

Guilford Community Church, February 7, 2021
5th Sunday after Epiphany



ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDE: “Bridge Over Troubled Water” by Paul Simon; *Patty Meyer, organist*

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning and welcome! Thank you for joining us in worship this morning, Sunday, February 7th. My name is Fred Breunig; I am the Head Lay Leader (Moderator) of Guilford Community Church. When this was recorded, our pastor, Elisa Lucozzi, was still on a period of rest, reflection, and study in preparation for Lent and Easter. So, you won't see her in the pre-recorded worship service this morning, but she returned to the office Thursday and is joining us online this morning for worship and for our Zoom coffee hour. Please join us there by finding the link on the church homepage, www.guilfordchurch.org

Our service this morning was prepared by students at Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School, Elisa's alma mater. I am looking forward with great joy to see our next generation of pastors in action, *and* it has provided a break, not only for Elisa, but also for our wonderful, dedicated and talented music leaders, Peter, Andy, and Patty. Elisa will be leading worship next Sunday, February 14th.

Today's service includes Communion, so you will want to assemble your own elements of communion: some variety of bread and something to fill your Communion cup. Also, please find a candle for us to light together in just a moment.

It's really hard not being in our sanctuary, isn't it? But we continue to worship online, because we love and care about each other and our community. We want to be connected, but we also want to keep us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting; and we know it is, indeed, the best way to care for one another right now. During this challenging time, let us keep creating new ways of being the church, because we know that being the church has nothing to do with the building and *everything* to do with loving each other. Let us continue gathering in this way to be the church and have a welcome wide enough for all.

Moment of silence for Antoine Cook and the Cunningham Cook family.

We begin our worship today by acknowledging and honoring the land we occupy *and* those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut
to worship and discern together the call of God
to the United Church of Christ for these days,
let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki Tribe.

These people used this land since time immemorial
and are still among us in the present.
We offer them our gratitude and respect,
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...
It is a Holy Communion we share of life on earth
of past and present, of pain and reconciliation,
of mystery and majesty...let us begin.

SILENT MEDITATION AND THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

If you have a candle at home, please light it as I light this candle to symbolize the light of Christ's love in the world.

We will now join the Andover Newton seminarians.

GREETING

Ned Allyn Parker

CALL TO WORSHIP

Daryl Denelle

Leader: God of wisdom and of truth, we come before you in worship and in praise.

People: Open our hearts to receive your word.

Leader: We come to be together as a community, physically apart but spiritually connected in your love that knows no bounds.

People: Prepare our spirits to feel your presence and your love.

Leader: Holy One, Divine Creativity, we ask that you would move among us and illuminate our being, wherever we are and whatever we are going through.

People: Give us minds that are open to respond to your radical love.

All: Let us join together in joy and in hope. Amen.

OPENING HYMN: "Welcome" by Mark A. Miller

*Let's walk together for a while
And ask where we begin
To build a world where love can grow
And hope can enter in.
To be the hands of healing
And to plant the seeds of peace,*

*Singing welcome, welcome to this place
You're invited to come and know God's grace.
All are welcome, the love of God to share
'Cause all of us are welcome here,
All are welcome in this place.*

*Let's talk together of a time
When we will share a feast,
Where pride and power kneel to serve
The lonely and the least,
And joy will set the table
As we join our hands to pray,*

*Singing welcome, welcome to this place
You're invited to come and know God's grace.
All are welcome, the love of God to share
'Cause all of us are welcome here,
All are welcome in this place.*

Let's dream together of the day

*When earth and heav'n are one,
A city built of love and light,
The new Jerusalem,
Where our mourning turns to dancing,
Ev'ry creature lifts its voice,*

*Singing welcome, welcome to this place
You're invited to come and know God's grace.
All so are welcome, the love of God to share
'Cause all of us are welcome here,
All are welcome in this place.*

PRAYER OF INVOCATION AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Jyrekis Collins

