

# TABLE MANNERS



Alice Fleming Townley  
October 4, 2020  
Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12 - 20

Israel wandered in the wilderness, tired, hungry and tempted by despair. In Exodus 20 we read the Voice of Love that came to them, “I am, the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” God had heard their cries, stirred the hearts of two midwives, a Hebrew princess, and a hiding shepherd, and finally broke every chain that bound them... Remembering this, reminded them of their deepest selves. They were holy, beloved, delivered people in covenant with the Creator of the Universe.

The Voice of Love continued, “so have no other gods before me, even when another voice tempts you with a golden calf, and tells you there is still ‘not enough.’ Do not use my name in an activity that is counter to my essence. Rest. Pharaoh kept you in chronic exhaustion, but you no longer belong to Pharaoh. You are set free for Sabbath, to delight in God, one another, and creation.

And you are freed to care for one another. Honor your father and mother. Do not harm--do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, do not covet.” And then Moses added, “Do not be afraid. Be in constant awe so

that you do not sin. Stay connected to God, yourself and one another." And with that Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Israel wandered and grumbled in the wilderness for 40 years. And there in the wilderness, God provided the food of manna, the drink of water from a rock, and the gift of the law. The Psalmist proclaimed, "The law of the Lord . . . revives the soul . . . rejoices the heart . . . and endures forever . . . God's Word is sweeter also than honey, and the drippings of the honeycomb." (Psalm 19: 7-10)

Sometimes we find ourselves in what feels like wilderness—and for many this is such a time. It has been another hard week in a pandemic and a presidential campaign. We heard regard for truth, and rules, and the sacredness of all humanity disregarded, again. The wilderness is also where God is present and calls us to remember. We do not serve the god of chaos or violence or golden glitter. We belong to the God of Love in whom we are in covenant. We belong to the God who heard the cries when our people were in slavery and stirred the hearts of many to free them. Even in the valley of the shadow, God leads us beside still waters, and green pastures, and sets a table before us, and restores our souls. We come to eat and drink and remember the table manners.

World Communion Sunday was first held in 1933 at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After fighting the war to end all wars; lying, murder, greed, dehumanization, unjust leaders, division threatened to undo them again. The pastor and congregation at Shadyside designed "World Communion Sunday" to remember their interconnectedness to

God and others. The message spread. In 1940, as World War II raged, an ecumenical church council named the first Sunday in October as World Communion Sunday. Come all who are hungry and tired and yearn for a better world. Come and eat and be filled at God's table. Fed, may we feed others.

**And the Table Will Be Wide**  
***A Blessing for World Communion Sunday***

And the table  
will be wide.  
And the welcome  
will be wide.  
And the arms  
will open wide  
to gather us in.  
And our hearts  
will open wide  
to receive.

And we will come  
as children who trust  
there is enough.  
And we will come  
unhindered and free.  
And our aching  
will be met  
with bread.  
And our sorrow  
will be met  
with wine.

And we will open our hands  
to the feast  
without shame.  
And we will turn  
toward each other  
without fear.  
And we will give up  
our appetite  
for despair.  
And we will taste  
and know  
of delight.

And we will become bread  
for a hungry world.  
And we will become drink  
for those who thirst.  
And the blessed  
will become the blessing.  
And everywhere  
will be the feast.<sup>i</sup>

– Jan Richardson

On World Communion Sunday we join with Presbyterians around the globe to dedicate the Peace and Global Witness offering to address systems of injustice near and far. And we also start to tie our shoes for the CROP walk. The CROP walk is an ecumenical effort organized by Church World Service to alleviate local and world hunger. CROP supports food banks, community gardens, access to water—and other initiatives and structures that save lives. Our church has participated for over 40 years. For many of us, walking and talking together as young and old, men and women, strangers and friends is an annual highlight. One of our children said it was better than Christmas. For the last several years, the Presbyterian Church of Okemos has been one of the top ten givers in the country. Last year our church shared \$18,363. In over 40 years we have raised \$344,228. We thank Ron Dorr and now Diane Allen for organizing us.

This year is not like the others. We cannot see each other in the fellowship hall to figure out who is walking and who might want to sponsor. This year, we cannot meet and walk together with all the other churches. And this year, with the pandemic, many more people are suffering from food insecurity. This year both the need and challenge of the walk are higher than

ever before. We have adapted worship, classes and meetings---and we can do this too. To register to walk or to donate go to the Lansing CROP website and find our church and a list of walkers--or call Diane Allen or the church office. In some ways it is easier, we can walk, rock, or run any time this week. Next Sunday at 4pm we will have Zoom meeting so that we can share and hear of everyone's efforts and adventures. As Ron Dorr would always remind us, "We pray with our feet."

In these days when we find ourselves in the wilderness, tired, hungry and tempted by despair may we remember the wandering of Israel. May we rest and eat and delight. May we hear with them the Voice that transcends time and place and all that threatens to divide. In hearing the Voice of Love, may we be love. In hearing the Voice of Truth, may we speak truth. In hearing the Voice that Liberates from slavery, may we see, hear, and move. Let no lie or greed or Pharoah tempt us otherwise. The law is like the sweetest honey, reviving the soul, rejoicing the heart, and enduring forever. We feast, that we might be become bread.

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Richardson, *Blessing for World Communion Sunday*, <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2012/09/30/and-the-table-will-be-wide/>