

Prayer for Illumination

Nourishing God, Open up something new in us. Open up curiosity or hunger. Open up attentiveness or compassion. Open up the parts of our hearts that need your centering Word most. And then, like yeast in bread, may your love expand in us. We are listening. We are hopeful. Amen.

Acts 2:42-47

42 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. **43** A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. **44** All the believers were united and shared everything. **45** They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. **46** Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. **47** They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

"Pocket-Sized Moments" by Sarah A. Speed

I wonder if we will know when restoration comes.
Will it feel big and dramatic like a summer rain?
Joyful and overwhelming, like an end-of-war parade?
Maybe.
Or will it be small?
Will it be pocket-sized moments, like wishing on stars,
the sun through the curtains, or lightning bugs in the yard?
Maybe.
I don't know how God will restore this world,
just like I don't know how to make the summer rain.
But I do know how to say I'm sorry.
And I do know how to love with all of me.
And I know how to say, "This cup is for you,"
And I know how to taste grace in grape juice.
So on the off-chance that restoration will be small,
pocket-sized moments of love for all,
I will bake bread and save a seat for you.
I will say I'm sorry and say I love you too.
I will plant gardens and look for fireflies.
I will say prayers on shooting stars at night.
And when the sun shines through my curtain windows,
remind me to open them wide.
I would hate to miss God's parade,
these holy ordinary days. —Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

“The Whole World”

Context

Our passages today are a little different, like the morning of our church picnic, we have a poem from Rev. Sarah Are Speed and a second testament passage. Rev. Speed works with Sanctified Art and writes many poems to process and share her day-to-day life.

Our Acts passage this morning, the key verse of focus would be, “Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity.” Keep in mind that the book of Acts *starts* with Jesus’s ascension. He is no longer in physical form in these passages. And still, the disciples are using this divine meal to connect with one another and spend time with each other.

In our current book study, we are reading Life After Doom, by Brian McLaren. It’s a book of how our world functions in this society when everything in nature seems to be headed to collapse in one way or another. It’s a *superrrr* uplifting book... In reality, it is leading to several conversations about our faith and our work together as faithful people fighting to care for God’s creation. He writes this, about communion, “this indigenous prophet (Jesus), underscores his point, by engaging in bold acts of nonviolent civil disobedience... Before his death... he gives [the disciples] a ritual meal in which they dramatize taking his body and blood into their bodies and blood. So they can live on as the ongoing embodiment of his Spirit in the World.” While I’m not always a fan of how Brian McLaren phrases things, and I’m not sure “*dramatize*” is the right word here, I do see this as a beautiful way of thinking about communion. We take Jesus’s body and blood into ours. We accept Jesus’s life-sustaining grace and love through life-sustaining food and drink.

Pocket Moments

Rev. Speed’s poem speaks of equally huge moments, disguised by what she calls “pocket-sized moments”. In reading this poem, the line that sticks out to me is the question of whether the restoration of the world will come like a big, dramatic, summer rain storm... Have y’all ever lived in a place where you could set your watch by the summer thunderstorm?

In South Carolina, many summers, there would be a week or two that would have a 3:15 thunderstorm. We knew in those 2 weeks not to plan for a swimming block from 3 to 4 o’clock. Because it would start thundering at 3:10, just enough time to get changed, and the storm would last for about 30 minutes. Big, fat, raindrops. Downpour for 30 minutes, then clear skies almost immediately, but by that point, the kids would only have literally 10 minutes to swim before having to get changed for the next activity. We just knew. These summer storms were, in fact, dramatic and impossible to miss.

And then Rev. Speed writes of the true pocket-sized moments, the ones that are too small to count individually. She says, “like wishing on stars, the sun through the curtains, or lightning bugs in the yard?” What other tiny moments do you see the restoration of God... as I wrote this

sermon, our oldest cat- Mr. Pants, stretched out and made sure all four paws were touching me while I typed. He sat there and watched while I worked. I also agree with Rev Speed, seeing lightning bugs, or shooting stars, any of those wonderful, magical things, they are these tiny glimmers of God's restoration.

