

Supper's Ready

World Communion Sunday

Text: Psalm 133; Acts 2: 43-47

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A beautiful thing happened one Sunday at church. It could have been here at First Church or at Manantial de Gracia¹; it could have been at any of the five-thousand-something sister UCC congregations who share our denominational roots; or, quite honestly, it could have been any church of any flavor anywhere on the planet.

But wherever and whoever and whenever, folks arrived one Sabbath day and the pastor gave them some brief instructions. "You'll find three slips of paper as you sit down this morning. I want you to write down three separate answers to this question: Don't over-think it. What are the three most comforting phrases that you know?"

It was a crowd-sourcing assignment to solicit real-time input on-the-ground and in-the-moment. Once everyone responded they would be sorted to determine the most frequent of the phrases given. The sermon that morning would be an extemporaneous conversation on the three things expressed.

I wonder: what would we have written if we had been there, and what our responses might reveal: in Spanish, in English, in whatever tongue is closest to heart.² The prompt again: what are the three most comforting phrases that you know?

Any guesses on the first one? It's something that we all long to hear. It's been the source and subject of poetry and song, of personal commitment and public conviction. Artists and preachers, sages and teachers have tried their hands at telling. And, in perspective of an Apostle named Paul, without this something in our lives we are pretty close to nothing.³

The most frequent response was **I love you**. To know that we are loved is about the deepest, most reassuring, most comforting gift any of us ever receive. From parent to child, life-partner to life-partner, brother and sister, friend to friend, stranger to other to unknown.

And deepest yet, to know that we are God's beloved: for God so loved the world and everyone in it, as God still loves the world in all of its splendor and anguish.

We celebrate that love in a very particular way when we come to the Table of Christ and take hold of the bread of life and cup of blessing. Even more, we do so when we make our way upfront on a virtual pilgrimage with other believers – aligned with one another taking our turn. More yet: we do so when we listen with the ears of our hearts for something that God once whispered through Isaiah to the whole human family, "You are precious in my sight, and I love you."⁴

So that's first on the comfort scale by any metric you might imagine: I love you.

The runner up was another three-word phrase. It applies to individuals in the tangles of relationships, one to one; and to entire peoples, nations and communities across all lines of separation and misunderstanding.

I forgive you. You tell me: where in the world would any of us be if we did not have the power of forgiveness to offer and receive?

Last spring a man named Ted down in Meriden let his fear of the Mosque next door lead him to do something horrific.⁵ He got himself rip-roaring drunk and then fired his gun randomly into their building. Not one was there at the time – which only slightly reduces the fear and panic that he caused. We all heard about it in the news.

Perhaps lesser known was that some months later, with trepidation and apprehension from all, Ted was invited to a symposium at that same Mosque. It was an interfaith gathering by the title “True Islam and the Extremists” to counter the kind of ignorance that ignited Ted’s actions in the first place.

“I was afraid,” Ted said as he stood up and addressed them all. “I wish I had come and knocked at your door. If I had chosen to spend five minutes with you, it would have made all the difference in the world. But I didn’t do that.”

And then, in a genuine act of reconciliation, the folks at the Mosque, whose motto is “Love for All, Hatred for None” lived up to its name by forgiving him.

So number two: I forgive you. Number one: I love you. These affirmations carry enormous power and are so vital to life. They are hopeful, reassuring, comforting, life-giving.

And then add number three: Supper’s ready.

That’s the call to nourishment – literally to food – without which we all would wither and die. It’s the call to a place of gathering, a table of all shapes and sizes; in kitchens or dining rooms; with a gaggle of friends and family or smaller. Kids come in hungry, and older folks, too. Sustenance and warmth are waiting, and something so basic as the human needs of hunger and thirst are met.

I once visited a widower in the months after his wife’s sudden death. Somewhere in our conversation I asked, “what’s the hardest part of the day?” And he said, with a flush of tears, “Supper time. No matter what was on our minds or how the day had been, I always counted on that time of presence with her. Sometimes we didn’t even have much to say. But it was when we truly were at home. It wasn’t just about food. It was about a special time and place we both relied on. I didn’t know how important that was to me, or how much I took it for granted.”

It's a tender pastoral question. I have asked it of others, too. It's guaranteed to bring the conversation deeper. And almost without fail, the answer is the same. It's the dinner bell of the heart. Supper's ready.

I love you. I forgive you. Supper's ready! Let's carry these with us to the table now. Because they are all here as we make our way, honestly, all three: love, forgiveness and nourishment.

And though we each may come feeling alone or by ourselves they are best received and shared together, in the community of Christ at the Table that bears his name.

The bread and the cup and each and every heart: the gifts of God, for the people of God. May it be so. Amen.

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¹ This sermon was offered as an invitation to the Table on World Communion Sunday, a service held in partnership with our sister Latino Congregation, Manantial de Gracia, Spring of Grace. Manantial de Gracia has been among us, worshipping in the First Church Chapel every Sunday since 2014.

² Pastor Elivette "Elly" Mendez Angulo translated my English words into Spanish providing a bilingual worship experience for both congregations.

³ I Corinthians 13: 1-3.

⁴ Isaiah 43:4.

⁵ Peter Marteka, "I Just Ask For Your Forgiveness: Muslim Community Accepts Apology, Greets Shooter As "Neighbor'." [Hartford Courant](#), April 3, 2016, p. B-1 and 7.