

## **“Communion Meditation,” June 7, 2020**

**Sharlande Sledge**

Do you ever start humming a song and ask yourself “Wonder why that song – wonder why right now?” When it’s Wednesday, and the song I suddenly hear myself singing is a hymn, I know I’m still planning Sunday worship; the hymn is a mid-week gift to me.

Now don’t worry – I’m not going to follow the example of Barack Obama and sing “Amazing Grace.” But I am aware that the words that came to me while thinking about a communion meditation have lived in me a long time, just as “Amazing Grace” must have lived within him.

When I was growing up in a small town in north Louisiana, we celebrated communion once a quarter, always on Sunday night. No matter what pastor was there, at the end of communion the pastor said, “And after they had sung a hymn, they went out . . .” So we sang a hymn. Always the same one. And I’ll bet it was a hymn that a lot of you sang, too, before you left the room after communion:

*Blessed be the tie that binds; our hearts in Christian love.*

*The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.*

Wednesday morning was the first time in a long, long, long time I had thought about learning the words to the song as a little girl. I didn’t understand the words then, but hearing them over and over again, and singing along with the congregation of my home church and other churches through the years, the practice paid off. I committed them to memory, without any big effort of my own. I remembered.

My good friend, James Lamkin, who grew up in church with me and now pastors an Alliance church a whole lot like Lake Shore in Atlanta, always often signs his emails to me “Blessed be the tie . . .” I like that. It hints at memories. It reminds me of a congregation of people who loved me.

Through the song I remember that we are all are connected to each other when we take communion, no matter whether we rise from our seats in the sanctuary to come to the Table -- or whether we are in fellowship through zoom on Sunday

morning. And surely we are connected through the Resurrection to those who have gone before us. And we are connected to those who will come after us. “Blessed be the tie” reminds me that we take communion together **to remember**.

Jesus told us to eat the bread and drink the cup. He told us to remember him in that way until he comes again. The ritual we practice at the table calls us remember that this table is set for everyone.

Jesus called us to practice many things: Love one another. Pray without ceasing. Love your neighbor as yourself. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Remember until I come again. Let your light shine. These are but a few of the things Jesus calls us to do. So we: *Practice loving. Practice praying. Practice neighboring. Practice remembering. Practice shining.*

The more we practice -- and the older we get -- the more it makes sense that we need to keep practicing. We keep practicing the ritual that Jesus called us to do: breaking bread and pouring the wine. We keep coming to the table; we keep eating at together; we keep noticing who is at the table with us; we keep watch for who is not at the table; we practice extending invitations to them; every time we eat Christ’s meal, we keep praying that we will be broken for the sake of the world.

Like driving a car, or riding a bicycle, typing on a computer, threading a sewing machine, or scrambling eggs, sometimes we think we can do life by muscle memory. But these past few months, especially this past week, we have experienced things changing in ways far beyond what our imagination of five months ago could have imagined, far beyond our preparations. In the midst of all the systemic and radical shifts in society, the things we think we thought we had figured out have been overturned. In the midst of acknowledging the realities of how generations of people of color have suffered, the Lord’s Table calls us to examine our own privilege and re-think Jesus’ invitation to all. In the midst of sweeping change, we confess we can’t live life completely by muscle memory. The Table calls us to forever create a new community.

As followers of Christ, the events of this week have bound us to our brothers and sisters on this earth because of our common humanity; our creation names us as all

as children made in God's image. Underneath all the stories in the national news this week, I hold on to these from our congregation:

I think of Wednesday night when Steve Reid read the psalmist's lament of body and spirit to us on Zoom, as expressed in Psalm 6: "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing. Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror." Then Steve asked how we pray these days. People shared their honest responses about the many ways we pray and care for those we love in these days of fear, upheaval, and change. It was a rich hour together.

I think of Jill Bellinger Roedel's email Friday afternoon, asking "Can we add something to the Lake Shore prayer concerns about those fighting on the front lines of social justice and racial inequity? I don't know what things are like in Waco right now but injustice and racial inequity are incredibly present right now in LA . . ."

And I think of Becky Kennedy's brother, Jeff. I hope you read the meditation Becky wrote for us on Friday. She shared her memory of being 10-years-old, watching her 15-year-old brother learn to drive, from her vantage point in the back seat. Later, when she asked her mother why Jeff was lifting a finger from the steering wheel every so often as if to wave at someone in an approaching car when there was no one coming toward them, her mother told her "I think he was just practicing his wave so he could get it right."

Our call to the table is a call to practice the ritual of remembering Christ's words to us. Remember them. Practice them. Practice them again. And give thanks.

### **Benediction**

Take these words with you:

*"Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love."*

Go with the blessing of God and this community to practice resurrection, so that in these turbulent times we may usher in signs of God's kingdom.

May it be so, and may it be soon. Amen.

