

**Sermon: Communicating - v - Communing**

**Scripture: Mark 14:22-25**

**Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans**

**Date: October 2, 2016**

---

The pastor and scholar Eugene Peterson, the one who translated the Bible into The Message said “In a kind of rough-and-ready sorting out, most words can be set in one of two piles: words for communication and words for communion. Words for communication,” he says “are used to buy stocks, sell cauliflower, direct traffic and teach algebra. Words for communion are used to tell stories, make love, nurture intimacy, develop trust.” (p. 191 from Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness)

It’s an interesting distinction. Obviously we need both communication and communion in our lives but it’s worth stopping to consider how much communication we do with one another and how much actual communing we do, for while communication is necessary for the health and functioning of our outer lives, communing is what is essential for the health of our inner lives. We live in a hyper-communicative world these days and especially with the election coming there is a lot of communication going on and communication about that communication that just went on and then communication about the communication of that communication!

Sometimes we strive and struggle to communicate with one another, when what is most needed is a decision to commune. A few years ago I went to a week-long Abrahamic Partnership course at Hartford Seminary where there were 6 Christians, 6 Jews and 6 Muslims. We did a lot of communicating throughout the week and learning about each others’ traditions. But at one point we were paired up with someone from another

religion and asked to share a particularly vivid experience of God with our partners. I was paired with a Muslim man who told his story and I told mine and it was at that point that the whole dynamic of the week changed. It was then that we went from communicating to communing. When we were merely communicating, I could stop and say “mmm? That’s interesting. I get that. I don’t get that. I agree with this, I don’t agree with that.” For sure there is value in that but it’s an activity of the mind and such mental activity can only go so far at best and at worst can get us locked into conflict about who is right and wrong, whose is good and whose is bad, which is better and which is worse, cause our minds like to do that sort of thing, splicing and dicing, evaluating and judging, separating and distinguishing. But when he began to tell his story about taking his wife and mother on the Hajj to Mecca and his struggles to get there and his resistance to it because it cost a lot of money and he was having a hard time justifying the time and expense and then his joy in finally making it and the rapture that resulted, there suddenly, before me, sat a brother.

Even when we are talking about religious or spiritual things to tell somebody what we believe is usually an act of communicating but to tell someone what we be-love, as Marcus Borg coined the term, to tell someone what we love and not just believe is to open the door to communing with another. Or to tell someone what we are afraid of, what we struggle with too, that’s suddenly gets us to the communing level. We share part of ourselves rather than just declare what we think. It’s a very different dynamic at work. Again, hear Eugene Peterson’s words - “implicit in the communications industry is an enormous lie – that if we improve our communications we will improve our life. It has not happened and will not happen. Often when we find out what a person ‘has to say’ we like them

less not more.... Words used as mere communication are debased words, the true gift of words is for communion: a part of myself enters a part of yourself. This requires the risk of revelation, it involves the courage of involvement.” He goes on to say “at the center of communion there is sacrifice. Working at the center, we don’t use words to give *something* but to give up a piece of ourselves.” (p.192)

And there it is - at the center of communion is sacrifice. Jesus broken and bloodied for us and sharing a piece of himself with us. This is not God communicating with us, so much as communing with us, God sharing a piece of Godself so that we no longer think about who God is and whether we agree with his approach to creating and ruling the world, but we participate in who God is, we identify with God and God with us, we meet at the level of soul and become a part of each other.

It’s a mystical act where much more is happening than meets the eye or can be put to words, for as we participate in God we are connected in unity and love, to one another. As Christians we are mystically joined through the broken body of Christ to others all over the world who gather at the same table, though it may be make shift in a home or ornately decorated in a church, though it may be marble in a cathedral or a stone in the woods, though it may be a tray in a prison cell or a mat on the floor of an apartment in a ruined city, though it be done in any sort of language and all sorts of cultures, still it is the body and blood of our one Lord, Jesus Christ, a mystical act that binds us together as brothers and sisters across this world.

## Words for Communion

### Prayer of Consecration:

Blessed God, full of mercy, we ask that you bless this bread and this cup and all of us with the outpouring of your Holy Spirit. Through this sacred meal, make us the bod of Christ, the church, your servant people, that we may be salt and light and leaven for the furtherance of your grace in this world. Amen.

### Words of Institution

Brothers and sisters in the faith, we recall anew these words and acts of Jesus Christ; that as he and his disciples were eating, on the night of his betrayal, Jesus took the bread and blessed it and broke it, and gave it to his disciples and said “take, eat, this is my body, given for you.”

Jesus took the cup and after giving thanks, he gave it to the disciples and said “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. By eating this bread and drinking this cup, we proclaim Christ’s death, celebrate Christ’s resurrection, and await Christ’s coming again.

### Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Holy God, you have called your people from east and west and north and south to feast at the table of Jesus Christ. We thank you for Christ’s presence that binds us all together into your church. By the power of your Holy Spirit, keep us faithful to your purposes in this world. Go with us to the streets, to our homes, and to our places of labor and leisure, that whether we are gathered or scattered, we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we rejoice and pray, amen!

### Benediction:

May God be a bright flame before you, A guiding star above you,  
A smooth path below you, A kindly shepherd behind you, Today, tonight  
and forever.

## The Last Supper

**12** On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go to prepare the Passover meal for you?"

**13** So Jesus sent two of them into Jerusalem with these instructions: "As you go into the city, a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him. **14** At the house he enters, say to the owner, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?' **15** He will take you upstairs to a large room that is already set up. That is where you should prepare our meal."

**16** So the two disciples went into the city and found everything just as Jesus had said, and they prepared the Passover meal there.

**17** In the evening Jesus arrived with the Twelve. **18** As they were at the table[a] eating, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you eating with me here will betray me."

**19** Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one?"

**20** He replied, "It is one of you twelve who is eating from this bowl with me. **21** For the Son of Man[b] must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!"

**22** As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take it, for this is my body."

**23** And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. **24** And he said to them, "This is my blood, which confirms the covenant[c] between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many. **25** I tell you the truth, I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

**26** Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.