

"Let It Rise"
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Central Christian Church, Waco, Texas
Sunday, October 7, 2007
World Communion Sunday

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 1.1-14

I first want to set the record straight....many people in this congregation have been stating that this is my first time to preach here at Central. Well, you're wrong...I believe it was May 1993. I preached a powerful sermon as a Senior in High School on Youth Sunday involving illustrations of my childhood experience striking out (repeatedly, I confess) in T-ball. Don't you all remember those theologically provocative insights delivered from this pulpit on that day? It's okay...neither do I.

Maybe, today, though,....we can explore scripture together, hear the message of God's Good News and walk away with a theological nugget...or should I say breadcrumb on this World Communion Sunday...that will stay with us at least for this week, if not, I pray, longer.

Join me in prayer, please...

Loving, Creating, Ever-present God, help us to know you are here in this place. We don't ask you to be with Us, because we know you are here first. Instead, we pray that we are open to the movement of your Holy Spirit in our lives, our church and our world. Amen.

World Communion Sunday. OK...is this just a Sunday that we serve communion a little bit differently? What really is it?

World Communion Sunday (originally called World Wide Communion Sunday) originated in the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 1936, for the first time, the first Sunday in October was celebrated in Presbyterian churches in the United States and overseas. From the beginning, it was planned so that other denominations could make use of it and, after a few years, the idea spread beyond the Presbyterian Church.

The Department of Evangelism of the Federal Council of Churches (a predecessor body of the National Council of Churches) was first associated with World Wide Communion Sunday in 1940 when the department's executive secretary, Jesse Bader, led in its extension to a number of churches throughout the world. Today, efforts to promote World

Communion Sunday are carried out by participating denominations, and several produce materials geared toward this observance. (www.nccusa.org)

Today is a day for congregations to have an opportunity to experience the Table as if sitting at the Table of the World. On this day, Christians in every culture, every corner of the world, can share a "meal" together. We are part of something bigger than just this table in this Sanctuary in the middle of Waco, Texas. People all over the world are taking communion in cathedrals, sanctuaries, mud huts, outside in open fields, meetinghouses, storefronts, small country churches and big mega-churches. The family of God is sitting at the table together. (www.globalmissions.org)

Communion is always a central part of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations. We participate in this sacrament weekly and even the location of the communion table shows anyone that it is central, important, and the focus of our worship. It's a lot like when visitors come over to your house...everyone crowds around the kitchen table, island, or other family table.

But is it all for show?...this "World Communion Sunday 'stuff'?" Do we walk away from the table feeling good about being part of the global community, or do we walk away with a deep, profound, urgent desire to truly do something about bringing our world community together every day? To be part of something bigger, something amazing, something that is destined to fail without the help of God?

As I was preparing a message for this particular day, I spent a lot of time thinking about growing up in the house of a bread-baker. Yes, most of you know my dad, Gerret Conover, as the candy man from his career with M&M Mars, but some of you might not know that my dad is a bread baker. Oh wait, let me correct that, my dad is an "award winning" bread baker...thanks to the Heart of Texas Fair! Growing up, I remember many weekends spent sitting at the kitchen counter "helping" my dad bake bread. A typical Sunday afternoon would consist of my sister Kerrie and I at the counter, covered in flour, Dad with the rolling pin, spouting of the same old bread puns (don't worry, I won't use them today, but I'm sure he'll tell them to you after worship) and my mom, sitting close by cheering on Tony Dorsett with the Dallas Cowboys.

Dad would always let Kerrie and I add the ingredients after he measured them out for us. I was always secretly intrigued by the yeast. As we would start the process, Dad would get a bowl of warm water and I would add the yeast, stirring it just a little and watching it "bubble." We'd set it aside for a little while as we prepared the rest of the batter. After adding the yeast, it was time to knead. Dad would break off a small portion of the dough for us to knead with

our toy rolling pins and we would then be allowed to carefully add our portion back to the middle of his larger ball of dough to let it rise. This was my favorite part. After letting the bread dough rise, Kerrie and I would race to be the first to get to "punch down" the dough. The fresh aroma of homemade bread would soon fill the house as the bread baked.

