

## **"Come to the Table"**

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Central Christian Church, Waco, Texas

Sunday, October 5, 2008

World Communion Sunday

SCRIPTURE: Luke 14: 12-23

Today is World Communion Sunday. Most of us have experienced this celebration of our oneness with all of those around the world who gather around the communion table. However, this year, we have a unique opportunity to acknowledge an additional layer of meaning and symbolism around the table. Today, in other Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations, Reconciliation offerings are being collected, just as we have done this morning in this congregation. I'd like to read a part of letter from the Disciples of Christ Minister of Reconciliation, April Johnson.

[taken from [www.disciples.org](http://www.disciples.org)] **Dear God's Beloved in Christ,**

This **Sunday, September 28th** and on the following **Sunday, October 5th**, we Disciples celebrate the **2008 Special Offering for Reconciliation Ministry**. On these two Sundays we offer our monetary gifts to further the mission of our Church and to live into our self understanding to be a Pro-Reconciling and Anti-racist Church. I am reminded as we approach this significant annual offering of our statement of identity:

**"We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us."** This is who we say we are. This statement describes both our current self understanding and our future hope. We are what we are becoming. As Christians, we live as if what is to come already is. We are people of the table and it is at the Lord's Table each week that we become one, united as one body of believers – the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Through the model and witness of Jesus Christ and his disciples, we are compelled to stand with and for the full inclusion of every member of the human family to be welcomed to God's bountiful table, "as God has welcomed us."

Because we are the Church together, we find ourselves advocating for justice and unity in the body of Christ celebrating our many gifts. It is for that reason that on Sunday October 5th we celebrate God's call to us to be reconciled one to another and all to Christ in conjunction with **World Communion Sunday**. At the 2007 General Assembly in Ft. Worth, Texas, Disciples voted to bring together these two related emphases of World Communion Sunday and Reconciliation Ministry offering to exemplify mutuality in our core commitment of Christian unity

and its expression in seeking justice in the church and the world, giving particular regard to the sin of racism. On that Sunday, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper in our churches throughout the United States and Canada, we stand in solidarity with Christ's beloved community throughout the world. As we drink the cup of salvation and eat the bread of life, we embrace God's welcome to all as many members, with many gifts at one table.

In Disciples' tradition, that table is limitless. Its boundaries extend outside the church walls and geographical boundaries. The funds from the Reconciliation Ministry Special Offering fund camps that introduce our young people to value the worth of all of God's human gifts. These young people work together to problem solve in camps or on urban missions. Our Regional expressions give grants to programs that address the symptoms of systemic exclusion such as projects that support academic improvement for students in under-funded and under-performing schools. Half of each dollar given during the offering remains in the Regions to fund local initiatives to address racial justice and to give witness to God's abiding love and grace.

Your generous gift to the 2008 Reconciliation Ministry Special Offering will further our witness to be the 21st Century church that God calls us to be, One Church, Many Members, One Body of Christ witnessing from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth!

*Will You Be the Gift of Reconciliation?*

Yours in Christ,  
Reverend April G. Johnson  
Minister of Reconciliation

I love the line in this letter where she states that "In Disciples' tradition, that table is limitless." Over the last few weeks, as I have prepared for this morning, I have reflected on my own experiences at "the table."

### **THE BREAKFAST TABLE**

I didn't realize that breakfast at the Conover home as I was growing up was anything but normal. It wasn't until I got to college that I learned my morning routine was not exactly what everyone else experienced. All throughout my elementary, middle school and high school years, my family sat down for breakfast at least 6 days a week (with Saturdays being our "day off".) While there were many evening and after school activities that might keep us from all gathering around the dinner table sometimes, the breakfast table was a good constant. My alarm would go off about 10 minutes before my sister, Kerrie's alarm, and I would stumble out of my bed, into the kitchen and climb up on my Dad's lap for what he thought was precious cuddle time....but I knew it was mostly for 5 more minutes of sleep. We didn't speak much at this time, a few

grunts of acknowledgement. Mostly we'd just enjoy the moment. Then Kerrie would stumble into the kitchen, nudge me off of Dad's lap and take her turn for 5 more minutes of sleep. Our breakfast was generally something simple, cereal or waffles, eggs or muffins. Pancakes would happen on Sundays most of the time. But the memory and meaning of the breakfast table in our house wasn't about the food. It was about the fact that the four of us, my mom, dad, sister and myself began our day together. Despite the fact that we would all come to and leave the table at different times, for part of the morning, we were all together before separating for the day. The breakfast table, to me, symbolizes a fresh start, a moment of pause, and a symbol of consistency.

