10/3-4/20 Revelation at the Table Rev. Amy Haines

Lk 24:28-35 Come to the Table Series

 World Communion

Last December, my extended family gathered for our children’s triple birthday party at the parsonage. When we were still gathered around the table after dinner, my sisters and I were ear-piercingly enthusiastic when my cousin and his wife announced they were going to be first time parents. It was a revelation that we had hoped for someday, yet were not expecting at that time and place.

In a typical year in our United Methodist itinerancy system, most pastoral introduction begins with dinner. The District Superintendent invites the pastor and spouse to meet with the SPRC chair and their spouse at a local restaurant. Having been through several of these dinners,

there is often a moment of uncertainty on the part of the laity until they figure out who is the pastor and who is the spouse. For some, there is still a moment of surprise when they are introduced to a female pastor.

Many United Methodist congregations have been known best in their communities for their church meals. I was shocked when I moved to Northwest Ohio and realized that ice cream socials there meant full meals including shredded chicken or BBQ beef sandwiches offered with the ice cream!

One previous church where I served had also been taught by previous generations to bring to a potluck not only a main dish, but also at least one side or dessert.

Now that you are hungry, give thanks for the times we have been able to share in community

around our tables here at church. Church dinners and Wednesday night meals. Coffee and donuts between services. Spaghetti and pancake dinners to support the youth.

I miss sitting around the table with you, listening to your stories, hearing your struggles, laughing together or lamenting together. Someday we will re-gather as the full church family around these tables.

Until then, consider the other ways to gather around virtual tables, or to re-connect in community through phone calls or emails or virtual studies or in-person worship.

Today we begin a four-week series called “Come to the Table.”

Revelation-Hospitality-Enemies- Laughter—all are found at God’s table and also at our tables.

Throughout the Scriptures, and especially in the Gospel of Luke, God’s welcome is offered through table fellowship, a welcome of love and grace, of claiming and calling.

As we reflect on such a welcome, in our worship, in our homes and in small groups, we are then invited to extend that welcome to others.

Think back now to meals with family or close friends around your tables, at restaurants, or with your church family. What has been revealed to you over the years over a meal? Were they moments of surprise, moments of joy, or moments of shock?

I recognize that not all revelations are positive. Not all meals are inclusive. How many times do you gather with family and must stay away from the topics of politics, religion or current events? Yet, around our own tables, or especially at table with other Christians, are not those the places where we ought to be able to learn how to discuss hot topics even when we disagree?

Today, as we remember the intentional announcements and unexpected surprises that have occurred around our tables, we also reflect on how often Jesus is revealed at table in unexpected ways. Or how often Jesus surprised those around him by revealing God’s kingdom ways at the tables where he gathered.

In the Gospel of Luke, there are 10 stories focused or implied to have happened around the table. In each one, Jesus upsets the status quo; he upends the purity laws expected by faithful Jews. For in the Jewish culture of the time, when a person broke bread with another around the table, that table fellowship signaled a welcome and inclusion of that person. Jews were not to break bread with someone of a different social class, or someone considered unclean by the purity laws, or someone who was not a Jew.

Yet Jesus broke bread not only with the religious leaders and his disciples; he also broke bread with tax collectors and women and sinners.

Jesus was offering the grace and welcome of God to every person with whom he broke bread.

He was revealing the truth to them, reminding them who and whose they were—beloved sons and daughters of Almighty God. They were loved. They were valued. They were forgiven. They were welcomed.

Today’s Scripture passage is the 9th out of 10 table stories in Luke, and happens on Easter evening. Jesus had been crucified and buried. Yet on that Easter morning, the women declared Jesus had been risen from the dead, and had appeared to them, alive.

On Easter evening, two of the disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, confused, grief stricken, and hesitant to believe the women. A stranger joined them along the road.

As they shared their story of Jesus, he began to open their eyes to the greater Scripture story and what it proclaimed about Jesus. When the three companions arrived at Emmaus, the pair invited the stranger to remain with them, and they sat down together at table.

While at table together, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them. In that moment their eyes were opened and they recognized the stranger was Jesus—risen, alive!