READING: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Nedelka Prescod

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
And lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is so high that I cannot attain it.*

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
That I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
When I was being made in secret,
Intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
All the days that were formed for me,
When none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!*

*I try to count them - they are more than the sand;
I come to the end - I am still with you.*

ANTHEM: “Alleluia” by Jerry Sinclair, arr. Heidi Butler

PASTORAL PRAYER

Heidi Butler

SERMON

EmmaRae Carroll

Hello and welcome church family! Across our differing denominations and local congregations, we still come together this Sunday as a united faith family. My name is EmmaRae Carroll, and I am a second year MAR (Master of Arts in Religion) student at Yale Divinity School with Andover Newton Seminary. Today I have the distinct Blessing of preaching a sermon on the Lord’s Supper: on Communion. The reading for today comes from the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 9-10, as well as verse 12: it reads:

1 Corinthians 13:9-10, 12 *NRSV*

⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end...¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then, we will see face to face. Now, I know only in part; then, I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.’

Let us Pray: God who sits enthroned in heaven above and yet loved us enough to send the Son Jesus Christ to be our meal, our bread and cup, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts would be right and acceptable before you today, our Rock and Redeemer.¹ In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

I am not a preacher by nature. My own call to ministry only became revealed in recent years. And yet, I have always loved worshipping God. Here at YDS (Yale Divinity School), I have been able to study the Sacrament of Communion as a liturgical scholar—the giving of the bread and cup to remember Christ’s death, resurrection, and coming again. And, prior to COVID, at our weekly worship service here at Andover Newton Seminary, called Emmaus, I was invited to help distribute the Communion elements of bread and cup to my fellow peers. It was one Blessing for me to go and receive the nourishment of the Sacrament from my classmates, but to be invited to distribute the elements myself was an entirely new Blessing. Through these moments of study and practice, I fell in love with Communion and what it means for the life of the Church.

My hope today is to share with you—through Scripture and Word—some of what has been so impactful upon my own spiritual life and growth.

¹ Psalm 19:14.

Liturgical scholars such as myself, people who study Communion and other worship practices of the Church, would tell us that the Communion table is an essential marker of time for the Church. The table connects us to the past when Christ and his disciples shared the first Communion meal. It connects us to our faith ancestors, who have taken part in this meal. In the present, it knits us together as a church, as fellow members of one Body, united with Christ as well as each other, and it brings the future to us in glimpses, where we shall eat and drink with Christ, and where fullness abounds with fullness. All times and places are brought together in this Sacramental space. The past is remembered in a way that brings it back to life, and the future is brought near in a tangible way—establishing God’s heavenly feast here on earth as often as we take and eat.

But, even in normal times, that future can be hard to envision. And these are far from normal times. As we come closer to the anniversary of our first lockdown, grief hits especially poignantly for me. For going on eleven months now, it has been unsafe to worship like many of us would have before the pandemic. For many of us, that means the complete suspension, or at least radical change, of the Communion table—either in person, socially distanced, with all other safety precautions in place, taken virtually as done here, or suspended entirely until we can gather together again. I have been counting the days until life might return back to approximately normal. You might be counting too. We remember our practices and observances from before the pandemic, and I know that I often feel stuck and dissatisfied with current practices. It feels like we’re ‘making do’, or compromising or skipping out altogether on some of the things we love the most, and the future we hope for at the Communion table feels especially distant, given that our present time has been so thoroughly disrupted. This period of life seems like a ‘time hidden out of time’ - days turn into weeks, weeks into months, and daily rhythms and patterns of life practiced for so long feel completely obsolete. Add to this sense of timelessness, the unrelenting traumas of black lives being lost to state-sanctioned violence, insurrection taking over our Capitol Building, and a virus so small that has taken away so much, and I feel like I can barely keep my head up today, let alone look to the future.

