

September 1, 2019

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Open Table

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Jesus ate with everyone, including people who were marginalized by others. He ate with women and he welcomed children at his table. He ate with tax collectors, who were considered the worst kind of sinners because they collaborated with the empirical forces against their own people.

And, in the last meal he ate with his friends, Jesus shared food even with one who he knew would betray him to his death. As he did so, he offered words not of condemnation but of forgiveness and promise.

In the United Church of Christ, we practice an open table at communion. In most of our denomination's congregations, you do not have to follow any particular creed, or profess any specific beliefs to practice communion. You need only to seek the new life that comes in Christ to participate in this sacrament.

What is a sacrament? A sacrament is a ritual action in worship which lowers the barrier between holy and mundane. A sacrament is sometimes called a "thin place," where the barrier between every day life and divine life is lowered. In a sacramental moment, we participate in a ritual that was begun by Jesus and has been practiced by Christ followers for generations.

When we receive communion, we also receive the forgiveness that Christ promised, and we have the opportunity to extend that forgiveness to others. Whether you receive communion gathered around a table or seated in a pew, communion is at its root communal. Around you are those with whom you share the open table. As you take the bread, as you sip the cup, hear again the words of Christ who welcomed all to his table, and who promised forgiveness for all who chose to eat and drink with him.

Receiving communion is an opportunity to be grateful for those moments when we are especially invited to brush up close to the holy. It is a chance to remember that throughout Christ's life, and even when he was close to death, he ate with those who were excluded by others. It is a place to be grateful that even at the end Christ Jesus offered grace and forgiveness to all, including the one who betrayed him. Communion is more than an opportunity to receive Christ's grace and forgiveness with humility and gratitude. It is also an opportunity to extend those gifts to all in our congregation, in our community and in our world.

Questions to consider:

- Does your congregation practice an open table? How can you tell?
- How would someone visiting your worship service for the first time know they are welcome at the open table?
- Are there ways that your congregation could extend the idea of open table beyond this sacrament, beyond these walls?