

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – October 4, 2020 – Worldwide
Ephesians 4:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

We begin our lives as children - needy, vulnerable, and dependent. It is then that we craft a vision of the ideal adult role model. We imagine one who is mature, responsible, capable, and wise. And with these virtues in mind, we strive to embody the characteristics that we hope will serve us well for the rest of our days.

I recognize how exceedingly fortunate I am to have lived in a home where these qualities were modeled for me. And I am also fortunate that, beyond my family of origin, others shaped my thinking in both formal and informal ways. There were educators, counselors, and coaches. Medical professionals and first responders. Government officials and spiritual guides - even my friend's parents. And I learned something from each of them about what it means to live well.

Living well, it seems, is about playing the long game. It is about leaning into one's past and embracing the future. Living well is an acknowledgement that many of those characteristics we received at birth will never actually fade away. Rather, we are all, at times, no matter what our age, needy, and vulnerable, and dependent. For this is what it means to be human.

As we struggle and grow in pursuit of personal autonomy, we also come to the realization that we are just one piece of a much larger puzzle. Thus, while we marvel at the innovations, the scientific advancements, and the technological accomplishments that serve as the hallmarks of human progress, we also acknowledge that none of these is accomplished by any one agent. Rather, new developments are the product of many people working cooperatively across generations, and across cultures, and even across time itself. For better or for worse, we inhabit this world together. And, daily, we have the ability to either build one another up, or to tear each other down.

We are presently living in the midst of one of history's most significant challenges. The current pandemic has had an astonishing impact on the health, and economic fortunes, and mobility, and freedom of billions of people. And in a moment such as this, it has become incredibly clear that we are not islands unto ourselves. Rather, the global nature of our commerce and the frequency of our travel assure us that when COVID-19 assaults citizens in other lands, threats to the well-being of citizens across the world will not be so easily contained.

Currently, we are scrambling to secure our safety. We are huddling closer to those of like convictions. And we are plotting a vision of a new and different future.

Understandably, many of us have withdrawn from our neighbors in this time of widespread anxiety, anger, resentment, and blame. While doing so has proven beneficial from the standpoint of public health, as Christians, and as citizens of an increasingly global society, we are now confronted with the challenge of remaining connected amid a season of ever-heightened suspicion. And with this in mind, I ask you, friends and fellow children of God, what it means to live well on this World Communion Sunday in the shadows of a global pandemic.

You will recall that the very first Communion was also celebrated in the shadows. It was Holy Week. Jesus was making preparations for his arrest and public execution when he gathered his disciples in the Upper Room and gave them instructions for what it means to live well, even in the midst of tragedy. He took the bread and the cup, physical symbols of eternal life and promised salvation, and he gave thanks to God for the goodness of these gifts. Then, as they shared in that meal together, they became one in spirit.

Recently, I had a conversation with a member of our congregation whose family of origin was part of a different denomination of our faith. She told me that when she was a child, each time that her congregation celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Communion, they called it the Last Supper. And on each of those occasions, it

was a reenactment of the events that took place in the Upper Room, complete with foot washing and a full meal.

Another of our members recently told me about how he used to travel on behalf of his company. Each place that he visited, he attempted to participate in worship. He was a Presbyterian from an urban environment, accustomed to receiving the sacrament surrounded by worshipers in business dress. But, in rural Nebraska, surrounded by corn fields, he recalled a particularly meaningful Communion worship service alongside farmers dressed in overalls.

While I was unable to make the trip this year, my family typically gathers annually for vacation on Edisto Island, SC. And there, I have often attended worship at the Presbyterian Church. The church, founded in the 1600s, administers the sacrament with participants seated at tables in small groups at the foot of the pulpit. It's what they've been doing for centuries.

In our second lesson this morning, Paul writes, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it with Christ." And so we come to the table. Sharing it with those who wash feet in preparation for this meal. With those who gather on wooden benches

and sit at actual tables in historic settings. And with those who receive symbols of God's grace in their overalls because they know that it is the matters of the heart, rather than one's attire, that are of greatest consequence to God.

Friends, we gather this day under unusual circumstances. Separated physically by a virus, but united in heart and in purpose as the people of God. And wherever we are as we take part in this service, we are grateful to be called the one body of Christ. May it be so, and all thanks be to God. Amen.