### **THE BOARD GAME TABLE**

Another table from my childhood you can still find in my parents house. Our coffee table in the living room was an old cobbler's bench. Kind of an unusual looking table, but still, it was our table. This table had different purposes throughout the years, but one of my favorite times around this table was when we would play board games or card games. Whether it was just with my sister, with the entire family, with our "adopted relatives" Uncle Ed and Aunt Isabel playing kings in the corner, or with friends from school, we loved to play games, assemble puzzles and more around this table. Even now as I watch my daughter play around this table, I am reminded that this odd, ugly table, is a symbol of joy, fun, sharing and learning to work together.

### **THE HOLIDAY TABLE**

Probably the most significant table, though, is the holiday table. Growing up in Waco, I did not have any extended family living closer than 1500 miles away, so holidays and special events were not filled with relatives for me. But I didn't know any better because at holidays our house was always filled to the brim with people. Thanksgiving at the Conover house, to me, is the best example of what I am talking about. Now, most Texans have their Thanksgiving Dinner with family around noon or 2 p.m., but for me, growing up in a household with Yankee parents, we had our Thanksgiving meal at dinner time, around 6 p.m. The reason this is important is because as Kerrie and I got older and had friends who were able to drive, our Thanksgiving table got bigger. You see, friends like Austin Dickson and Beau Stewart, other members of the CCC youth group or our friends from school would often eat dinner early in the day with their family and then show up at our house as the turkey was being carved. But that's not all who made up the list of guests at our Thanksgiving table. I remember that one year we had a few youth group friends, the four in my family, 2 Baylor exchange students from China and one from Germany, and 2 co-op Workers from M&M Mars who were from Columbia. It was quite the international celebration---yet I didn't realize at the moment how far from the "norm" that was.

Also, during my freshman year at college, I called home a few days before Easter to see if it was okay with my parents if a few friends came home with me because they had no place to go for that holiday weekend. Most of them lived too far away to go home and were just planning on hanging around campus. My parents, of course, said that it would be no problem. Well, it ended up that we had 2 other girls and 7 guys come home with me that weekend spanning the spectrum from all walks of life. I told them all that I would be going to church here at Central on Easter morning, but it was up to them if they joined me or not. You see, in that group of 9, there was 1 Hindu, 2 Catholics, 2 Buddhists, 2 Baptists, 1 Lutheran, and a Jewish girl. I wanted them to know that I respected our differences in faith. Well, that Easter morning I woke up to all 9 of them choosing to come to worship with us! The lesson around the holiday table for me matches the closest to this day that Disciples of Christ churches are combining World Communion Sunday and Reconciliation Offering. The holiday table for me, is a symbol of oneness, of acceptance, of love.

### **OTHER TABLES**

What tables are you thinking about in your life? Our days are filled with different tables. Conference tables, children's school tables, snack supper tables, lunchroom tables, coffee tables, kitchen tables, they are everywhere. Just yesterday there were tables here at CCC filled with people eating lunch together after spending their Saturday morning unloading the beautiful pumpkin patch we have out in the front yard. This morning, children, youth and adults were around Sunday school tables...engaged in discussions about faith, life and living in today's world. Recently, I have been part of a group of women in the church who have started having dinner once a month. No program, no agenda, just a few women, sitting around a table, laughing, sharing a meal, and sharing life together. Earlier this morning we as a church family gathered around the Communion table: the ultimate symbol of grace and love given to us.

As we leave to go out into this world this morning, though, I want you to think about how you can make room at the tables in your life. How many of us leave this Sanctuary to go to lunch and never think about inviting a college student, widow, single woman or man, visiting family, or even your best friend to share a meal with you? You see, the table can be a lonely place for many people. Some people don't feel accepted at tables. Some people don't like sitting at tables alone. Some people have been hurt at tables and need help healing. Some people are discouraged by their experiences at tables. This, this is the message of the morning. This is the message of Jesus Christ. We must constantly be looking for ways for more people to feel comfortable, welcomed and invited to pull up a chair at our tables of life.

Will you do that? Will you do that this morning? Look around...who can you ask from our church family to join you around a table this week? Who from your workplace or community might need a table to share? What about out in our community where tables are often hard to find....who in the community or world can you share your tables with? It's the call of Christ. It's the gift of Love and it all begins with the table here at the center of our Sanctuary.

Amen.