

A VIRTUAL SERVICE FOR WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

PRELUDE **“It is well with my soul”**

<https://youtu.be/DtEAlxof53Y>

UMH #377

(Pastor Lori Douglas Weaver, COSSO Music Director)

WELCOME

INTRODUCTION *World Communion Sunday may be introduced with words about this service, which is an edited version of the Great Thanksgiving prayer. You may want to include a few comments about views on virtual communion. Here are a few thoughts:*

This year there’s something a bit odd about World Communion Sunday.

The day is meant to rally hope and bring the world together. Like many efforts of the church, World Communion Sunday is rooted in our common humanity — the idea that the Church can show that unity is in community, even in the midst differences and strife.

Unity is the gift Christ offers us at the communion table, and every table where we share a meal. When we gather around life-giving food, we are called into the body of Christ — empowered for work and witness in the world. As the liturgy puts it:

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory
and we feast at the heavenly banquet.

In the UMC on World Communion Sunday, we often focus on our worldwide connection and take offerings for hunger and justice. This reminds us of our call as the Church, to be a community of support for all people, and to practice our life together in the joy of growing, harvesting, preparing, and sharing food from the earth. We pray for our “daily bread” to sustain us in our living — but many still to do not have enough daily bread. The corona pandemic has brought hunger to many tables, around the world and in this country.

So, on this World Communion Sunday, many of us will consume the body and blood of Christ in an ordinary meal shared around a common table. And many of us will not, either because there is no bread or table or because we are debating whether God can be present in virtual communion. Maybe it’s the debate we need. Maybe it’s a good time to reflect seriously on the mystery of God in our eating, at meals and at our communion table.

Before beginning the service, each one gathers a candle or a small light, a Bible, a piece of bread, and a small glass of water.

Words in bold are intended for all to read; various readers may be used for other parts; hymns may be adapted as needed.

A VIRTUAL THANKSGIVING FOR WORLD COMMUNION

Adapted from Great Thanksgiving Four by Heather Murray Elkins in The Book of Offices and Services of The Order of Saint Luke, OSL Publications, 2012, pp. 22ff.

OPENING WORDS

When circumstances and concern for our common well-being keep us from gathering to share the communion meal (or the Eucharist feast) in person, we find other ways to gather and to pray, separated in one body.

We are one in the spirit and one in Christ Jesus.

Recognizing the presence of God, we are not alone,

God is with us. We are not alone.

Christ is with us. The Risen One meets us, blesses and feeds us on the way,

We are unity in community, the Holy Spirit is with us.

We gather with the communion of the saints in light, and with God's people around the world.

With brothers and sisters, strangers and friends, absent in body but united in Spirit, we pray:

UNISON PRAYER

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

Help us to remember that you are with us, in real and virtual space.

May we pray to you in faith, praise you with gratitude,

and receive your word with thanksgiving;

in Jesus' name. Amen.

And so, with all who breathe on earth and all who sing in heaven,

we praise your name and join Creation's song: *(said or sung or read silently)*

HYMN

"Now Thank We All Our God"

(v 1)

UMH #102

FIRST READING: John 8:12

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Light the candle

Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world. You are our Risen Lord in whom light has conquered darkness.

The light shines in us.

Sit silently in the light, feel the power and presence of the Risen Christ.

(pause)

SECOND READING John 14:6:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

Hold the Bible.

Here in our hands is the story of God's covenant of steadfast love with God's people.

God's presence is with us in all times and places – even in the midst of fear and danger.

And the Word was God.

Sit quietly and absorb the stories of God's love and grace that can sustain you wherever you are.

(pause)

HYMN "Now Thank We All Our God" (v 2) UMH #102

THIRD READING: John 7:37-38

On the last day of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'"

Hold the glass of water in your hands.

Without water, there can be no life, and too much water can take away life. In creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the water and brought forth light and life. We were nourished in the water of a womb. We were baptized by water and the Spirit into God's family. Water reminds us that it is a gift, while some still die from lack of clean drinking water, and some suffer from torrents of water flooding their homes. Yet, love and grace still flow.

Give us that living water.

Drink the water slowly. Feel it flow into your body, as God's love flows into your body and soul.

(pause)

HYMN "Now Thank We All Our God" (v 3) UMH #102

JOHN WESLEY ON "THE MEANS OF GRACE"

In his sermon on the means of grace, John Wesley taught that God can give us grace with or without physical means: God can work through anything or indeed nothing.

We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or in the bread and wine received in the Lord's supper; but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the Author of all grace; that the whole power is of Him, whereby, through any of these, there is any blessing conveyed to our souls. We know, likewise, that He is able to give the same grace, though there were no means on the face of the earth. In this sense, we may affirm, that, with regard to God, there is no such thing as means; seeing He is equally able to work whatsoever pleaseth Him, by any, or by none at all.

(pause)

In this virtual act of worship, we pray that God's purposes may be fulfilled in us, even though we cannot gather at one common communion table, we remember God's mighty acts of creating the world, redeeming it and sustaining it.

FOURTH READING: John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Take a piece of bread in your hands.

Christ took the bread and blessed it and fed the multitudes. Christ took bread again, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his closest friends, and formed a new covenant with all who break bread in remembrance of him. Christ was made known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. Just as the grains of wheat are gathered together to make one loaf, we who are many are one body in Christ.

The body of Christ is given for us.

Break and eat a piece of bread.

Remember the times you have received bread in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Remember those who gathered with you. Remember the presence of Christ in that moment. Remember those who have no bread and no table to gather round. Remember that Christ is with us in every moment of our lives – in real and virtual times.

We do this and remember.

Sit silently and allow Christ's love to surround you.

Together we pray,

God of all people, renew our communion with your Church throughout the world, and strengthen it in every nation and among every people.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,

one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,

until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at the heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,

all honor and glory are yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

HYMN "For the troubles and the sufferings of the world"

Global Praise 3 #162

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Now, let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, light of the world, you speak to us words of life. Call forth in us rivers of living water, and feed our deepest hunger.

In these trying times, in times of loneliness and confusion,

remind us that we are never alone, for you are with us always.

Hear us now, and pray for us in our weakness with sighs too deep for words,

as we lift up our prayers.

Names or concerns may be spoken aloud, typed in the Chat box, or held in your heart.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Ever-present God, bless us in the COS, and the new students who gather with us this weekend.

Bless all our churches and families, that we may know your grace and transforming presence.

Bless the world in these strange Covid times, as we seek new ways to serve you in our churches and communities.

Bless those suffering from coronavirus and those who care for them.

May they know your healing; may the dying know your welcome.

Bless the scientists searching for solutions, bless all the workers seeking to serve us.

Bless the governments trying to steer a new course; may they know your wisdom.

Bless these new times we now live in:

hold the grief for what is past,

hold the fear of present and future,

that, within your love, we may grow in trust and peace.

Fill us with your grace, and inspire us to be instruments of mercy and hope,

for we pray in Christ's name.

Amen. *(Adapted from Chris Polhill, "Voices out of Lockdown" ionabooks.com)*

CLOSING SONG

"Bind us together, Lord"

TFWS #2226

BLESSING

When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,
and when we are dying, it is in the Lord.

Both in our living and in our dying,

We belong to God.

May we be for the world a blessing for all.

May God bless the world and keep us.

May God's face shine upon the world and be gracious to us.

May God look upon the world with kindness and give us peace. Amen.