

## *Remember – We are all called to the Open Table*

*Psalm 132: 1-12 and Revelation 1: 4b-8*

As it was in the beginning, is and will be. One of the reasons why God is divine, how we understand God as divine, is that God is beyond our concepts of time. We can guess at the future, we can ponder the present, we can remember the past, but in all those actions, we are imperfect. I am sure you have a memory from childhood and when you share it with a sibling, they laugh at you and say that is not at all what happened. Sometimes in the present moment we can completely disagree. I had a moment yesterday - where it felt like it passed in the blink of an eye and I am sure some in the room with me felt it was a little longer than that. And the future, of course, no one knows, but we could sit around and guess. There's no way for us to know.

One of the definitions of elder that our indigenous elder, Evelyn Day, shared with us is that when elders seek to decide or give their opinion on things, they ponder what impact will this decision have; what impact will this have for 7 generations. And what we forgot to ask was if it was the 7 generations to come or the 7 generations that have come and we came to realize that perhaps she meant both. Yes, we must look to our decisions and what their consequences may be in the future, but we also need to look back at the wisdom of other generations and what they have taught us coming forward.

Today we celebrate this open table (*pointing at the communion table*). The sharing of communion has been done in a plethora of ways ever since that first night where Jesus transformed what had been a Sader or Passover meal into what became a central ritual for Christians. It always has included a form of carbohydrate and a form of liquid. However, I have been in that place where the form of carbohydrate was rice, bread, cubes of bread made very, very small, chunks of bread so big it took three bites to eat them. I have had bread handed to me and I have been invited to reach in and rip out gouges out of a huge loaf.

In the cups, I have had wine, water and grape juice. And yes, I have had different colours of grape juice depending on what was available in the church. I remember once on a ski hill we had a soda cracker and grape juice from a juice box. In all those times it was Christ who was the bread, Christ who was in that juice, because we were doing that together and remembering.

For me, one of the great gifts of an elder is an ability to pause. Pause before saying yes or no. Pause before saying something on social media. Yes, elders now can use social media. But they pause before sharing, pondering, is this true. Is this going to raise anxiety or lessen it; is this going to spread good news or bad?

Elders also pause whenever they wish that someone would just change, be different, grow up. Because elders know that we can not make one another change. We can not make another person grow up. So, the elders in my life have opened their mouth and then shut it and taken a breath. They have gone home and tried to be as patient as they wished I could be. Or they have gone home to seek silence since I would not give them any.

When it comes to this table of ours, many decisions have been made over the centuries about how we share this meal. Often when we are with good elders before we make any decision there is a pause. In the height of the temperance movement, in eastern Canada there was a clear need by those in the movement to get rid of alcohol anywhere and their churches. It happened that around this time the procedure had become possible to have grape juice. Grape juice that would be able to be in the fridge when you bought it on Friday and still be able to be served well on Saturday or Sunday. And so, away went the wine and in came the juice, in United Churches.

And then, when the temperance movement had lost some of its ‘oomph’, there was a call from our ecumenical partners to go back to the “right way”, which was wine. And so, the elders in the United Church of Canada paused. They knew they wanted to uphold tradition, hence wine, but they also wanted to allow anyone to come to the table. And they had become aware of people who had been trying to stop drinking and they wanted them at their table. And so, they paused and said, let us just wait. Let us continue with this juice tradition of ours and see where it takes us.

Well wouldn't you know it, God giggled and said oh good, now they will realize that the children have been missing out. You see, up until that time and still to this day in many churches you could not receive communion as a child. You needed to take your confirmation classes and become a member first. Now that made sense, especially since we were about to give them a sip of wine, but if any of you have had the opportunity to watch a child receive communion you have seen the depth of their understanding that God would set out a simple meal just to say I LOVE YOU.

They totally understand that. Though not all children have had the opportunity to receive a perfectly simple meal given in love, most have. Whether it be a free breakfast at school, a snack at their best friend's house after school, or supper with someone special, they know that taking a moment, pausing, and hearing and tasting love makes perfect sense.. And so, in the United Church the children started coming up to the front. Now I will not say that we all went peacefully into that night, because it was not peaceful. There are still questions, as there should

be. In general, our hope is that this table is open to all ages and to anyone struggling with addictions.

The pause before we decide is a gift of our elders. When we become elders, we pause before saying yes and before saying no. We know that we must keep strong boundaries so we can stay healthy. We cannot say yes to everything, but we also know that this world does not run on hopes and wishes. It runs on acts and so our elders say yes often!

There is one other thing that occasionally happens at this table. You see in seminary there is always a class where you learn how to lead worship and usually right away, we all name our #1 fears: I am going to drop the bread! I am going to bless it, it's going to be Holy and then I am going to drop it on the floor. ("Oh no, said Leigh, I won't drop the bread. I will spill that juice.") I heard a wonderful story, just this morning, about juice being spilled, in this very room, by a minister, onto his lovely, white alb.

Good elders remind us that perfection is not the goal. Perfection as a target just leads us to failure because no-one ever will be perfect. Instead, we are to seek our best - and so, sometimes the juice arrives late because someone forgot to get it or sometimes the bread crumbles (oh, the early days of gluten-free bread, oh the crumbles, the crumbly crumbles). Vacuuming under the communion table after Sunday doesn't feel like a sacred thing, but our elders remind us that God is not fragile. We need everyone to partake in this meal. And, if they trip or their hands shake or they just plain old spill all over the new white tablecloth then so be it! If God's love is shown, let it be at our sacred table. As we grow into becoming elders, may we seek to be ambassadors of forgiveness and love, imperfection and many pauses to allow the Holy Spirit to gift us with wisdom and with peace. Amen.