

## Wesley United Methodist Church

October 7, 2018

“We Are All One Family.”

Philippians 1:1-11

Leadership magazine printed a delightful story some years ago. It was about Mark Wellman, a paraplegic, who gained national recognition by climbing the sheer granite face of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. On the seventh and final day of his climb, the headlines of a local newspaper read like this: Showing a Will of Granite. Accompanying the headline was a photo of Wellman being carried on the shoulders of his climbing companion Mike Corbett. A subtitle said, “Paraplegic and Partner Prove No Wall is Too High to Scale.” What many people did not know is that Mike Corbett scaled the face of El Capitan three times in order to help Mark Wellman pull himself up once.

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday. This day millions of people all around the globe will receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. They will come from various traditions and different cultures. Some will walk to church while others will ride a bus or train and still others will drive in cars. Some will attend large churches, others very small churches, but all have one thing in common. We are followers of Christ.

Father Henri Nouwen, in his book, *Lifesigns*, shared that he began a daily Eucharist, or service of the Lord’s Supper, at the university where he taught. At first only one or two students attended, but gradually the number increased. Father Nouwen watched students who did not know each other, and often had very different viewpoints, come together as a worshipping community. “Most of these people would never have chosen each other as friends or companions,” Father Nouwen wrote. “But they all, often for quite different reasons, felt attracted to a daily Eucharistic celebration, in which the Word of God was proclaimed, and the Body and Blood of Christ shared.”

Over the months these quite different people found themselves drawn by a deep sense of community. These people who had different interests discovered a special bond based not on physical or emotional attractiveness, social compatibility or common interests, but on the presence of the living Christ.

As students participated in the daily communion they were strengthened by each other’s presence. “All of them started to experience support from each other in their daily struggles,” Nouwen wrote. “Many became good friends, and some even found their partner for life. Such were the remarkable fruits of spiritual community.”

St. Paul begins his letter to the church at Philippi by calling the “partners in the Gospel.” That phrase describes our relationship to those around the world with whom we share this celebration of bread and cup today. That relationship cuts across national, racial, and ethnic differences. It is based on a spiritual truth: We Are All One Family.

Some years past, a reporter asked a white teenaged girl in Philadelphia why she participated in a riot to run a black couple out of her neighborhood. “I wouldn’t want my kids to get to know the blacks,” she said. “Why,” the reporter asked. “Because they might get to like them!” she answered. What a shame!

However, that’s the danger, isn’t it? There is so much fear, unfounded fear, in our world even today. We see it across the world, our country, and we see it in our own neighborhoods. How sad! Why can we not believe the Bible? We are all descended from one mother and father. We are all one family.

We are family even with those who do not declare Jesus as Lord. As followers of Jesus we long for the day when every person on this earth knows him to be Savior and Lord. We ought never be apologetic for our faith.

Maxie Dunham recalls the time many years ago when he and his wife along with their two small children were driving from Gulfport, Mississippi, to his parents’ home in Richton, about one hundred miles away. It was sleeting, and the road was becoming icy on that unusual cold night. It was close to midnight out on a dark, lonely highway. Then it happened. Their car stalled. There wasn’t much of hope of anyone stopping to help them at that hour of the night. The children were getting colder, and Dunham and his wife were getting anxious. After what seemed an eternity a car came to a screeching halt beside them. Maxie told the driver that their car stalled, and without asking further questions, the stranger told them to get in his car. The stranger even helped them with their luggage and went out of his way to take them to a friend’s home in the nearest town where they could spend the night.

Dunham noticed the man’s accent was different from his own. He obviously was not from Mississippi. The man who helped the Dunham family that night was David Ben-Ami, Rabbi of Temple B’Nai Israel in Hattiesburg.

A few months later Dr. Dunham read an article in the newspaper about the trials and tribulations of Rabbi Ben-Ami. His troubles began when he befriended ministers of other faiths. The Rabbi visited pastors who had been thrown in jail for demonstrating against racial injustice. He befriended a white Presbyterian minister who had been involved in this struggle for equality, and he had assisted in distributing turkeys to needy Mississippi families of all races. Rabbi Ben-Ami’s congregation was so upset that they asked him to leave.

Discrimination from any quarter is a tragedy. We are a family even with those who do not name the name of Jesus. We do him a great disservice if we cannot love all people, even those who worship differently than we worship. Here is the important thing. Christ asks us to do no more than he himself has done.

The next time you judge another to be unworthy, think how unworthy you and I are of the sacrifice Christ made for us. If loving people who are not like us is difficult, imagine a holy God giving up his Son for an unholy humanity. I shared with you the story of a young man who helped a paraplegic friend to scale the face of a great mountain. I hope it causes us to think of what Christ did for us on Calvary. He came into this world of sin and death, sorrow and suffering, for one purpose to lift us up. And now he calls us into partnership. We are partners with him and with believers all over this world seeking to lift others to the throne of grace as well.

We have been bought with a price. Someone has lifted our undeserving souls all the way to the throne of God. As we take the bread and cup this day, we remember what Christ has done for us, and in partnership with him and his people all over the world, we seek to lift others to that throne as well. Amen.