Amuse me for a little while as I explain that while Forest Gump believes that "life is like a box of chocolates," and some of our church family who helped yesterday might say that life is like a truckload of pumpkins, today I propose that church is like a loaf of bread. Let's think about this. Some common ingredients for bread are flour, salt, eggs, sugar, milk, and yeast. Occasionally, a bread recipe will call for something more interesting like nuts, whole wheat flour, honey, rye, oats, or raisins. The end result, after the baker has carefully added each ingredient, is a warm, delicious loaf of bread. Churches are the same. There are some basic ingredients to a typical church...are you with me? Let's focus just on our congregation, Central Christian Church in Waco, Texas. Think about our ingredients. What kind of bread do we offer the world? Are we currently baking something, or are we scattered ingredients waiting to be combined? What new, unique ingredients will we add to our dough that will make us like no other church anywhere? Go ahead....dare to dream, dare to allow the Holy Spirit to stir within you this day to add ingredients to the dough.

Yet, no matter what the other ingredients might be, the most important ingredient when baking bread is the yeast. Now, as I said before...the yeast sits in the lukewarm water for a little while first. Sure, it's doing something in that little cup of water, but it's separated from the rest of the dough. There are some bubbles in it, there's some fragrance coming from it, but it's just yeast in water at this point. Only when it is added to the dough does the dough then become bread and the yeast can do it's work to "let it rise."

Where are we right now, church in our process of developing from just ingredients to a fresh loaf of bread? Let's go back to today's scripture and see. Let's start back with verse five, but this time, I want you to imagine Paul is speaking to Central Christian Church, not just Timothy:

⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. Central Christian Church has been a congregation worshipping together, sharing life together and impacting the Waco community and the world since the 1800's. Just as Paul referred to Timothy's family heritage, we, too, have a beautiful Faith Heritage and Family.

⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands Paul is obviously unable to be with

Timothy at this time. He knows that as a young minister, Timothy needs encouragement, reassurance, and hope to continue the work of Christ.

⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. If that doesn't give us permission to say, Alleluia, let's change the world...let's share God's love and grace together as church, let's find people who don't feel connected in this community, and simply love them. God has equipped us, not with a spirit of Cowardice, my friends...but the scripture sayd, with a spirit of power and of love.

⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

Whew...this is good stuff, right? When we say yes to Christ, the Holy Spirit jumps into our lives and often we just sit in the lukewarm water....off to the side. God has called us not casually with a cell phone, a text message, or a land line. God has called us with a Holy calling...a call to love radically. Let's jump to verse 13

¹³Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. We have been given a charge, we've been given full confidence that we can do it. There is no room for apathy, for negativism, for doubt, for fear of failure. You see, we can't fail, because of our reliance of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Go back to verse 6 again with me. "For this reason I remind you to REKINDLE the gift of God that is within you." Let me rephrase that....For this reason, I remind you, Central, that you are an amazing congregation filled with amazing people. We've done amazing things in the past, we're experiencing great things in the present, it's time that we each add ourselves fully to the rest of the dough so that we can truly help this congregation RISE and become bread for the community and this world.

You see, the yeast's job is to enable to bread to rise. Why do we let bread rise? You let bread rise to develop its flavor. So, if we are the yeast, and the ministries of this congregation are the ingredients, we MUST be added to the dough for this church to become...well....simply to become.

Let me put this more concretely. We've got so many wonderful things going on in this congregation. Ministries that are well established like our

Outreach efforts, Fellowship Dinners, our Chancel Choir and many more....and then there are new ministries...I heard that there are just a *few* new things in the works in the Christian Education Department these days and still, there are other things we haven't even thought of yet.

But none of these ministries can be anything for our congregation, our community, or our world without the yeast....I mean, without YOU. Each one of us must discern how God is calling us to be an active part of this congregation, just as the yeast is an active part of the bread dough. Each one of us must pray diligently today and each day for God's Holy Spirit to move within us, guiding us to help "let it rise"...to help its flavors develop so that others around the community will smell the aroma of love, of pure joy, of acceptance, of creativity, of God's love and grace and they will say, wow....I want that bread....out of all of the bread that's on the shelf, I want that one. I want a church that is alive with joy. They'll say, I want a church that is loving all people. I want that church....that church that is opening its doors to new things. That church that has got so many volunteers that they never have to make another phone call asking for volunteers again. That church that opens its arms, its resources, its life without hesitation....and then those people will become yeast and will add themselves to our bread dough, and they will help our church to "rise" even more because of the power of God's love and grace.

Let's not be like any other church. Let's pray about how to be different...how to create a bread that no one has ever tasted. A bread that people will ask, "How did you bake that?" And we'll say, "we added ourselves boldly and fully to the dough because we knew that with God's help, we could "let it rise." We will say, "We wanted to be part of something so big that it's destined to fail without God." [cue music/slides of John Waller's song: SOMETHING BIG]