Right in the middle of her poem, "And I know how to taste grace in grape juice.

So on the off-chance that restoration will be small,

pocket-sized moments of love for all,

I will bake bread and save a seat for you." That is what this day of holy celebration is. Rev Speed calls it a "holy ordinary day." This day where across the entire world, this meal together is shared. The bread and the cup are used to remind each of us that God was able to redeem each of us throughout time and space. For some, it is simply a meal. Growing up, communion was the perfect snack in the middle of a long church service. And for others, it's a holy, sacred moment to share with all believers of every time and place.

Communion in the Bible- Judas Ate Too

The passage in Acts that we read today isn't exactly one of the moments of full communion in the scriptures. All four of the Gospel writers have an account of the communion dinner with Christ. The wording is a little different from one book to another, but the account still remains in each book. There is also the account in First Corinthians, when Paul writes the words we very frequently say, "I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread. **24** After giving thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me." **25** He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me." **26** Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you broadcast the death of the Lord until he comes."

For this moment in the life of the disciples, grace comes as a huge, world-shaking event. Everything changed this night at dinner. The disciples gathered around, listened to Jesus teach, watched as he broke bread, poured wine, welcomed them around, maybe told them to gather in closer, and he told them to remember him in this holy act.

In the Bible, there are many examples of God's overwhelming grace. The one that stands out, in connection to communion specifically, is that all 12 disciples were present at this dinner. I want you to think about this situation... when and where. So, the story is that Jesus went to Bethany, as the chief priests and elders were plotting to kill Jesus... the woman pours perfume over Jesus's feet, Jesus explains that she's preparing him to be buried, and the disciples need to chill about it. Then-

14 Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests **15** and said, "What will you give me if I turn Jesus over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. **16** From that time on, he was looking for an opportunity to turn him in.

Passover with the disciples

17 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and

said, “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover meal?”

18 He replied, “Go into the city, to a certain man, and say, ‘The teacher says, “My time is near. I’m going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.”’” **19** The disciples did just as Jesus instructed them. They prepared the Passover.

20 That evening, he took his place at the table with the twelve disciples.

That’s when the Supper happens. When Jesus had taken his seat with the 12 disciples. Do you see where I am going with this? Judas ate dinner too. Jesus broke the bread, served it to everyone around the table, then he poured wine, and told each of them that they were to continue to celebrate and remember him. Judas too. None of the disciples knew it was Judas who betrayed Jesus (already), but Jesus knew, and still served Judas.

Today’s Grace

Today, right now, I fear we would fall closer to Judas at the table than the woman washing Jesus’s feet. There is a wonderful truth, though, God offers us the exact same amount of Grace that everyone around that table received. Between James, John, Peter, and all the others—all the way around to Judas, each was offered this beautiful gift of overwhelming grace. Something we can neither earn nor lose, we can’t trade it for anything else, we can’t decide we no longer want it... God has offered it regardless.

I have mentioned to a few of yall that the Seminary Nerds have a whole discussion over *how* the bread is given. Is it offered, with your hands out, receiving? Or is it taken, grasping at the offering? There are theories on both sides, but personally, I prefer to offer the Body of Christ, because the Grace of God is offered, and our acceptance of that grace is entirely dependent on *us*. However, it is never that *we* must go after the Grace of God. It has been offered and extended, waiting for our acceptance.

Last month, coming up the center aisle for communion, some new friends came up with a dog. This is not the first dog we’ve had in worship; likely, you didn’t even realize she was here until after worship. She made her way up the aisle with her mom, and when they got to me, I handed the woman her piece of the body of Christ. Then, she said, “Oh! She wants one too.” So, I handed her a second one, and she fed the dog. It felt better than debating theology in the middle of communion, and quite frankly, I believe that dog is closer to God than most of us will ever experience. The bottom line is this: We don’t have to understand the sacraments to receive them. We don’t have to have our faith figured out. We don’t have to be perfect or guilt-free. God has offered this grace to every creation. We simply reach out and accept the Grace of God.

Please pray with me