

# One cup, One bread, One body

B-15, John 6:51-58, August 19, 2018

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This is a challenging Gospel reading. Jesus seems to be saying we are supposed to *literally* eat his flesh and drink his blood, which confounded the Jews who were listening to him. And it confounds us. What does it really mean?

We know that this reading is ultimately about experiencing God and Jesus through the symbolism of communion. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” (John 6:56) Through sharing one cup and one bread, we do experience God and Jesus. And as we experience this **together**, we can become **one body**.

When we come to the table and experience God’s presence through Jesus, we are overcoming our differences and diversity, we are becoming **one Body**. And it’s not just about coming to the Eucharistic table on Sundays. When we go out into the world and share bread and share the cup with our diverse neighbors, like Jesus did, we are becoming **one body**.

Fifteen years ago, when I was preaching on this same Gospel, we were facing a huge and scary dilemma in the Episcopal Church, and especially in our diocese. A few days before, at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, the majority of the bishops, clergy and delegates decided to approve the new Bishop of New Hampshire, Gene Robinson, the first openly gay bishop allowed in the Episcopal Church.

It was a very scary situation for me, for Rec, for our diocese and for the whole Episcopal Church and world-wide Anglican Communion. I had only been here at Rec, and in this diocese for 10 months. I had just been to a meeting with our Episcopal clergy from the San Antonio area. It was supposed to be about other topics, but the main conversation ended up being about the approval of Gene Robinson. As best I could tell, I was the only one who was not upset with the Episcopal Church. Several of the clergy said they did not think they could stay “in communion” with the “progressive” wing of the church who approved the Bishop of New Hampshire.

As I sat in that meeting I began to think: “What about me? And what about Rec? Does this mean our sister congregations can no longer stay in communion with us because we interpret the Scripture differently on the issue of homosexuality? What about those in my congregation who have a similar negative opinion on homosexuality? Can they no longer be in communion with us? What about those in my fellow clergy’s congregations, probably a small minority, but I bet in every congregation, there are at least a few who supported the gay & lesbian community? Can they no longer be in communion with those in their own parish who have a different opinion? Are we going to let this incredibly divisive issue break the “communion” within our parish families, our diocese, the Episcopal Church? Will it shatter the “communion” within the worldwide Anglican Body? Is there anything I can do, or we can do? Can we heal the brokenness and restore the communion and continue to be **one body**? Or can we only stand back and watch the train wreck?”

The Apostle Paul faced some similar challenges in the early days of the Church. I have talked about this in some other recent sermons. When the early church spread beyond the Jewish communities into the Gentile world, there were some huge challenges because of their differences. Initially, the Jewish Christians in Corinth had a very difficult time accepting the Gentile Christians, because the Jewish Christians wanted to include many of their Jewish traditions, in the Christian Church. But Paul, a Jew, basically said, “Let go of your old Jewish traditions.”

In his letter to the deeply divided Corinthians, Paul said: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is **one bread**, we who are many are **one body**, for we all partake of the **one bread**.” [1 Corinth. 10:16-17] “. . . we who are many are **one body**, for we all partake of the **one bread**.”

For Paul, the Oneness we each share with Christ, as experienced and expressed and symbolized in the Eucharist is the basis for a Oneness with each other, that should overcome all divisions, all disagreements, all barriers. Paul was also asking slaves and slave owners to come to the table together as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to drink from the same cup and eat from the same loaf, to be part of **one body**. Paul writes to this very diverse crowd of Corinthian Christians, “For just as all the many members of the body are **one body**, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” [1 Corinth. 12:12-13]

Fifteen years ago, I was deeply afraid **the Body** in this diocese and in the Episcopal Church was going to fall apart. Thankfully, I was the Rector of Reconciliation, which had a very different perspective. The focus of the Church of Reconciliation is not, and has never been, just about being “progressive.” Our focus has been and continues to be about being “reconcilers.” Coming together *despite our differences*, our different perspectives, to agree to disagree, so we can still share **one cup, one bread**; so we can be **one body** in Christ.

We are trying to follow the example of Paul’s church in Corinth, which was able, despite huge diversity – Jews, Gentiles, rich, poor, slave-owners, slaves – to share **one bread, one cup** and be **one body** in Christ. We have worked hard to be “reconcilers,” so that we can be **one body**. Over the years we have reached out to brothers and sisters who are very different from us, and invited them to be **one body** with us. Here’s an example:

For many years we have been collaborating with three sister congregations, St. David’s, Resurrection and St. Matthew’s on celebrating Holy Week. We take turns hosting different services during Holy Week, our choirs work together, we preach at our sister congregations. We break bread together . . . . **even though** we are at a very different place on challenging issues like homosexuality. Despite our differences, we’ve continued to be **one body**.

About 6 or 7 years ago, Reconciliation initiated and hosted table conversations among members of diverse congregations about homosexuality. We listened to each other, and respected each other, and we agreed to disagree. We eventually convinced the Bishop to allow similar table conversations about this challenging issue at Council, in 2014; and also among clergy at our annual clergy conference. These conversations helped us to understand each other, to respect each other, to agree to disagree, and to remain **one body**.

Eventually, our bishops allowed the blessing of same-sex unions. And then same-sex weddings. And most recently an openly lesbian clergy. And those congregations and clergy who disagree with us, are still our brothers and sisters, we are still **one Body**. We will never all be on the same page. But if we can agree to listen to each other, respect each other, and agree to disagree, we can continue to be **one body**.

We are again facing a challenging time. Many Episcopal and other Protestant churches are aging out, shrinking. As I’ve shared before, I think a huge part of the problem is we, the aging leadership of the Church, are not listening to younger generations. We are not seeing the world from their perspective. I’m pretty sure the Church, and the Church of Reconciliation will be very different 20 or 30 years from now. The world is changing rapidly. Generations are changing. And if the Church doesn’t change . . . . will it survive?

Now people of my generation, probably aren't going to want to change much in the ways we want to worship and the things we want to do as a faith community. But are we going to be able to accept change and diversity among younger generations, and be able to agree to disagree, and at the same time, share **one bread, one cup**, and be **one body**?

I have been so blessed to have a radical, community organizer young son, Seth, who still believes in the way of Jesus, the way of love. I will never be like him; I will never see the world and the Church through the same lens. But I am striving as hard as I can to still share one bread, one cup, and be one body with Seth and his younger generation friends.

We are trying to address at Rec this huge challenge of changing generations; and changing churches. We have created what I am calling the "Young Adult Advisory Team." The purpose of this team is to invite our young adults to come together periodically to give the current leadership of Rec, who are predominately of my generation, an opportunity to ask for, and listen to the perspective of the younger generations on various issues. For example, at a recent gathering, we asked about our **website**, which we are now in the process of updating: "What's working for them? What's not working? What's missing?" And we got some very good feedback. We began a similar conversation about our worship, our liturgy and music.

We have lots of issues we hope to be able to bounce off this Young Adult Advisory Team. And we hope these conversations will help Reconciliation anticipate and prepare for the major changes that need to happen.

So here's what I think is the big challenge for the Church today: Can people of my generation listen to, and if necessary, agree to disagree, with younger generations, as we imagine and begin to plan for the Church of the future? Can we continue to be one body? Can we share one bread and one cup together around this table? Even if we are in the midst of major challenges and changes that we don't all agree with?

Yes, we can do this if we continue to be the Church of Reconciliation. If we continue to be **reconcilers**, who share **one cup, one bread**, so we can continue to be **one body**.

Amen.