

Congregational Church of the Messiah

Worldwide Communion Sunday

October 5, 2008

Something More

Responding to God's Love

Luke 7:31-50

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In today's scripture, we hear Jesus likening people of His generation to children who were lazy in their faith. They liked to sit on the sidelines and not get involved in life.

“To what shall I compare this generation, and what are they like? They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another saying, ‘Let’s play together.’ and no one responds. We played the flute for you, and you did not dance, we sang a dirge and you did not cry.” (Luke 7:31-32)

Jesus used a second illustration of how that generation of people chose to respond by making fun of the person God sent to them. Jesus said, “John the Baptist came eating no bread and drinking no wine; he lived in the desert, lived off berries and wore goatskins and you said, ‘He has a demon!’” (from Luke 7:33) Then when the Son of Man comes eating and drinking like an ordinary person you said, “Look at this, a gluttonous man. He’s really a drunkard and besides that he is a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!”

(Luke 7:34)

In spite of these pointed references to the lack of faith and conscience by the people who had judged John the Baptist harshly and who were just as quick to criticize Jesus, the scripture records that one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to dine with him

Do you suppose he was going to try to get Jesus drunk and prove that Jesus had no message from God? On the other hand, maybe he was just trying to make his conscience feel better by showing that at least he for one had nothing against this man. Maybe the Pharisee was sincere. Listening to Jesus’ teachings in the public square, he could not fathom nor accept the authority with which Jesus spoke. Perhaps the Pharisee could see how accurately Jesus had summed up the actions of that generation and wanted to learn more. Therefore, the Pharisee took the initiative. He responded and risked the ridicule of his fellow religious club members by inviting Jesus to his home for a meal.

When the Pharisee invited Jesus to his home for dinner, he chose not to do the usual things to greet and welcome his guests—to wash their feet, give a kiss of greeting, to anoint the head with oil.

When the woman of the city came and anointed Jesus’ feet with oil, shed her tears upon them and dried them with her hair, the righteous host was indignant and jumped to the

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conclusion that Jesus could not be a prophet because he allowed this unclean woman to touch his feet.

Jesus uses the situation to teach a fundamental lesson in God's forgiveness and acceptance. When we owe much and another owes little, and both debts are canceled, therefore, we assume that the one owing more would be more grateful.

Jesus likens how much we owe God to the unclean woman who sinned and was forgiven much by God, and she expressed her gratitude by being generous to Jesus.

In contrast, the Pharisee whose opinion of himself as being so righteous kept him from being generous to Jesus and did not recognize the spirit of God in Jesus. As a result, the Pharisee did not give even the usual courtesies to Jesus and the dinner guests when they arrived at his home. He did not value Jesus, as did the sinner who anointed His feet.

The scripture from Luke demonstrates how unresponsive people can be when God calls them. Within the scripture, there are three scenarios: adults acting like children, sarcastic adults saying John the Baptist had a demon, and the righteous Pharisee. None of them responded when they had the chance to act as God's people.

Generations have come and gone since Jesus told these simple stories, and yet their message still rings true today. Do we respond when opportunities to act as God's people come to us?

It is so easy to ignore opportunities and be like people who sit on the sidelines and criticize others who are trying to get good things done. We can let the world go by without seeking to use our energy or our money to add beauty, health, and renewal to this church and/or to a hurting world.

In addition, there are righteous souls that believe they already have all the personal faith they need and do not expect God to ever do something new and amazing to help this hurting world become a better place in which to live.

There is *something more* to life than we already have lived. The Spirit of God leads us into the future day by day. Wherever we are sitting, whatever we are thinking, there is *something more* that God is calling you and calling me to do that His kingdom might come on earth through us in some new way.

How we respond may be the key to our own future closeness to Jesus. If Jesus were to knock and be standing on your doorstep tonight, are you ready to open the door wide and invite Him in? Whenever we are ready, Jesus responds immediately to every sincere invitation. No house or heart is empty that invites Jesus to come in.

We know He does not come to criticize us, but to guide us, to instruct us, to encourage

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and yes to accept us as we are. Then He loves us enough not to leave us as we are but strengthens us where we are weak or indecisive and encourages us to grow closer to Him.

The saying in Proverbs is true, “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is...” (Proverbs 23:7)

Today do not think that you return to your home alone. The Spirit of Christ goes with you in two ways.

First and most fully in spirit because in our essence we are not the clothes we wear or the reputation we have. God already knows the person we are in our hearts and whether or not we want to put Him first in our lives. We are spiritual beings as well as physical ones. Putting our beliefs into action shows the world what we believe spiritually. God sees our actions too and knows how our actions help to bring His love to the situations and people we work with every day.

Second, God will be with us when we take Holy Communion. Jesus knew we are spiritual beings as well as physical ones. He was aware that we have a strong tendency to believe what we can see and touch more than we are willing to trust God’s spiritual Presence, which we can sometimes feel but rarely see.

Around the world in Christian churches this Worldwide Communion Sunday, there are tables of all shapes and sizes. There are different traditions in cultures and countries far removed from this place. But there will be a oneness in the Spirit of Christ Present wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name and Spirit remembering that Last Supper with His disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem before he was betrayed and killed on the cross for us.

The bread is a symbol of Christ’s body, which is broken for you and for me. The cup is a symbol of Christ’s blood, which was shed for you and me. When we put forth our hand to take the bread or the cup, and we eat and drink, we are asking Christ’s Spirit to come anew into our own physical bodies as well as to quicken our spirits. Jesus told his disciples to do this “in remembrance of Me.” There is no magic in the bread or juice itself. However, there is an incredible strength in the Spirit of God that can become especially real in our lives when we open our spirit to Christ’s Spirit as we partake of the elements.

Through the centuries, devoted men and women have been killed for holding to the sacredness of the reenactment of this Last Supper.

Holy Communion is symbolic of The Supper to which all individuals who sincerely love the Lord and seek to follow Him are invited.

As Christians in the Congregational Way, we have no earthly authority over us. We are each responsible directly to God for our spiritual commitment to Christ. God wants us to

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help transform the world by following Christ's example, putting our beliefs into actions, and inviting others to respond to God's great love.

You are invited to participate in remembrance of the Lord's Last Supper as He prepared His earthly disciples to make the transition from thinking of Jesus in His human form with them to His coming to be a spiritual presence within them.

Even beyond this morning's Worship Service here at Messiah, wherever you are having a meal, it can be a remembrance of that Last Supper that Jesus shared with His disciples.

Let us be reminded of the Presence of the Spirit of God calling us to experience *something more* in our lives even now. His Spirit and our spirit can meet, and His amazing love and wisdom can flow through us into actions in the world in which we live. The awareness of God's Spirit within you can come to you through the sacredness of this time. God is always with us. Let us enter into awareness of His Presence within us.

Come Holy Spirit.

Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us.

(from the hymn, "Spirit of the Living God")¹

Amen.

¹ *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship*, #393. Fifth Printing, 1990. Nashville, TN.