

# St James United Church



## Message for October 5, 2025

World Communion Sunday (Last Sunday of Creation-time)

“A Mustard Seed of Faith” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Lamentations 1:1-6; Luke 17:5-10

“How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks.” This opening of “Lamentations” rings too true on this World Communion Sunday only a couple of days before October 7<sup>th</sup> when two years ago 1,200 Israeli civilians and foreign nationals were killed by Hamas fighters with an additional 251 taken hostage. Since then, Gaza’s been razed to the ground, more than 67,000 Palestinians killed. The reputed aim was freeing the hostages and defeating Hamas, but the result so far is millions of civilians suffering amid rubble.

It is a tragedy that overwhelms the heart, especially as it cannot be considered in isolation from the decades of conflict and occupation, nor that apart from the long history of Palestine and Israel, nor that apart from centuries of anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust, centuries too of anti-Arab prejudice and Islamophobia, both part of the tangled and tragic legacy of colonialism. And this is but one situation among others as entangled with an ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian drones in European airspace, conflicts in Sudan and Yemen among other places, the escalating situation in the US, economic crises, displaced people, Indigenous nations suffering, impacts of a changing climate, other ecological concerns...What a world on this World Communion Sunday!

Which is why we mark World Communion Sunday. Started as a way to promote unity, first with Presbyterians, then other Protestant churches, the decision to mark this day gained momentum during the Second World War when so much of the globe was in conflict. The founders of the day knew that many of our global issues were at their core spiritual issues, our hearts gripped by selfishness, greed, lust for power, in other words, sin, and as such needed to be approached through the lens of faith, tackled with our hearts open to God’s loving and ultimately transforming grace. What better way to seek that than through the sacrament of communion as we are fed in spirit and healed in God’s love?

This is the main point of our gospel as Jesus invites his disciples to have a mustard seed of faith. He doesn’t mean making an assent of belief, nor is it a statement about being saved through faith alone. That can be transactional as I pray a particular set of words, and everything is okay with my soul even as the world is beset by conflict and pain. That approach reduces the reality of sin to something personal when it’s most often collective, systemic even. I hear instead Jesus inviting us to trust, to open our hearts to God with even a mustard seed of openness, enough for God’s life and love to grow in us. And as we do this, God’s life and love in turn flows through us to others, to the world.

I say that because this statement about faith needs to be read in its context. It doesn't stand alone but comes after a series of difficult teachings about not being enslaved to wealth, the importance of caring for the vulnerable, being quick to forgive others. It's for all these teachings the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. It is a sincere prayer for spiritual aid, conscious as they were that applying Jesus' teachings in their lives requires more than just willpower. That was the dilemma faced by the leaders in Jerusalem prior to what our Lamentations reading presents. The king and his advisors rested confidently in their "relationship" with God but trusted mostly in themselves, rebelling against Babylon rather than submitting as Jeremiah prophesied. And beyond this, their faith in God was really about staying in control, seeing God's promise to uphold the royal line of David as unconditional, effectively a permission to put their drive for power above serving their people, a reality we still see in operation in the world today. The result for them was the destruction of the temple and most of the people carted off into exile, for us, it seems like the whole world is on the verge of destruction.

And so we gather to share in communion, knowing we can't put Jesus' teachings into practice by willpower alone. Like the disciples, we need help because the starting point for a changed world is ultimately changed hearts. It is good then that in addition to shared prayer like communion, that we take time for personal prayer, to come to quiet, to read scripture, to reflect on our day, to look at ourselves and our motivations honestly, not just aware of what we have done wrong and asking forgiveness, important as that is, but perhaps more importantly looking at where we've extended love, shown compassion, sought peace, where others have done the same, conscious of where God has been present and so opening our hearts a bit wider than a mustard seed.

To this end I'd like us to engage in a prayer practice based on the life of Francis of Assisi whose feast day as I said earlier was on Friday. For Francis, faith was not about withdrawal from the world but being present to it with his full self. This exercise is from Jon Sweeney, an expert on Francis. .... I invite you to look at your hands, your palms, your fingertips, and picture what they recently touched, what they carried, perhaps this morning, what they recently gave away. Our hands can hurt or heal. Which have they done? Ask God to use your hands as a blessing. Now consider your mouth. What does it do most often? Laugh? Smile? Share honestly? Speak kindly? Not always? Ask God to bless others with your mouth. Think about your feet. What do they do if you see someone in need, someone who is in trouble? Do they move in their direction? We often move so quickly we don't notice others let alone someone needing a friend. Pray that you may put your faith, and God's love in your feet. As we ask God to use our hands, our mouths, our feet, we are living our faith in practical ways, like Francis did.

On this World Communion Day, Jesus invites us to have faith, our hearts open to God's love. The world may be in crisis in many ways but God is with us in it, giving strength to the hostages and their families, courage to the people of Gaza, drawing forth compassion in the hearts of anyone watching the news, tenacity to those seeking an end to the war in Gaza and so many other issues. Jesus tells us we need only faith the size of a mustard seed. In other words, if we open our hearts a little bit, live our faith a little bit, share our love a little bit, God multiplies that in us and with each other. As we all do that, God through us, changes the world. Amen.