

Exodus 17:1-7
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“World Communion Sunday”

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Today is World Communion Sunday; a celebration observed by many Christians which takes place each year on the first Sunday in October. World Communion Sunday promotes Christian unity by focusing on an observance we all share, the eucharist. This day has roots beginning in 1934.

In my years as a Pastor, World Communion has always provided an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate God’s diversity; In humankind, in all creation. In I Corinthians 12, Eugene Peterson brings the apostle Paul’s words to life, “God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful...”

In Exodus today, the diverse gifts of creation play a major role. Just listen as I quickly lift up at least 6 ways this passage points to creation. 1. The story begins with the Israelites in the Wilderness of Sin. 2. Sin does not mean sinful but is a name drawn from a moon god named Sin. 3. The people are crying for water. 4. God tells Moses to take the staff he used at the Nile river. 5. Moses and the elders were sent to the rock at Horeb and, 6. God assures them water will come from that rock. Each part of God’s creation has a role to play in the story. Each part of creation is differently gifted but, relying on God, all the parts work together, and the thirsty people receive water. In Exodus, every part of the landscape plays a role.

In 2013, an Article from ABC NEWS was titled, “... Is America Scared of Diversity.” The article notes that diversity is on the rise in our country. It reports a survey developed and conducted by leading pollsters of both major parties identified a “new American Center,” as well as the ideological wings.

In looking at the results from those in the center, one-third report being worried about how increasing diversity in America will affect the country’s future. 1 in 5 say that diversity makes them “Very Anxious.” Moreover 65% identified in the New Center say diversity inspires no increased sense of hope in our country’s future.

People of Christ we need to create metaphors, stories, and language to speak about the richness given to us through the variety of gifts God gives. God’s gifts can be skills, time and treasure; but we become gifts to one another in other ways. Our cultural background, our educational experiences, our life situations, the different challenges we have faced and overcome; Through us and all creation God is seeking to weave together a joyous new kingdom of love, a realm of abundance, a world where we understand the value of our relationship to

one another, and to all living things. God desires a Kingdom where we acknowledge how desperately we need each other for fullness and life.

I wore this stole today specifically. Over the years many of you have commented on the beauty of this stole and I have always promised to tell the story someday. Well today is that day. I have chosen to share this story on World Communion Sunday because I think it represents the type of stories which happen in the lives of each of us, stories which help us share God's promise that, "All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful..."

This stole was a gift from my home congregation, St. Peter United Church of Christ in Stone Church, IL. It was presented on the occasion of my ordination into Christian Ministry. It cannot be purchased anywhere, there is not another one exactly like it in the world and there never will be. If you were to look closely it is made up of separate pieces of clothe which have been sewn together into an overall theme. The pieces of clothe were donated by numerous members of my home church.

One of the pieces of cloth sewn in behind my neck is a swatch from a necktie designed to look like a piano keyboard. During High School, I gave this tie to a close friend who played piano and served as our church organist. When he heard about the stole project he returned it knowing it would be a special way to remember our friendship. Several other pieces in the front of the stole have embroidery on them which was done by my grandmother's own hands. My Mom gave these pieces knowing how special it would be to feel wrapped in Grandma's handiwork. Some of the other swatches have meaning while others were scraps set to be traded or discarded.

One church member, Mrs. Karen Holtgrewe, gathered all the different pieces together. Karen creatively came up with the theme of "Creation." You can see her how she expressed the theme; the bottom of the stole has browns and greens like the ground and grass. Then bright colors of flowers, eventually you get to the blues representing the sky and finally to whites, blacks and greys of the clouds.

It was a lot of work. She had to cut and size each piece to fit. She had to sew each piece into place. I am sure there were times she wanted to just "go and buy something nice," but she stayed with it. She took the separate pieces and made them into a unique and beautiful stole.

God never promised diversity would be easy. Knowing this God has given us rituals and traditions, ways by which diverse people can come together and build relationship on common ground. One of those ways we share today, around this table. My prayer on this World Communion Sunday is that each of us will claim and share stories from our life about times when God's diversity has revealed beauty, increased our understanding, grown our compassion, and given us new life. Now, as we prepare to approach the table this morning; we celebrate by the Grace of God... diverse grains made into one loaf, diverse grapes made into

one cup, and these diverse gifts Jesus assures us. help us experience the grace and mercy of God known through his life, death and resurrection.

Amen