

“In Search of Holiness”
World Communion Sunday--October 4, 2026

1 Peter 1:13-16

World Communion Sunday was first celebrated in 1933 at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. The pastor of the church at that time, the Rev. Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr, wanted Christians to remember that the church and the sacrament of communion were bigger than their own congregations, their own communities, and their own denominations. By the time 1940 rolled around, with much of the world preoccupied by World War II, the Federal Council of Churches encouraged every church across our land to participate in a day that now falls yearly on the first Sunday in October.

Born in a time of profound, global division and conflict, it's amazing to think that World Communion Sunday has survived in its current form for eighty-six years. And yet all these years later, in a world still filled with profound division and conflict, the need for this particular day in our church calendar remains unchanged. Today, then, we gather for worship to echo the hope-filled command Jesus Christ expressed long ago for God's people. “You must all be one.”

It's easy, in my mind, to think of this day as simply another communion Sunday. The communion table behind me looks the same as it always does. The bread on the communion trays have been cut into similarly sized cubes. All of the juice cups have been filled by the Deacons to a uniform height. Much of the language you will hear during communion and the ritual we engage in of coming forward to the front to receive the communion elements will sound and feel familiar if you have been here on a communion Sunday before.

In order to fully live into this World Communion Sunday, however, I invite you to set aside the idea that we are about to share just another communion. Instead, consider today as a day for stretching your imagination. It's a day for seeing beyond what is and dreaming about the possibility of what could be in the future. To that end, I invite you to close your eyes, if you choose, and open the eyes of your mind.

What I am about to read to you is entitled a “Table Blessing” for World Communion Sunday written a few years ago by a favorite poet, Jan Richardson.

*To your table, Blessed Jesus, you bid us come. You have set the places, you have poured
the juice,*

And there is always room you say, for one more. And so we come.

*From the streets and from the alleys we come. From the deserts and from the hills we
come.*

*From the ravages of poverty and from the palaces of privilege we come.
Running, limping, carried, we come.*

We are bloodied with our wars, we are wearied with our wounds, we carry our dead within us and we reckon with their ghosts.

We hold the seeds of healing, we dream of a new creation, we know the things that make for peace, and we struggle to give them wings.

And yet, to your table we come. Hungering for your bread, we come; thirsting for your cup we come.

Singing your song in every language, speaking your name in every tongue, in conflict and in communion, in discord and in desire, we come.

O God of Wisdom, we come...

Sometimes on a communion Sunday, you will hear me describe our communion table using particular images. I don't do it every communion Sunday. But occasionally, during the "Invitation to the Table," you will hear me illustrate how big our communion table actually is.

When I do this, I stretch both my arms out as far as they will go. And I try to give you a sense of the length and width and depth of the table. Because at each communion table where Christ breaks bread and pours the juice, including the table behind me, there is a seat saved for every single person who calls on the name of Jesus Christ.

Whether today is the first time you are sharing communion. Or you have shared communion hundreds of times. Whether you live in the United States or Africa or South America or anywhere on earth. If you walk to the front of the sanctuary to receive bread and juice or you limp or you shuffle with a walker or you are carried in someone's arms or you are wheeled in a wheelchair. No matter how much money you possess or how old you are or how thirsty or hungry you might be. By definition the communion table is large enough to accommodate all God's people. And World Communion Sunday is the day we all show up for supper.

Yes, we come to the table on World Communion Sunday to give thanks for our Christian siblings around the world who will share communion in other places this day. And we come to the table to envision a day when Christians from every corner of the world will gather side by side...

We also come to the table on World Communion Sunday in search of holiness. Which is a rare thing in our world where holiness is hard to come by. I don't mean the kind of holiness that involves bells and whistles and angels and dazzling lights. I mean the kind of holiness that shows up in small and ordinary events and objects day by day.

The kind of holiness we might even refer to as mundane. Holiness that manifests itself around a simple table over a simple supper meal. Where simple bread is broken

and eaten. And simple juice is poured for everyone to drink. Once upon a time, Jesus Christ took an ordinary, routine dinner event that you and I engage in every day of our earthly lives and said to us, “Look, what you are doing is holy!”

In the end, through the communion meal we are connected to Jesus, who is the host of our shared meal. Through the communion meal, we become one with the God made known to us in Jesus Christ. And when we are one with God and Jesus Christ, we connect to one another...across humankind...

You heard me read for you earlier a “Table Blessing” created by Jan Richardson. I end this sermon with a blessing also written by Jan Richardson for the occasion of World Communion Sunday this year. It’s entitled, “AND THE TABLE WILL BE WIDE.”

*And the table will be wide. And the welcome will be wide.
And the arms will open wide
to gather us in.
And our hearts will open wide
to receive.
And we will come as children who trust
there is enough.
And we will come unhindered and free.
And our aching will be met
with bread.
And our sorrow will be met
with juice.
And we will open our hands to the feast without shame.
And we will turn toward each other without fear.
And we will give up our appetite
for despair.
And we will taste and know
of delight.
And we will become bread for a hungry world.
And we will become drink for those who thirst.
And the blessed
will become the blessing.
And everywhere
will be the feast. **Amen.***

—Jan Richardson
from *How the Stars Get in Your Bones: A Book of Blessings*
janrichardson.com/books

