

## **Where There is Life There is Hope**

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**Texts: Matthew 14:13-21 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 08-22-2021**

Today is the final Sunday of our Sermon Series on Communion. While we have been reflecting on Communion on Sunday mornings, we have also been watching the world around us and see many struggles – Haiti has experienced catastrophic weather events, there are ongoing issues in Afghanistan, COVID infections both here and around the world have increased. There is much pain and struggle in our world. May we see our faith in God and our commitment to Celebrate Communion in Remembrance of Jesus Christ not as simply a comfortable ritual but as a Celebration of our Hope in the future. May we find Communion to be a lens of hope in a distressed and distraught world.

The Scripture passages for this morning are Matthew 14:13-21 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. This first one will sound quite familiar.

**First Scripture Reading<sup>i</sup>**                      Matthew 14:13-21

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup> When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds

away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”<sup>17</sup> They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.”<sup>18</sup> And he said, “Bring them here to me.”<sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.<sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.<sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

**Second Scripture Reading**      1 Corinthians 11:23–26

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>25</sup> In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

The Word of the Lord  
**Thanks be to God.**

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These are both familiar passages of Scripture for anyone who has been in church for any length of time. I preached a

sermon not too long ago on the Feeding of the Five Thousand, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. That sermon focused on the compassion Jesus had for the people who had come to hear him teach and to find healing for the sick.

The second passage you have probably heard most every time you have participated in the celebration of Communion. This passage from I Corinthians is the earliest record we have of the practice of Communion as found in Scripture. It is likely that the words conveyed here by the Apostle Paul were the actual words used by the early church when they gathered for their meals together, where they also took the bread and the cup as directed by Jesus Christ.

These are both powerful passages. These are both passages that point beyond ourselves. They point us to see and encounter the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – our Creator, Savior and Comforter.

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As you reflect on the multiple tragic events of the past month and past year, you may wonder how these passages and our practices of faith are relevant.

Where is God when we struggle? How does our faith help us navigate natural disasters, disease and conflict?

I tell you this morning that it is with faith that we can offer peace and comfort.

It is through this faith that we have Hope.

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Hope, for the Christian, is not some pie in the sky, wishful thinking concept.

According to Google, an archaic definition of hope is a “feeling of trust.”<sup>ii</sup>

While it may be archaic, the definition is spot on.

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Why did so many people show up when Jesus and his disciples got out of the boat? Because they had a ***feeling of trust*** in this man named Jesus. They had ***HOPE***.

Some of the people might have been there out of curiosity and to be part of a “show.” Many more people were there because they had heard about Jesus, or even previously heard Jesus. They had Hope – a feeling of trust in this man. Even if they couldn’t define it or fully understand it, Jesus represented hope.

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Hope. A feeling of trust.

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When we think about the Corinthian Church, there is more than meets the eye. If you only look at our passage for today, you miss the background of the Apostle Paul’s letter and why this particular passage is important.

According to Professor Carla Works,

Immediately prior to verses 23-26, Paul reveals that the Corinthians’ table etiquette was not even recognizable as [what we would call] the Lord’s

Table. In verses 17-22, the reader learns that some have plenty of food and drink while others have little. Some are drunk before their brothers and sisters even arrive. Clearly, some of the Corinthians are more affluent than others. They can afford more food and, because they do not have to work all day, can begin fellowship earlier....

Before we are too critical of these wealthy believers, though, we should remember that they are behaving according to acceptable social norms. It was expected that those who had more money and power would display their wealth by consuming more food (and better food at that) and by enjoying certain benefits of their status....<sup>iii</sup>

The practices of the Corinthian Church are part of the reason we only celebrate the Bread and the Cup as our Communion practice. We are to focus on what is important when we come to the Lord's Table. We focus on the remembrance and celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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If you look at the last verse of our Paul's message for today, it says, "26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

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Communion is not a spectator sport. We are called to **participate** and to **proclaim**. Specifically, we are to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

***Until he comes.***

The Communion Table is the table of Hope.

Communion helps us to look beyond ourselves and proclaim to the world God's love and care.

***That is why Communion is relevant TODAY in our world.***

If you look around the world, many, many people are living without hope. There is no feeling of trust – not in their government, not in their neighbors, not in the natural world.

No trust. No hope.

As Christians we have trust in God.

We have trust in our Savior and in our future – regardless of what the world throws our way.

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Yes, there is much for which we grieve these days. Natural disasters, wars, and all kinds of disease, not just COVID. There is conflict between friends and tribal groups and countries. There is conflict between people in our country over politics and differences of opinions.

The list could go on and on and on.

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How do we continue life in the face of all the negative?

For believers in Jesus Christ, we continue life and serving and caring for our neighbors because of our faith and our hope in God.

When we gather as a community of faith at the Table of Jesus Christ, we are claiming a trust in God, and we are making a commitment to proclaim our trust in God to the world.

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Communion really is not a spectator sport.

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With Communion we tell the world and one another that God is our Hope.

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As I was studying for today's sermon, I read a short story from a Pastor about his first visit to provide Communion at a local nursing home.

Seven residents came to his service, most in wheelchairs and unable to speak. All seven did take Communion. At first the Pastor was feeling a little sad that more did not come and that they really couldn't communicate with each other well.

But then something amazing happened. One resident started clapping. Then another and another until they were all clapping.

The Pastor said

They could not speak, but they could clap and they could smile. It was as glorious as the sound of angels clapping.

And in that glorious applause I heard the sound of hope beyond hope.<sup>iv</sup>

They proclaimed the Good News of Jesus Christ the way they could. They clapped. The Pastor went on to say that “Where there is life, there is Hope.”

As I consider all that we experience and share at the Communion Table, I find great comfort from this story.

We, those of us gathered here today and at every Celebration of Communion, WE are called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ is all the ways we can.

And to remember, that no matter the circumstances we encounter, Where there is life, there is Hope.

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<sup>i</sup> Scripture quotations from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible are copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission.

<sup>ii</sup> Google’s English dictionary is provided by Oxford Languages. <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/maundy-thursday/commentary-on-1-corinthians-1123-26>.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/clapping-at-communion-how-bread-and-wine-became-symbols-of-hope/129297.htm>.