

The Pursuit of Peace  
World Communion Sunday  
Presbyterian Church in Leonia  
October 6, 2024

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Psalm 133  
1 Peter 3:8=18a

We have a family friend whose daughter is the same age as mine, and they have been friends since kindergarten. My friend's daughter has a wild range of emotions, and part of her appeal is that you never quite know what she will say or do next; she is very exciting to be around. My daughter instinctively knows this about her friend, and even when they were very young, and would be playing outside, my daughter would burst into the kitchen and say, "Quick! I need to feed my friend some bread."

After giving her friend a taste of bread, this friend would stop ramping up into high emotion, and their playdate would continue on with delight.

This friend is not that unique. If you go to a restaurant that is thoughtful enough to serve bread while you wait for your food, some— if not all— will tear into it, finding comfort in that first bite where the hard crust gives way to a yeasty softness. The bread prepares us by relieving our immediate hunger, so that we can savor the meal to come.

Bread prepares you— physically, emotionally, spiritually— for what comes next. I know of course some people need to be gluten-free, and in other places in the world it might be rice, or nsima, injera, or poi that your host will serve, instead of bread. But each culture has an elemental staple that the people trust to heal their immediate hunger.

Today as we celebrate World Communion Sunday, we have a display of breads from around the world. This day began by a Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia, in 1933. It picked up with other denominations in the US, and then spread around the world, especially in the wake of the brokenness of World World 2.

Bread reminds us, as Jesus reminds us, that God wants both our physical, and our spiritual hungers to be met. The broken bread teaches us that when we are broken, we can be made whole. Jesus' crucifixion and death were not the end of the story. In his resurrection, he showed us that broken bodies can still hold power and can even change the world. What hope this gives; for we know brokenness; maybe we know it as near as our own bodies. Surely we know it in the world. We have seen Western North Carolina, a region that had the reputation of being immune to the impact of climate change, broken and decimated by Hurricane Helene.

We hear of brokenness in Sudan, in Congo, in Ukraine, in Cameroon, and in Haiti. We hear of brokenness in the office of the New York City Mayor. And tomorrow, we note the anniversary of the horrific October 7 attacks on Israel, as well as the 41,000 deaths of Palestinians in Gaza in the war that has followed, and the ensuing conflict with Israel, Lebanon, and Iran. So far, and on all sides, the only solution that has come of violence is more violence, and nobody knows peace.

But recall something that bread can do:  
Bread prepares us for what comes next.

Before October 7 was seared into our heads as a day of atrocity, October 7 was known as the Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu's birthday. He, who lived under the injustice of apartheid in South Africa and also helped lead a movement to overthrow it, and rebuild and heal a nation, knew something about building peace. "How does peace come? Peace doesn't come because allies agree. Allies are allies — they already agree! Peace comes when you talk to the person you most hate. And that's where the courage of a leader comes."

1 Peter was a letter circulated throughout churches in Asia Minor, mostly through what we know today as Turkiye. The letter advised Christians who surely longed for peace, for they lived under persecution by the Romans and the Greeks. Peter told them, Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. He also advised them to seek peace and pursue it.

It is one thing to seek peace. But what does it mean to pursue peace? I think of how my dog pursues a ball at the dog run, as if it is his *holy* calling. What would it look like if we were to pursue peace like that?

Instead of me standing here, I invited someone who daily does life-saving work of building peace.

Let me introduce to you Mr. Rahshon Timothy Dixon to give a testimony as to what pursuing peace means for this local community.