

Sermon Sidebar- October 6, 2019

One in the Spirit and the Gospel

For nearly 80 years, churches of various Christian faith traditions have joined together for World Communion Sunday. Presently, this day is commemorated by 38 different Christian traditions. These various groups each celebrate the day in their own ways but even though they are in different settings, everyone gathers together, at least symbolically, around the Lord's Table. This Christian unity, specifically symbolized by the act of communion, is the focal point of World Communion Sunday. This provides a powerful reminder that we are one in Christ despite our differences.

According to the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the idea for World Communion Sunday was originally conceived by Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr, pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Kerr wanted to bring various churches in the area together for a service focused on unity, and he felt that one thing that unites us all in the Christian faith is the celebration of Holy Communion. Kerr wanted the service to be a celebration of Christian unity with Communion as the primary exhibition of this united nature.

The first observance took place in 1933, and three years later it was adopted as a general denominational practice by the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 1940, the Department of Evangelism for the Federal Council of Churches, a predecessor of the National Council of Churches, promoted it to churches in member denominations. Speaking about World Communion Sunday, Kerr's son, Donald, explained, "The concept spread very slowly at the start. It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. [The day] symbolized the effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ." And we've been celebrating it ever since. Remember that we are called by Christ to unity in the Spirit. Not uniformity (we do not all do communion the same way). But we are unified in our devotion to Christ and our obedience to his call to celebrate communion, in remembrance of him.

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

1 Corinthians 1:10 (NRSV)

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

Psalms 133 (NIV)

13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:13-14 (NIV)

3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)