

“THE TABLE OF WELCOME”

Psalm 78:10-20

October 2, 2016 - World Communion Sunday

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One of the great things about the Psalms is that when we read them, we often find echoes of our own feelings, our own gratitude and awe, but also our own struggles, our failings, our questions. Far from prettying-up their faith traditions, the psalm writers sometimes state quite bluntly that their ancestors went astray, made God angry, and lost their faith. They do this, I'm sure, because they know that future generations will face the same kind of doubts and temptations and challenges. To know that others have been this way before means that perhaps we will figure it out too. To know that our heritage includes those who strayed, questioned, had their hearts broken, forgot what they should remember, did what they knew they shouldn't... means that we are part of something bigger than our limitations and stronger than our weaknesses. We are enfolded in the wide and mysterious mercy of God, and into that mercy, we can voice our doubts and ask our questions and cry our anguish and shout our outrage.

When I read these verses from Psalm 78 they seem somehow so contemporary to me. We modern Christians can relate to them. We can hardly enumerate all the ways God has blessed us, all the ways we have seen God's hand and felt God's presence. And yet, the troubles in the world around us loom so large – so terrifying, so unresolvable - that we *do* forget. All the suffering and want and fear make our world feel like a wilderness.

This is a divisive time in our country. The racism we want to think is behind us has made itself visible and undeniable. Acts of violence headline every newscast. Over 63 million people in our world are now refugees (more than after WW 2), fleeing war, gangs, poverty, repression, natural disasters. ISIS and Boko Haram and crime syndicates spread terror. The Israelis and the Palestinians are no nearer to peace. War rages on in Syria. Human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world. 34 million children in the world suffer from malnutrition. One in eight people is hungry. Poverty destabilizes communities and nations.

We wonder if anything will ever change. We wonder where God is. We might ask, as the ancient Israelites did, “Can God spread a table in this wilderness?”

The table of communion is our affirmative answer to that question. We know it to be a table of justice, unity, understanding, reconciliation, transformation, nourishment, peace, and welcome. This is what we experience when we gather around it. This is what Jesus calls his people to. This is what we are nourished *for* when we come to communion. Here we bring our broken hearts and the world's brokenness, to remember again God's faithfulness, God's mercy, God's power, and God's intentions for us and the world. At this table, we learn how we are to be in our whole lives: breaking bread and making peace, feeding people in body and soul, welcoming strangers, repenting of our sin, breaking down barriers, remembering God's goodness, trusting God, giving thanks. We are here to practice what we are to go out and practice: spreading a table of welcome in the world.

Further reading: Luke 15:1-6 and Mark 8:1:1-8

Resource:

“Come to the Table of Peace” (PCUSA Peace and Global Witness Offering Resource, 2016)