

– **Our November theme for 2019** –
Communion: the practice of simplicity

‘This is our great covenant: To dwell together in peace’
~James Vila Blake, 1894

The living tradition we share draws from many sources. We defer to our own direct experience; we heed humanism’s guidance of reason; and we wade into the world’s religious texts. Jewish and Christian teachings, for example, call us to respond to God’s love—whether we believe in God or not—by loving our neighbors as ourselves. So, too, in Islam: ‘None of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.’¹ Love is the spirit of this church, indeed, and we covenant to dwell together in peace, a phrase evoking fellowship, communion.

Holy Communion, or the Eucharist, the Christian ceremony commemorating the Last Supper, might be familiar to some of us and less familiar others. Either way, we may wonder how a Passover meal in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago is relevant to our lives right now in MetroWest Boston. The word ‘Eucharist’ is derived from the Greek *eukharistos*, or, in our Modern English, ‘grateful.’ The Greek *eucharistia*, used to refer to the Lord’s Supper itself, means ‘thanksgiving,’ which may provide enough of a link to suit a range of personal theologies.¹¹

In the run-up to Thanksgiving, Americans are pretty good at doing gratitude. We put communion over consumerism. Our focus turns toward the one holiday that doesn’t require us to go out and buy a bunch of stuff, except for what feeds us. We simplify, stripping away the clutter in our lives, which allows us to appreciate what’s truly sacred. Thanksgiving Day calls us to eat, drink, and appreciate what we already have: We practice simplicity, and we make America grateful again.

The bread and wine we share at the table is sacred, as is the stillness we share in a blissfully extended moment of silence in the sanctuary together. Still, we needn’t be in the same place or even in the same time to experience the benefits of communion. It can transcend these dimensions. To read *Don Quixote* is to be in communion with Cervantes and his 17th-century Spain; to meditate on the memory of loved ones is to be in communion with them and with the great mystery that lies ahead for us all; and to see our youth coming of age is to commune with a world we hope to bequeath to future generations into perpetuity.

When we simplify our lives here and now, pare back the unnecessary, and power down the distractions that make us numb to life, we have more room for what’s enduring and important: nourishment, gratitude, and connection—communion.

Questions to contemplate:

1. In what areas of your life do you overcomplicate things?
2. How would your life be different if you were to simplify one of those areas or one of those things?
3. What's the difference between simple and easy?
4. Where, when, and how do you experience communion—and what's it like for you?
5. What's the difference between solitude and isolation?
6. How do you seek communion with people, places, or things across time and space?

Quotations to consider:

‘Simply to be, and to let things be as they speak wordlessly from the mystery of what they are. / Simply to say a silent yes to the hillside flowers, to the trees we walk under. / To pass from one person to another a morsel of bread, an answering yes, this is the simplest, the quietest of sacraments.’ ~ Jacob Trapp (725 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

‘For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.’ ~ 1 Corinthians, 10:17

‘Live theater is a kind of communion.’ ~ Anita Diamant

‘Nothing can fill the gap when we are away from those we love, and it would be wrong to try to find anything. We must simply hold out and win through. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a consolation, since leaving the gap unfilled preserves the bonds between us. It's no good to say that God fills the gap. He does not fill it, but keeps it empty so that our communion with one another may be kept alive, even at the cost of agony.’ ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

‘Simplicity helps to satisfy the hunger of our souls. It strips away only what impedes love. Those who walk in simplicity and communion find the path to peace and become lanterns for others seeking the way.’ ~ Keith Fournier

ⁱ Prophet Muhammad, Bukhari's *Book on Faith*, circa 846 A.D.

ⁱⁱ Colin Buchanan's *Historical Dictionary of Anglicanism*, 2006 A.D.