on the mountain of God in the New Creation.

In the Lord's Supper, everything saving God has done for us comes together in Jesus. In his life, in his sacrificial death, in his resurrection victory over the evil we do and over death itself.

Jesus is the host of the table. He stands here beckoning us to come. Not only at this table but all around our globe wherever people are gathered for a meal: in a cathedral or small rural open air church, around a fire, in a café, in a pub, in a bar, in a home, in a hovel, in a banquet room, in a lunch room, in a school yard, in a convalescent home or hospital, in a prison dining hall, in a refugee camp, in a Friday evening synagogue Shabbat service... Wherever and whenever people eat together.

The bread may be yeast raised wheat, flat or cracker; corn tortilla, rice or plantain..... The beverage equally, infinitely variable.

Nevertheless, God's gracious, reconciling, peace giving invitation to all of humankind is present. Supper is ready! Wash up and come to the table! Welcome home, welcome home!