With such a revelation at the table, the disciples’ eyes were opened to approach the world in a whole new way. Running back to Jerusalem, they enthusiastically shared the good news they had experienced. In so doing, they extended God’s table through wonder and truth and grace.

When has Jesus been revealed to you? Was it through the Scriptures, or the witness of another person? Was it through the actions of a close friend, or the loving persistence of a family member? Has Jesus been revealed to you in worship, through music, or through the bread and cup of Holy Communion?

When have you experienced Jesus around a table--a table in your house, a table with family or friends, the table of Holy Communion?

Today we gather at Christ’s table to share the bread and cup, elements that recall another meal Jesus shared with his disciples—his final meal, his last supper.

At that meal, Jesus sought to prepare his disciples for what was yet to come. He encouraged their love for one another, and for the world around them. He recognized that they would all desert or deny him, yet still he would call them to carry forth his good news. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, foreshadowing how soon his body would be broken

and his blood poured out for the sins of the world.

Only looking back on that meal, did the disciples began to understand the significance of that night.

Sharing together today at this table, or connected online from our own tables, we can still recognize the truth of Jesus’ welcome and love offered through the bread and cup of holy communion. The elements are not simply a remembrance of a meal long ago; they are also a holy mystery of God’s forgiveness and grace offered to us here and now.

Give thanks that we are not alone! God is with us, as God is with all in the church universal.

Today, as we share together, we also can give thanks that we are not alone, for we gather on this World Communion Sunday with brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. Throughout this day around the world Christians are meeting Jesus in grain and drink. Christians from many denominations and many diverse backgrounds. Missionaries in Nepal and the Congo. Family in other cities and states. Congregation members at their own tables throughout our community. We share today at our tables with those who think and act and believe different from us. Yet we all gather to remember and be renewed by Jesus’ presence with us at the table.

As United Methodists around the world, we continue to offer an open table for holy communion, a table where all are welcome to share in the bread and the cup, as long as they seek the love of Jesus. You don’t have to be a member of our congregation. You don’t have to be a certain age to share in the bread and the cup.

Parents, today offer communion to your children in whatever forms you have at home. Say a blessing over those too young to partake, yet are still present as part of the church universal.

God is with us all, at the ordinary and sacred tables of our lives. And as Jesus revealed God at his tables, we are called to reveal Christ at our tables. Like the disciples who left Emmaus to return to Jerusalem, we are called to go forth from this table of grace to offer grace to others.

As we have been welcomed we are called to welcome others. As we have been forgiven we are called to forgive others. As we renew our walk with Jesus we are called to invite others on that walk.

Don’t be afraid to share your experiences of Jesus with others at your tables, or over the phone! You, too, have a story to share. Of Jesus’ love and amazing grace. Of doubt and faith.

Or encouragement and stumbling. Of trust and surrender. Of forgiveness and renewal.

Next week, invite someone to worship with you, in person or virtually. Next week, invite someone to coffee, in person or over the phone, and ask them to share their story of walking with Jesus. Next week, ask God to open your eyes of seeing Jesus not only at your tables,

but throughout the week, in sacred and unexpected ways.

Don’t be afraid to make space for all of God’s children at the table of grace. Jesus was not afraid to eat and welcome tax collectors and sinners, the righteous and the outcast, men and women.

Jesus is calling us to not welcome only those like us at the table, or those we believe are forgiven at the table, or those we select at the table. Rather, Jesus is calling us to welcome all at his table—and for Jesus, all means all.

If Jesus can break bread at his final meal with both Peter and Judas, men who deserted and betrayed him, there is no one we cannot break bread with at our table. Breaking bread does not mean we will always agree with one another; breaking bread means we respect and honor one another.

Don’t be afraid to open your eyes to the unexpected ways God is working in our lives. Remember, Jesus can be revealed to us in many ways—at the table of communion or in the midst of worship; through the Scriptures or the story of another person; through an ongoing relationship with someone who walks the walk or through an unexpected encounter with a stranger. God works in many ways throughout our lives.

May we open our eyes to Jesus, and then open our eyes to one another. May we extend the table of grace that we have received. May we be changed by the welcome we receive from other Christians within the church universal.

God, by your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world. Amen.