If It Ain’t Broke, Break It
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World Communion Sunday
Ravensworth Baptist Church
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Good morning! As you’ve noticed by looking around, the worship space looks a little different this morning. It’s World Communion Sunday- one of my favorite days of the year. It is on this day that we celebrate, with the church universal, this idea that we are all connected through the common act of the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup, those radical acts that Jesus taught us to do.

In 2015, our world is connected even beyond this table. We can tweet something and have it go viral worldwide in a matter of seconds. We can FaceTime with family around the world. We can livestream speeches, weddings, tv shows, concerts and just about anything else from where we are and thanks to the internet, have it someone else’s home instantly. In some ways, we are more connected than ever.

“World Communion Sunday started back in 1936, when the world was deeply fragmented by the conflict that would be later known as World War II. World Communion Sunday (originally called World Wide Communion Sunday) has been an observance to help Christians all over the world affirm their unity in Jesus Christ as it is expressed so beautifully at the Lord’s Table. Originating in the Presbyterian Church in 1936, the idea of World Communion Sunday was embraced and promoted by the Federal Council of Churches (now the National Council of Churches) in 1940.

Those Christians who started World Communion Sunday saw the Table of the Jesus as a place where the wounds in the Church, many the result of a brutal war, could begin to find healing.” 1

And certainly in our world today, there are many wars, many wounds and more need for life together around the table of grace than ever before. This week, we witnessed another mass shooting, this time at a community college in Oregon. Indeed, there are systemic wounds that run deep in this country.

There is so much pain in our world. And that’s why World Communion Sunday came to exist in the first place, that we might join in the pain and joys of one another as we break bread around the world. We see our broken selves, brought together around this table and our dashed hopes scooped up and

placed on the altar. This table of hope and peace is where we come for a few moments to connect with our family around the world.

Some of you might have heard that the Pope visited our wonderful city two weeks ago. Was anyone aware of that? Of course, we all were. I was enthralled with every move he made.

After the pope left the nation’s capital, he traveled to New York City and one of his many stops was an interfaith prayer service at the 9/11 museum at ground zero. In a place that represents so much grief, so much pain and so much fear, the pope called on faith leaders in this country to gather together for a prayer service.

It would have been easy to have had the prayer service at a huge cathedral in New York. He could have even had it as a precursor to the mass he offered at Madison Square Garden. But no, this prayer service was held in a place that marks the woundedness of our world—a place that reminds us of our corporate need for healing, forgiveness and grace.

In his speech, the pope said, “Here, amid pain and grief, we also have a palpable sense of the heroic goodness which people are capable of, those hidden reserves of strength from which we can draw. In the depths of pain and suffering, you also witnessed the heights of generosity and service. Hands reached out, lives were given. In a metropolis which might seem impersonal, faceless, lonely, you demonstrated the powerful solidarity born of mutual support, love and self-sacrifice. No one thought about race, nationality, neighborhoods, religion or politics...

This place of death became a place of life too, a place of saved lives, a hymn to the triumph of life over the prophets of destruction and death, to goodness over evil, to reconciliation and unity over hatred and division.”

Throughout the service, different leaders stood up to pray, offering words of peace. A children’s choir filed in and sang “May there be peace on earth.” A friend of mine was lucky enough to attend this service and she said that through it all you felt like healing and communion was happening through all those present in that space.

Our passage today is one in which people are also longing for healing and communion. This morning, we meet up with two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus.

We are on a dusty road, on that very first Easter afternoon a few miles outside of Jerusalem. Cleopas, one who was a disciple of Jesus and his companion

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were walking toward Emmaus, a smaller town. We do not know why they were
going there and where Emmaus was exactly, but that was their destination.

I imagine as followers of Jesus, they were rolling over the details of the
weekend as they walked along. Jesus had just been arrested and crucified
three days earlier. When something traumatic or extremely confusing happens,
we examine it from all angles. We talk about it over and over again trying to
make sense of what had just happened.

Maybe their grief was just too much to bear. Cleopas and his walking
companion were talking about all of this and discussing it with heavy hearts on
the Road to Emmaus when someone walked up behind them.

As they were on a busy road, they didn’t think much of it, but then the man
came a little closer and asked, “What are you discussing with each other while
you walk along?”

Cleopas and his walking companion just stood there, pondering the question.
They kicked some pebbles on the dusty road, looking at their sore, tired feet,
choking back the lumps that were rising in their throats.

What the two travelers did not realize was that the man walking beside them
and asking them questions was Jesus himself. For whatever reason, they did
not recognize the resurrected Jesus.

As Cleopas and his friend pulled themselves together, Cleopas decided to
answer Jesus and said, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not
know the things that have taken place in these days?”

Jesus replied with a question, “What things?” Now, if I was Jesus, I would want
to know exactly what one of my followers had to say had happened. I think it
is not an exaggeration to say that he was not really pleased with what Cleopas
had to say.

Cleopas answered Jesus by saying, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who
was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and
how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death
and crucified him. But...we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
Yes, and besides all this, it is not the third day since these things took place.
Moreover, some women were at the tomb this morning and they didn’t find his
body there. Then they came back and told us about visions of angels who said
he was alive. Some of the disciples went back to the tomb and found it just
like they said, but they didn’t see him there.”

