

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church & Neighborhood House
351 E. 74th Street, New York, NY 10021-3701
(212) 288-6743; (c) 914-217-4173; ray@janhus.org; www.janhus.org

World Communion Sunday – Yes, You Are
(c)2012 Raymond J. Bagnuolo

World Communion Sunday.

Hold on, because the 7 billion people of the world are on their way here. It may get very crowded, very soon. They will be coming from 196 independent countries, as of last count, they will be speaking over 6500 different languages, and Mandarin Chinese will be among the most common, with more than 1.2 billion people speaking that language. English and Spanish are a close second and third, with about 383 million each.

In a day's travel to get here, for every hour they travel, there will be 16,920 babies born and 8,500 folks going to their final rest. At the end of the day, there will be over 200,000 more of us – or almost 74 million more people on the planet at the end of a year.

Statistically speaking, after all no one actually counts all these births and deaths, keeping track. It's all arithmetic.

By comparison, in the First Century, it is estimated that there were about 200,000,000 people worldwide, with over 1 million living in Rome. Maybe, thirty thousand in Jerusalem, but no one really knows. It was a busy place.

Jesus would not have known how many people were in the world, perhaps even in the Roman Empire, although he and his family did participate in the census, according to the gospels, it is likely that they did not publish the results of their Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

Suffice it to say that Jesus and we face the same challenge: living in worlds where there are more people than we will ever know; more people than we can ever count. Added to that, you know that each person, whether you know them or not – is of equal value. Each is a child of God. No exception.

And, in Jesus' world and ours, we both do the same thing. We invite them all to the table. At least that is what we say, and what I believe we mean. But do we really **know** what that means?

Let's go to this morning's readings for a minute, because I don't want to skip them. Even though one of them might seem a bit problematic in terms of our understandings of welcoming/hospitality for all – and the idea of marriage, divorce, and gender.

Did Jesus read Psalm 26 and subscribe to it without exception? Verses in the Psalm read as follows:

“For your steadfast love is before my eyes (God), and I walk in faithfulness to you

I would say Jesus and all of us would agree with and/or strive to see and walk in such a way. However the psalmist then says that as part of the “proof” of his or her faithfulness:

"I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I hate the company of evildoers; and will not sit with the wicked."

Well, maybe Jesus agreed with this at one point, early on in his upbringing, but it seemed to change greatly in his adult ministry. In fact, he was often criticized for sitting with, eating with, speaking with and even healing folks who might fall into this category.

So, it seems that Jesus probably didn't agree with all the teachings of the psalms, many of which were already a thousand years old by the time he was born. Times had changed. Things were different.

And there also seems to be a "sense" and "leaning" in Jesus' ministry in which he moved freely within groups, ate and drank with those marginalized and oppressed – and appeared to have a good time when with them – there seems to have been a "sense" that the only reason people needed these stringent, strident, and rigid rules wasn't because they were loose, or evil, or hypocrites – yes, many were – but he might just have referred to those and other behaviors or "ways of being" as symptoms of their hard-heartedness. It was their unwillingness to love one another and treat others as they wished to be treated that made it necessary to establish laws.

After all, there were literally millions of people in the world – how would you ever get them to behave and act according to love; so, you better get these rules and laws on the books and make sure they are enforced.

And, if you have someone proposing such things, well – you challenge him. And, in today's readings of Mark, the Pharisees challenge Jesus on the law, tested him – as they always were with the thorny questions of his time. In this case, divorce. And when pushed to answer about whether it was right to divorce or not, he finally said, "No." Moses, he said gave you the right to dismiss a wife because of your hardness of heart." Hatred? Did Moses give the men the right of dismissal of the wife for fear that if he didn't the wife might be killed (as Moses had once killed a man in anger)?

It's hard to say. During the time of Moses, it was permissible to have many wives, so why the need of divorce – except to cut off lines of succession and property? Was this the hardness of heart Jesus spoke of?

And Jesus, tired of their games, maybe – simply says, "No. It's wrong. Adultery, in fact." Now, go and deal with that! He makes the argument that from the beginning of time, God made man and woman to be together and no one should mess with what God has joined together.

It is very difficult to know exactly what these words mean some 2,000 years later. But times have changed, as they did from the psalmist to Jesus and now Jesus to us. I doubt there is a person here that believes someone should remain in a marriage that produces abuse or was a mistake from the start. I doubt that many hear would argue with the agreement that God's love brings loving couples together, and no one should mess with that, whether same or different in gender.

But people do argue and test us, as they argued with and tested Jesus. Sometimes, the numbers of people arguing and pushing back are so great, well, that we wonder if we got something wrong. And then the frustration can set in,

“How will I ever reach these people? Look at them all. God, how do I help them to know you and your love and the promise and eternal life of fulfillment that you hold?”

There is evidence in the gospels that Jesus said things much like that; having spoken with many of you, I have heard similarities and variations of the same theme, and I have known these questions myself in my own ministry.

I spoke a little about this a couple of weeks ago, when I talked about my visit to the Apple store and all the people in that mecca of marketing, wondering what was a minister to do in such a place, besides indulge in his techy side?!

Is it a wonder that with such winds of contention and questions that a smart teacher – a rabbi like Jesus wouldn’t keep it simple? And wouldn’t repeat the message over and over, so that it could be repeated over and over?

“Jesus, what is the most important commandment?”

To love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. And the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

“Jesus, how often should we do these things.”

Always. When you break bread and drink from the cup, every time you sit down with a meal, whether with those who know you or those who are strangers, do this, be with all God’s children and remember me and remember my teachings. And remember what is most important of all.

To love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. And the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

So simple. A simple commandment for complicated people.

As we approach this table and these many breads that reflect “bread” as many loves reflect “love” –

As we come together in a world of more people than we will ever know, sisters and brothers we will never call by name –

As we share this bread and cup with each other, enter into the energy in this space that indeed joins us with all creation, all the angels and saints, all who have gone before, are here, and are yet to come –

And let us love one another, as Jesus loved. And let us bring that love wherever we go, on table, one meal, one conversation at a time.

We are World Communion – it is not an action but a collaborative way of being, reflecting what it is that already binds us.

Always live in remembrance of Jesus and his teachings;

always love and be ready to grow in love’s ways;

and let us invite God, Jesus and Spirit; this invincible Spring where Life is eternally new to dwell with us, this morning, this very morning, in this crust and cup with all the world here, now, in our midst.

For you, my sisters and brothers, are already World Communion. You just need to say so.