

## World Wide Communion Meditation

Job 1:1; 2: 1-10; Mark 10: 2-16

I'll tell you a true story. These readings come up on a 3 year cycle. Six years ago, it was communion Sunday just like today. I had tried my best to write a sermon that helped the congregation deal honourably and intelligently with the Gospel reading – Mark's teaching on divorce. I think I did a good job. I gave some background on what divorce meant in those days....nothing like now....a man could simply write "I divorce you" and a woman would be out in the cold, literally, vulnerable and abandoned, and a woman had no such mutual right....I explained that Mark's gospel is the first written of the four that we have in our Bible; that by the time Matthew wrote ten years later, he was making allowances in some cases....that the Bible does not speak with one voice on this topic.... And on and on. It was good!

What I did NOT realize though, is that the Sunday School in Debec was staying in for the whole service. I was too far into the service by the time I realized they were not going down for Sunday School....and I went ahead and preached the sermon anyway. That might even have been ok –

But also, what you need to know, and I SHOULD have known, is that in that congregation was a young mom and three beautiful daughters...at that time aged 10, 8 and 6 (sort of) who were right in the deep and painful middle of a divorce.

I will never ever forget that service.

That brave mom sat there, arms around the 2 daughters she could reach, they leaning against her, crying themselves, and watching their mom with sad and frightened eyes. As she cried quietly. Me...preaching what I had thought in the safety of my office that week, was a balanced and academically sound piece of scriptural interpretation.

What should I have done? What would you have done?

Was I insensitive? Should I have simply not preached the sermon and gone right to communion, letting the sacrament speak for itself? Let the smell of the fresh bread, the acid taste of good old Welsh's and the words of the elders as they passed it "bread for your journey – cup of joy" do its mysterious healing? I simply don't know.

The one thing I **do** know is that my sermon that day came at the text from a rational, logical, "head" point of view. I spent time explaining what divorce meant in Jesus' time; so different from what we mean today. I spent time explaining that in the early church the attitude to divorce changed quickly – from Mark, the earliest gospel, to Matthew only ten years later...and that Paul had another take on it....

I spent time on all that and that's good, it's important to know the history and the background but you know what? When you're hurting, you don't need *ideas*. You don't

need me to speak to your head. When you're sitting in the pew, arms around your daughters and reaching for your 10<sup>th</sup> Kleenex....

When you've been visited by pain, and you sit among the ashes scraping your cracked and bleeding skin...you need me to speak to your heart.

What to say, at a time like that?

I don't know. What I DO know is that every time we gather at this table there are those among us who are hurting. I don't know *you* – I've had the privilege of sitting with some of you already and getting to know at least some of what you carry in your hearts...but even if I'd been here for years I would *never* know the fullness of you, of your pain, of what makes you sit at this table makes your belly ache for the promise it brings.

Every time we sit here together, whether we know it or not, *someone* is in pain. Job is among us, scraping his skin with a pot shard. Silently...waiting for something to break through...for some sign, some sliver of hope, some salve for his cracked and bleeding skin.

If that is you today – welcome to the table. This is the very place for you to be. It will not be a magic fix. It will not provide neat and tidy answers – but it is food for the soul, oil of gladness for skin that has been dry too long. Perhaps for you the effect will be instant – that happens sometimes - and people say a loud and certain “amen” or “halleluia!” More often, though, what happens is a moan of longing...a guttural acknowledgement that this is important...a faint whiff of home, and it is enough. For now, it is enough.

There is a place for you at this table. Pull up a chair....and look around. Here you are, squarely in the company of the magnificent, ordinary, sinning, forgiving, forgiven family of God throughout the ages and around the world. If all you can do is be silent, then we will sit by you in your silence. If no answer is adequate, good for you. Don't settle for platitudes, accept the tedious or trite words that sometimes preachers, God forgive us, try to give. If life has dealt you something that you have yet to understand or accept – and if the only response you have is.....pain....then let that pain be. Bring it here and we will honour it; bear witness to it, and if that's all we can do, then let that be as well. We are groping and hungry too. Let us at least be our flawed and aching selves for you.

Sit with us. Look around. Who do you see? As we sit here, we do so with brothers and sisters all over the world....many many of whom sit in silence, pot shard in hand. The earth itself sits with us, sores on its body, oozing and raw. The earth; God's very body, our host and also our guest.

Sit with us. Look around. Who do you see? Who is missing? God forgive us, there are empty chairs at the table. Some have chosen to absent themselves from the family, and others have been made unwelcome. Shame on us all.

For all this pain, for the emptiness and the misunderstanding, for the injustice and the raw aching need that is no one's fault but the universe that sometimes seems so unfair...for all of it, we offer what we can. Ourselves and our deep desire that it be made whole. Our fierce belief, and our experience - that this is possible. The loaf, whole and fragrant, is here. The cup, one cup – notwithstanding, is offered for our blessing.

There is bread for the journey. There is an abiding welcome and an invitation that will never ever be withdrawn. There is food to spare and the welcome is real.

The mystery of faith, we're told, is that only when the bread is broken can it be shared. There's something about the breaking. Leonard Cohen says "there is a crack in everything; that's how the Light gets in" - there's something about the breaking; a hint, a promise....a tiny glimmer....a mystery.

Welcome to the table of mystery – let yourself simply be in this moment. Offer yourself to its blessing as the blessing offers itself to you.

Come – all is ready.