

Proverbs 9:1-6
Psalm 34:9-14
Ephesians 5:15-20
John 6:51-58

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Who's In and Who's Out

May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable to thee O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen

At the top of the list of the lines I wish I'd written is this one: "When you draw lines about who's in and who's out remember where you're putting Jesus." I don't know who first said it, but I believe it's at the core of Jesus' life and ministry. All are beloved and all are part of God's beloved kingdom.

Jesus who was often found at table with his friends welcomed the marginalized, the "least of this" the friendless. No exceptions.

And writes Lutheran author and pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber:

...his LAST supper was the worst. He broke bread with his friends who were just about to abandon, deny and betray him. And yet, he took bread, blessed it, broke and gave it to these total screw-ups and said, "This is my body, given for you, whenever you eat of it, do this in remembrance of me."

He instituted the Eucharist by giving bread and wine to all the people who were just about to totally screw him over.

And then what does the church do in remembrance of him? – try and keep the "wrong people" from receiving the Lord's Supper.¹

It is the question worth asking. Especially now when we are working our way through five weeks of lectionary texts that have feeding and bread as their core. Over and over we are told and I hope hear Jesus say "I am the bread of life...feed on me..." It is what is clearly most essential to him. The Eucharist is at the heart of our life here at St. Martin's and it is the heartbeat of my own. It is where the God I wasn't looking for found me as I kneeled at a noon Eucharist in Westminster Abbey decades ago.

¹ Bolz-Weber, Nadia, Sermon preached on 7/28/21

After walking around London for a few hours during a dark time in my life, all I wanted to do was sit down. “Eucharist at noon” the sign said. “Oh, I could sit down,” I thought and went into the Abbey.

That changed everything.

It is in part because of that moment, a turning point in my life, and all the moments since, that I am utterly unyielding when the Eucharist is involved. Denying it to anyone says you’re not good enough for Jesus.

Once when my brother was hospitalized, a Catholic priest came to see him. Now my brother, Mark, is not Catholic. But he’ll always go where the action is and when a van leaves from his residential center to go to church, he’s on it.

While chatting with the priest he asked what parish we were from. I said we grew up in the Methodist Church. Nor did I tell the priest that once when Mark came to visit, I found a picture in his suitcase of his total immersion baptism at an Evangelical Church where he’d apparently been born again. My brother is very ecumenical.

The priest looked *aghast*. “Mark’s not Catholic?” No, I said. “Well then, he should not be receiving communion.

I tried to contain my furor so I didn’t embarrass Mark. “Do you mean to tell me that my brother, one of the kindest, most loving people I know is somehow not good enough to receive communion at your church?” I asked the priest to leave.

I can be respectful of other beliefs and theologies and honor my obligation and responsibility to do so. Except when those beliefs wound someone I love. And I refuse to play “Let’s Pretend” with Jesus. While there is some ambiguity in parables that he taught and different ways of interpreting some scripture, there’s utterly no doubt that he meant what he said when it came to love and inclusion. “Whatever you do to the least of these you do unto me.”

We know Christ in the breaking of the bread. We may not always understand how that is but we know the truth of it. Week after week, the Eucharist lays claim on us and then hearts renewed, we return to the world.

I knew a mother whose son died of cancer after being in/out of treatment for over a decade. In the months following his death she said to me that she knew she wanted to do something in his honor and said:

“Bread must be broken before it can be served.”

All of us will be broken in this life in ways large and small. It is all those broken bits of us that are gathered up and united with Christ in the Eucharist. We are given what we need to transform our lives and the world.

The Rev. William Sloane Coffin was a chaplain at Yale before serving as the senior pastor at Riverside Church in New York. He fought for racial justice, and nuclear disarmament and was a passionate antiwar activist. In a sermon he preached about carrying the Eucharist out into the world:

...the bread of heaven feeds my soul. But the bread is not only a symbol of Jesus, it is also symbolic of the church that calls itself “the body of Christ.” I believe that as members of Christ’s church, Christians are brought together in one loaf to be broken to feed the world. I believe Christians could make an enormous difference in this world; and maybe, by God’s grace, even save it. The only question is if we will.

AMEN