As I have prepared for World Communion Sunday this week, one of my favorite communion stories from another pastor popped up. Keith shared this story. There was an old couple in the church who both had hearing problems.  I’m guessing hearing aids were not as good then as they are now, but neither one of them had figured out that talking to each other loudly during church meant everybody else could hear them, too.  Conversations during worship went something like “What’d he say?” “He said lying is bad!” “Oh!” and she would nod her head knowingly.  As a pastor, hearing and seeing some of your reactions in the pew brings a smile and giggle to our Sunday mornings.

Keith continued, that at his particular church, people were invited forward for communion one pew at a time, and they would kneel at the altar rail to be served. One Sunday this couple was kneeling, waiting for the pastor to make his way down the line with the bread and cups. And she started talking to her husband.  “I hope they don’t serve grape juice again. I don’t like grape juice!”  “Just drink it for Jesus,” her husband said.  “I don’t want to drink it for Jesus! I don’t like grape juice.  They should serve 7-Up. I like that stuff!”  When the congregation stood up a few minutes later, Keith peered at the woman’s cup and saw that her little cup was still full.  She didn’t “drink it for Jesus.” I don’t think Jesus minded.  I don’t think God was offended by an old woman’s dislike for Welch’s.

In one church where I served as an intern, the congregation celebrated communion by intinction, just as we do, where we take a piece of bread and dip it in the grape juice. At this church, there was an altar and following communion the bread was left on a table up front after worship. Well, the children discovered that the kind of bread we used for communion was yummy, so while they’re parents gathered in the fellowship hall after church, they ran back upstairs and ate the leftover communion bread.  A few adults got upset when they saw children grabbing great big chunks of the body of Christ and shoving it in their mouths, not to mention the crumbs on the floor or the occasional arguments about which child got more. But parents didn’t want to tell their children they couldn’t have the communion bread.

Somebody came up with a great idea. We ceremoniously carried the communion bread from the sanctuary at the end of worship, and we took it to the table in the fellowship hall where we held coffee hour.  So it fed us in communion, and it fed us in community.  It was a great solution because it satisfied everyone, which is rare!  But either way, I don’t think Jesus minded.  I don’t think God was bothered by children wanting to eat that which was good.

As we celebrate World Communion Sunday, I am aware of the many different ways we do it, and how important those ways are to us. Whether it’s from a common cup or individual cups, whether it’s regular bread or challah bread or flat bread or wafers, whether servers wear white gloves as Korean Christians do, or whether the communion table is adorned with kente cloth, as in many black churches, I don’t think God is offended by any of it.  What matters is not the form but the substance.  What matters is not how we celebrate communion, but why.

We come to this table to remember Jesus—

to remember his life and his death,

to remember what happens to someone who breaks the rules for the sake of love,

to remember that we are now the body of Christ in the world….broken yet whole.

Our words of institution, “Do this remembering me…” is a reminder that we are to have the mind of Christ, who welcomed the outcasts, who exalted the lowly, who humbled himself, and gave his life so that we might know how to live.  We are to have the mind of Christ . . .but it’s so much easier to be the hands.  We know how to be God’s hands in the world. We are God’s hands when we present our offerings, when we donate out of our abundance or clothes or food or bed supplies. We do it every week in countless different ways. We know how to be God’s hands at work in the world.

It’s harder to have Christ’s mind, and even more difficult to have Christ’s heart. Yet that is our calling as Christians—

to have the same mind that was in Christ,

to have the same heart that was in Christ.

to love the world even when it hurts us,

to love others even when they hate us,

to love freedom even when it means limits,

to love justice even when it is inconvenient,

to love mercy even when it means extending it to someone whose beliefs we can’t stand.

We live in violently divisive times, and yet today of all days we remember. We remember our connection with other Christians as we come to this table.  We remember the people of Libya and Morocco suffering from flooding and earthquakes. We remember people in the Ukraine as the scourge of war continues with no end in sight. We remember the lives of family and children in our own communities, lives lost in bus accidents, drunk driving incidents or unnecessary violence. We remember all that unites us, all we have in common, all the good that we share and sometimes the pain that we share.

I said earlier that I don’t think God is offended by how we do communion, but I do wonder if there are limits. I do wonder if God is bothered when we eat of the broken bread but refuse to admit our own brokenness.  I do wonder if God is troubled when we drink of the cup of blessing but refuse to offer blessing to others.  I do wonder if God is saddened by how we take communion at the foot of the cross but refuse to see its similarity to the lynching tree.  I do wonder if God cries when we walk away from this table yet we are unchanged by it.

But I do not wonder if God meets us there anyway. I do not question whether God welcomes us anyway.  God gathers us in, like a grandmother gathering every child in her embrace. And that is why we come again and again we come, because we know we are welcome here.

And not only are we welcome here, but all are welcome here. Your creed, color and culture do no matter, here because it does not matter to God. You are welcome here regardless if you are rich, if you are stable financially, if you are just making ends meet, or if you are not sure where your next meal is coming from. You are welcome here.

You are welcome here, no matter what your gender is or how you identify. You are welcome here.

Please know that no matter who you are, or where you are on your life and faith journey, you are welcome at the Lord’s table.

Even if you prefer 7 Up to grape juice. Amen.