These are extraordinary times. And yet, we are not the first to suffer such hardships, or to be in a time that is not the way we think it should be. In Scripture, we are reminded time and again that “this world is not our permanent home”,² that we will face hardships and trials,³ that that which is wrong and bad and evil in the world appear to win for a time,⁴ and that we can’t see clearly as to how everything will work out for good, or if it will at all this side of heaven.⁵ This time that we are living in is extraordinary, but it is not unique.

² Hebrews 13:14a

³ John 16:33, etc.

⁴ Psalm 73:2-5

⁵ Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 13:9-10, 12.

So, at this weird Communion table, we can have the conviction that this time, yes, even this time, still remains an integral part of our journey as Christians. We can see that even Biblical writers wrestled with similar issues. Paul, the writer of 1 Corinthians from which our passage comes, struggled with a problem familiar to us today: knowing things in part, seeing things only as if through a dimly lit mirror, wondering when the picture of life might become clear. In our present confused and clouded time, many of us might ask ourselves those questions daily - what news sources share the truth; what information is reliable and not merely a distortion of some insignificant fact; how can we live as people of faith in a world so obfuscated by other people and by our circumstances. But, on an even more simple and tangible note: talk about seeing in part - we can't even see each other's faces without a mask in the way! Seeing clearly spiritually, relationally, politically - how can we hope for any of those when we are not even able to see each other *physically*.

And yet, there is hope. There is hope at our strange Communion table today. For Paul still writes that someday - some heavenly day - we will know completely and we will see again face to face. Paul's message does not end in despair, and our situation will not either. Paul chooses hope over despair because he perceives the inbreaking of a heavenly time, of a clear picture, of an anticipated banquet. And if our present moment is a 'time out of time' for the worse, then this heavenly time waiting to break-in will be a 'time out of time' that establishes clarity, that unveils truth, and that un.masks us, each one to another.

So, I would suggest, dear family in Christ, that we look upon our own COVID time as a place where God's heavenly time might intervene, even if it's in a way that we don't fully understand (and trust me, no one fully does). For some of us, that means recentring our expectations during this time to see the inbreaking of God's Grace. For others of us, it might mean resting in God's promises and completed work, and for still others, that means rolling up our sleeves and doing the hard and good work in this time that "God prepared beforehand to be our way of life".⁶

And so, where does our celebration of Communion fit into all of this? The day before my birthday this past year, and two days before my husband's birthday, my husband and I both tested positive for COVID-19. We were living halfway across the country from either of our families and I felt utterly alone and afraid. It was in the middle of our fall semester of school, and I did not know how I was going to get groceries safely to our apartment so that we could eat, let alone how I would finish out the rest of the semester. I was an island of loneliness, adrift amidst a sea of brain fog, COVID symptoms, and fear.

And yet, love and light, and to-the-door delivered groceries and extended academic deadlines cut through that fog as friends, Andover Newton friends, and family supported us and virtually held us on our birthdays and beyond, until we were again feeling better and (mostly) symptom free. We did not deserve that love, and yet, here it was given to

⁶ Ephesians 2:10.

us, good, running over, unmeasured, and abundant. The way we experienced these blessings felt like a time hidden out of time, heaven brought down to us.⁷ I did not understand it at the time, but that, I believe, was Communion to us in that moment. This was God's love and divine presence given to us in the form of groceries and get-well cards. It was the friend sitting outside our window, sharing two different pizzas while separated by glass, that appeared as Jesus Christ of Nazareth sitting down with his disciples in a pandemic. It might have been different in form from the Communion table of 2,000 years ago, but it was no less transformative in spirit or impact.

This love, this Communion, was a place for us where we could see more fully, even if only a glimpse at a time. That love poured out to us through our community was a symbol of Communion that broke into our sickness and brought God's kingdom down to us, even now, through tangible ways of food and support.

