Isaiah 56:1,6-8
Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my
deliverance be revealed. And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to
love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant— these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples. Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those
already gathered.

World Communion Sunday began in 1936 as a way to celebrate our ecumenical oneness in
Christ and to bring Christians together in a spirit of unity and peace.

A spirit of unity and peace. Ah...surely needed now more than ever, 84 years into this annual
commemoration.

World Communion Sunday also calls the church to reach out to all people and celebrate
diversity among God's children. On this World Communion Sunday, we pause to be mindful of
the fact that each Sunday as we worship, we join with some 12 million United Methodists all
around this globe in worshiping God. We worship with some 2 billion Christians world wide—in
Europe, North America, Africa, Latin America and Asia.

So, how do we lean into both unity AND diversity in ways that are deeply faithful, counter-
cultural, contributing to the health and wholeness of this rich and beautiful world?

Recently, Pico Iyer, the British essayist, novelist, world traveler, wrote an Op Ed piece in the LA
Times subtitled: “…the world is more than the issues that divide us.” The central problem of our
times, he observed, is the fact that we’re all united mostly by our divisiveness. We won’t find
answers to this in the political sphere, he posits, because by its very nature, the political sphere
thrives on either/or, binary categories of right/wrong, us/them. It is in the religious sphere
where we find a more inclusive vision.

Iyer was travelling once with the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists. Decades
of conflict mark the relationship between the dominant China which claims sovereignty over Tibet.
Still, the Dalai Lama maintains that to be pro-Tibetan is not to be anti-Chinese. And so he prays
daily for the health of his Chinese brothers and sisters, knowing that they will always be
neighbors and that the welfare of either depends on the other.

It’s the same religious mindset we see in Pope Francis who regularly teaches to avoid thinking in
simplistic us-them categories. “Would God,” the Pope asks, “love Gandhi any less than a priest
or a nun simply because the Mahatma was not a Christian?”
This religious framework of unity in diversity, diversity in unity flows over us like a stream of refreshing water, doesn’t it, in this season in which our souls are parched and worn down by sloganeering and cantankerous discourse?

Unity in diversity. Diversity in unity. This is the foundation of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision of the world house in which we all live. And it is at the heart of the teaching of the prophet Isaiah, which we heard Larry read for us this morning. All will come and join together, and God’s house will be a house of prayer for all peoples.

I heard this vision affirmed and grounded in a beautiful sermon this past week. The daughter of a colleague of mine is a rabbi. Her proud mother sent me a link to the sermon. Rabbi Jordi reminded us of a story from the Midrash which teaches that God formed the first human out of dust from all over the world: yellow clay, white sand, black loam, red soil. We are many, and we are one. All belong. None are outcast. None worth any more or any less than any other.

In a political season, we are called, as citizens, to reason and think, to speak our mind and vote our conscience. Our very democracy requires this, of all of us.

At the same time, people of faith live in another house, a bigger house, a world house that is the beloved community. To this vision we must also be faithful and true. We affirm truths that go deeper than the present moment, that endure forever. We maintain an affinity for all the children of God and an allegiance to their well-being, to the basic humanness that we share in common, created by God and precious in God’s sight.

May this World Communion Sunday call us home—to the table of Christ that is open to all and to God’s house that is a house of prayer for all peoples. May this World Communion open our hearts and minds to a big beautiful vision of what this world can be.

Notes:
