

Sermon for Year B Creation 1
Proper 22
October 8, 2006
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock, NC
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It's All About Communion

It's all about communion this morning.
I'm not just talking about the Holy Eucharist,
though certainly that IS communion,
But communion has been super-sized in so many ways this morning.

If you look up the word "communion" in the dictionary,
you will find a number of definitions
but the one I like the most is this:
An intimate relationship with deep understanding.

An intimate relationship with deep understanding.

I like that definition of communion—
though I think I might do a brief re-write
and change it to read:
An intimate relationship with deep mystery

Because it seems that the older I get,
the more I understand how little I really understand.
And that's okay.
I no longer feel compelled to understand everything.
I am comfortable-- and actually comforted
by deep mystery.

That is what I find at this Table (the altar).
An intimate relationship with the deep mystery of God.
Do I understand it all?
No.
Three years of seminary, thousands of books read, Bible study, prayer, worship...
The answer is still no.

But it's not about the understanding,
It's not about finding THE answer.
It's about being drawn closer and closer to God.
An intimate relationship with the deep mystery of God.
We long for that relationship.

Communion is what I find in my relationship with my husband.
Even after knowing one another for almost 40 years,
 there is so, so much
 we will never understand about one another.
But that does not make shallow the relationship we share,
 because we live in mutual respect of one another
 and in absolute awe of the mystery of love.
Go figure. You can't explain love.
Communion is an intimate relationship with deep mystery.

God tells us that in the story from Genesis this morning.
As humans we long to be in relationship.
Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh—
 it doesn't get much more intimate than that.
It is truly part of our DNA
 to want to be in communion with one another.

So what about that gospel reading this morning?
It's difficult to see how a question and answer confrontation
 between Jesus and the Pharisees—
 on the topic of divorce-- can be about communion
 but it is

Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

This question is, of course, a trap.

 If Jesus says he approves of divorce—

 Well, does he mean that it can be done on a whim,

 If something displeases the husband, it's fine for him to say,

 “That's it. It's over. You're out”

But If Jesus speaks against divorce,

 he's in trouble.

 Remember John the Baptizer spoke up against divorce

 and his head wound up on a platter.

Why?

 Because Herod married the ex-wife of his brother

Jesus asks the Pharisees to state the law.

 They say, divorce is legal according to the law.

But Jesus points out the problem of the law here—

 because the law only allows the man to divorce his wife.

 The wife has no say in it nor can she divorce her husband. Regardless.

Jesus understands that to be in an intimate relationship such as marriage,
BOTH husband and wife must be equally IN that relationship.
What God has joined together is two people in a relationship.
One person does not a relationship make.

God's purpose is relationship—from the beginning of creation.

Today is the first Sunday of our Creation Cycle.
We, along with a growing number of Episcopal churches
and churches of other denominations,
set aside these eight weeks prior to Advent
to focus on our relationship as Christians with the created world.
This is the season of the Church Year that offers us a chance to explore
Our intimate relationship with God's created world.

How does it make you feel when you see that giant maple
in the front yard of this parish?
When you see the mountains blazing with color?
When you stand outside under the stars on a clear night?
Or gaze out the window and see the harvest moon?

God's created world
teaches us to think with our hearts as well as our heads.
Creation is awesome.
Its mysteries are many and deeply beautiful.
How is God calling us to act as stewards of this intimate relationship?

We celebrate this morning with a Celtic Eucharist (Eucharistic Prayer C at the 8 AM)
Why?
The obvious reason is that one of the strongest tenets of Celtic Christianity,
is a deep love and respect for creation.
(And in Eucharistic Prayer C there are wonderful images of our created world,
as well as a call to us to care for "this fragile earth our island home.")

The Celtic Eucharist is based on 6th & 7th century texts like the Stowe missal
which also brings us into intimate relationship
with our liturgical heritage.
The words are different—
but so much is the same.
We come into union with our history as a church, as Christians,
as people of God who come together to worship.

But there is another reason.
(Remember, it's all about communion today!)

The Celtic Church believed that when we share in the bread and the wine,
we come into union with Christ and with one another.

It is the breaking and the sharing that brings about this union.
We cannot be in relationship by ourselves.
We need the community to share communion.

We all share in the one bread. We all drink of the one cup.

And above all, Celtic theology
never fails to remind us:
this meal is a mystery.¹

The reading from Patrick tells us that God is not “up there.”
In true Celtic fashion,
Patrick tells us
God is above and in and under
God inspires all,
gives life to all,
God is all.
God is in communion with us.
And that is different than us being in communion with God.
God longs for us as well.

Someone shared a story with me this week
about a young child coming to the communion rail
with her mother.

At the announcements during the service,
The mother slipped out and went to the church nursery to get her little daughter.
As they came up the steps to the altar rail,
the little girl was still holding her snack from the nursery--
a somewhat soggy, half eaten cracker.

The priest came and placed a piece of the communion bread
in the little girl’s empty hand,
and said, “The Body of Christ.”

¹ Thomas O’Loughlin, Celtic Theology, page 145.

The little girl looked at the piece of bread.
She looked at the priest.
And then she immediately held out her other hand,
the one to with the half eaten saltine cracker,
and she offered it to the priest, saying,
“The Body of Christ.”

The priest was stunned at first.
Then he took her saltine cracker, took a bite and said,
“Amen.”

That is communion.
An intimate relationship with deep mystery.
A mystery so deep and so beautiful that perhaps only a child can really understand it.

Our God is the God of all.
The God of heaven and earth.
The God of the sun and the moon and all the stars.

The God of the maple tree and the mountains.
The God of creatures
that wiggle and wag and wait for their blessing.
The God of shared soggy saltine crackers.
Our God is the God of all.

It's all about communion.