And church family, today we have the very same thing! We *have* Communion, that bread and cup that was poured out for us in love. We *have* the very thing our church ancestors had and did - that Christ did - right at our fingertips. It might not be the cracker and juice we are used to; it might not be the wine and bread that we have grown up taking. It might look vastly different than how it did a year ago, and it might look different from church to church and from household to household, but it is still Communion, it is still grace upon grace, it is still an inbreaking of God's heavenly feast into your place right now.

And this is the beauty of Communion. Through embracing these periods of time hidden out of time - through embracing this COVID-time, through seeing this time as heavenly focused instead of earthy bound, through encountering the not quite, the ever expectant, and the already-but-not-yet, **we are actually brought into the Grace and promises of God even though they have yet to be fulfilled.** You may not entirely understand it, and neither do I. Yet somehow, through the Grace of God, Communion brings God's future kingdom into our present reality and gives us a foretaste of God's divine love and presence. By and through the taking and eating of the Communion elements, we remember Christ's love toward us. We are bound together as the Church, and we are brought to see a glimpse of even that heavenly banquet. We hope, knowing that the pulling down of masks and sharing a meal over Zoom does not impede God's Grace and Mercy from reaching us; and we trust, holding to the conviction that these momentary clouded experiences will one day give way to a clear and unimpeded heavenly feast. "Now I know only in part; then I will know fully. For now, we see (mask to mask), but then we will see face to face." Let us pray together:

Dear God,

You who invite us to Your table: have mercy on us. Gently remind us of Your heavenly banquet that is to come, through the outpouring of Your love and Grace that we find in

⁷ Luke 6:38.

Communion, so that, through Your Holy Spirit, we might abound in hope and love for one another. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

COMMUNION HYMN: "As We Gather at Your Table" by Carl P Daw Jr.

*As we gather at your table, as we listen to your word,
Help us know, O God, your presence; let our hearts and minds be stirred.
Nourish us with sacred story till we claim it as our own;
Teach us through this holy banquet how to make Love's victory known.*

*Turn our worship into witness in the sacrament of life;
Sent us forth to love and serve you, bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion to forgive as you forgave;
May we still behold your image in the world you died to save.*

*Gracious Spirit, help us summon other guests to share that feast
Where triumphant Love will welcome those who had been last and least.
There no more will envy bind us nor will pride our peace destroy,
As we join with saints and angels to repeat the sounding joy.*

HOLY COMMUNION

Sarah B. Drummond and Ned Allyn Parker

CLOSING HYMN: "Every Praise" by Hezekiah Walker & John David Bratton

*Ev'ry praise is to our God,
Ev'ry word of worship with one accord.
Ev'ry praise, ev'ry praise is to our God.
Sing hallelujah to our God.
Glory hallelujah is due our God.
Ev'ry praise, ev'ry praise is to our God.*

*God, my savior.
God, my healer.
God, my deliverer.
Yes God is! Yes God is!*

BENEDICTION

EmmaRae Carroll

POSTLUDE: "I Love These Days" by Billy Joel; *Patty Meyer, organist*

Andover Newton Leaders in order of appearance:

Ned Allyn Parker (MDiv '10) is an ordained American Baptist minister and the Associate Dean of Institutional Advancement for Andover Newton Seminary.

Daryl Denelle is a second year YDS MDiv and ANS Diploma student preparing for ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Jyrekis Collins is a second year YDS MDiv and ANS Diploma student preparing for ministry in the American Baptist Churches.

Nedelka Prescod is a first year YDS MDiv and ANS Diploma student preparing for ministry in the American Baptist Churches.

Heidi Butler is a second year YDS MDiv and ANS Diploma student preparing for ministry in the American Baptist Churches.

EmmaRae Carroll is a second year YDS MAR, ISM and ANS Diploma student, and a member of the First Congregational Church of New Canaan.

Sarah B. Drummond is an ordained UCC minister and Founding Dean of Andover Newton Seminary.

Online Communion image courtesy of <https://medium.com/@pmphillips/bread-and-wine-online-resources-and-liturgies-for-online-communion-34b80972a068>