I’m thinking Jesus took a step back, rubbed his chin and crossed his arms
across his chest. Maybe he even shook his head a little bit.
Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer and then enter into his glory?”

Apparently Cleopas and his friend didn’t have a chance to really respond because then Jesus interpreted everything as they walked along—everything all the way from Moses to the prophets and everything that he had said too during his ministry.

When Jesus had finished his lecture and the travelers were truly exhausted, they started to hear some noise off in the distance. They were finally approaching the town of Emmaus. Jesus walked ahead as if he was going on and the two travelers, somehow awake and alert enough to invite him, invited him to stay with them.

They urged him strongly saying, “stay with us because it is almost evening and the day is nearly over.” Jesus agreed and went in to the house, sitting down at the table.

The three men sat down, probably happy to be off their feet for the first time in a long time. The two disciples were especially exhausted having just been through what they had been through and Jesus, well, we know what he had been doing for the past three days.

When the bread was brought to the table, Jesus picked up a piece of bread, held it up in front of the two disciples. Maybe he turned it over in his hands and looked at it, then looking at the disciples.

Then, Jesus took that bread and he blessed it, and he broke it. Then he held it up for a minute, the crumbs falling on the table. His eyes pierced theirs. Even in physical and theological confusion and exhaustion, the two disciples knew. **They knew.**

As he looked them in the eyes, he held out the piece of bread. They each reached up, hands trembling, hot tears streaming down their cheeks. Their fingers brushed against his and Jesus handed them the bread. As soon as they had reached up and held the bread in their own hands, Jesus was gone. He had vanished before their tired, exhausted eyes.

They sat there in silence for a few moments. **Because then, they knew.** When he lifted up the bread, they had seen the wounds. His words were familiar too, but as he had lifted up the bread, his garment fell down a little bit and they saw the wounds on his wrists.

Those wrists had taught them many times before. And now those wounded wrists, although no longer bleeding, offered them the bread of life. And they
knew in an instant that it was Jesus. Suddenly, it all made sense-- they had to go back to Jerusalem!

They rushed up from the table, gathered their belongings and they TOOK off for Jerusalem.

I bet they ran the whole way. And I bet the whole way they were saying—the women were right! He’s not in the tomb anymore because he is with us. His broken body and that broken bread moved them to action.

The two travelers, now long-distance runners arrived in Jerusalem, with chests heaving, completely out of breath as they got to that locked where the disciples were hiding. It’s still Easter evening, remember.

The eleven disciples, as Luke relays it, were gathered together in the room and Cleopas and his friend burst in. I’m sure the disciples thought it was the authorities coming for them.

But Cleopas and his friend, out of breath and excited were telling them, “The Lord has risen indeed! He came to us on the road to Emmaus and then he explained all the scriptures to us and then he sat at the table and broke bread with us. It all makes sense now!”

Jesus made sure that the breaking of bread and the sharing of wounds was central to his message. His wounded hands handed them that bread. And their wounded and broken selves were now the ones to hand the bread of life to the world.

We have to believe that the joining together of hearts and minds brings about healing in our world. And Jesus even went as far as to say that sitting around a table and breaking bread can bring about radical change.

So, as my friend says, **if it ain’t broke, break it**

Break the bread, bringing new life.
Break the bread, inviting all to the table.
Break the bread, showing your woundedness and as you do, bearing witness to your brokenness.
Break the bread, believing that this radical act of hospitality brings life, goodness, reconciliation and resurrection.
Break the bread, sharing God’s love with the world.

“This is the promise of the resurrection — not that we will no longer be wounded. No, we will always be wounded. Between hunger and poverty, war and terror, abuse and hate, our world will make sure that none of us escape unscathed without wounds that do not heal.
But as people of the resurrection, our promise is that our wounds will not always and forever bleed. The promise of the resurrection is not the assurance of a life without wounds but a life in which our wounds, even if they define us as they do Jesus, do not bleed us. The promise of the resurrection is that, eventually, after the bleeding stops, our wounds, while they won’t ever heal, might just begin to heal others.”  

And this promise of resurrection is what gathers us around the table of grace. The promise calls to us, prompting us to make even more room at the table, knocking over chairs so more people can gather around it.

So, Jesus took the bread, his garment falling back exposing his wounds, and he blessed the bread. Then he broke it. And he gave a piece to you. And a piece to me. And then we gave it to one another so that all the wounds of this world might be healed.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

And the Table Will Be Wide
A Blessing for World Communion Sunday
By Jan Richardson

And the table will be wide.
And the welcome will be wide.
And the arms will open wide to gather us in.
And our hearts will open wide to receive.
And we will come as children who trust there is enough.
And we will come unhindered and free.
And our aching will be met with bread.
And our sorrow will be met with wine.
And we will open our hands to the feast without shame.
And we will turn toward each other without fear.
And we will give up our appetite for despair.
And we will taste and know of delight.
And we will become bread for a hungering world.
And we will become drink for those who thirst.
And the blessed will become the blessing.
And everywhere will be the feast.

Amen.

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3 David Henson, “Resurrection and the Wounds that Won’t Heal,”