

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2024
TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
MARK 10:2-16 "HARDNESS OF HEART"



ST. JOHN

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Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in bold print

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "Commune with Me with Let Us Break Bread Together"

Kirk Dearman

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Open and Affirming Ministries

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP: (Inspired by Psalm 26)**

One: The Holy One dwells within and beyond the congregation and makes a home among us.

Many: Prove us, and try us; Holy One, test our hearts and minds.

One: The glory of the Sovereign One abides with us, illuminating our journey, energizing our gathering, and warming our spirits.

Many: Prove us, and try us; Holy One, test our hearts and minds.

One: Bless the Name of Names, the God of Truth, and the Giver of Life with songs of praise, prayers of hope, and moments of connection.

Many: Prove us, and try us; Holy One, test our hearts and minds.

***INVOCATION:**

Majestic God, your realm encompasses the universe, the earth, and our community. All creation declares your glory. May we unite with our kin around the world in celebrating you and the connections we share. As we gather in your name, may we remember those we join in faith, hope, and worship on every continent representing every tradition. May we declare in spirit and in truth...one bread, one body...the church striving to one as you, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Spirit are one. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 349 "I Come With Joy"**

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Holy One, we come to this gathering, the table, and your presence mindful that this day particularly celebrates our human connectedness. The reality lies far from the idea and your vision of beloved community. You call us to remember the poor, the marginalized, the immigrant, the isolated and abandoned. You command us to love our neighbor and have blessed us to live in an era in which we may know our neighbors from across the world to amazing degrees. Yet, we cling to our echo chambers and isolationist tendencies. We place our desires and comforts over the good of the world. We demonize difference rather than dignify diversity. Forgive us and have mercy on us while propelling us to new life. Extend your grace to transform our attitude and actions and infuse us with openness, curiosity, and love.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved, God's grace and power reside in you in mutual support of a transformed life. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 assures, "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and [God] will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing [God] will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." Allow the testing to strengthen you, to build your endurance, and to do a new thing in you and through you for the glory of God.

***GLORIA: Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)**

(end) One God always here. One God always here.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Genesis 2:18-24 from The Message

¹⁸⁻²⁰ God said, "It's not good for the Man to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a companion." So God formed from the dirt of the ground all the animals of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the Man to see what he would name them. Whatever the Man called each living creature, that was its name. The Man named the cattle, named the birds of the air, named the wild animals; but he didn't find a suitable companion.

²¹⁻²² God put the Man into a deep sleep. As he slept he removed one of his ribs and replaced it with flesh. God then used the rib that he had taken from the Man to make Woman and presented her to the Man.

²³⁻²⁵ The Man said,

"Finally! Bone of my bone,
flesh of my flesh!

Name her Woman

for she was made from Man."

Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.

The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked, but they felt no shame.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 26 Page 636

SECOND TESTAMENT LESSON: Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

The Son is God's ultimate messenger

¹ In the past, God spoke through the prophets to our ancestors in many times and many ways. ² In these final days, though, he spoke to us

through a Son. God made his Son the heir of everything and created the world through him. ³The Son is the light of God's glory and the imprint of God's being. He maintains everything with his powerful message. After he carried out the cleansing of people from their sins, he sat down at the right side of the highest majesty. ⁴And the Son became so much greater than the other messengers, such as angels, that he received a more important title than theirs.

⁵God didn't put the world that is coming (the world we are talking about) under the angels' control. ⁶Instead, someone declared somewhere,

What is humanity that you think about them?

Or what are the human beings that you care about them?

⁷*For a while you made them lower than angels.*

You crowned the human beings with glory and honor.

⁸*You put everything under their control*

When he puts everything under their control, he doesn't leave anything out of control. But right now, we don't see everything under their control yet. ⁹However, we do see the one who was made lower in order than the angels for a little while—it's Jesus! He's the one who is now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of his death. He suffered death so that he could taste death for everyone through God's grace.

Qualified to be a high priest

¹⁰It was appropriate for God, for whom and through whom everything exists, to use experiences of suffering to make perfect the pioneer of salvation. This salvation belongs to many sons and daughters whom he's leading to glory. ¹¹This is because the one who makes people holy and

the people who are being made holy all come from one source. That is why Jesus isn't ashamed to call them brothers and sisters when he says, ¹²*I will publicly announce your name to my brothers and sisters.*

I will praise you in the middle of the assembly

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 10:2-16**

²Some Pharisees came and, trying to test him, they asked, "Does the Law allow a man to divorce his wife?"

³Jesus answered, "What did Moses command you?"

⁴They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a divorce certificate and to divorce his wife."

⁵Jesus said to them, "He wrote this commandment for you because of your unyielding hearts. ⁶At the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female.*^[a] ⁷*Because of this, a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife,* ⁸*and the two will be one flesh.* So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together."

¹⁰Inside the house, the disciples asked him again about this. ¹¹He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if a wife divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Jesus blesses children

¹³People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them. But the disciples scolded them. ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them, "Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them, because God's kingdom belongs to people like these children. ¹⁵I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child will never enter it." ¹⁶Then he hugged the children and blessed them.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “What’s Love Got to Do With it?”

Why does the author of the Gospel of Mark say the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus? Why does Jesus only give the detailed answer when he’s back safely in the house with the disciples? Well, look and see where this incident is taking place. It’s down by the Jordan, in the Judean wilderness. Who used to work there? John the Baptist. Why did John get put in prison, and finally lose his head? For criticizing Herod Antipas for marrying his brother’s wife. Coincidence? Probably not.

This doesn’t mean that what Jesus has to say about divorce in the passage is irrelevant to the broader question; far from it. But it brings the story into three-dimensional reality. Herod’s irregular marital arrangements (his wife, Herodias, had had to divorce Philip so that it could happen) were among the reasons why it was clear, to John the Baptist and plenty of others, that Herod could never be the true king that God intended to give to Israel, even if that was Herod’s ambition.

The criticism of Herod went with the announcement that the Messiah’s coming was expected at any time. Now, as Jesus goes to Jerusalem following the disciples’ recognition of him as Messiah, we shouldn’t be surprised that the Pharisees try to trap him. Will he allow himself to say something about divorce which can then be presented as treasonable? **(This sounds sort of like a “soap opera” on TV or a crime novel.)**

Jesus, of course, can spot a trap a mile away; but he loses no integrity in how he deals with it. Jesus has a public discussion and later on a

private discussion with the disciples alone. The Pharisees quote Moses, who doesn’t command or encourage divorce, but allows it and places strict controls on it. The proper procedure must be followed. Jesus doesn’t say Moses was wrong with the “permission” in Deuteronomy; but Jesus insist that one should go back to Genesis, to the account of creation itself, to discover the creator’s will. Genesis says that the bond of husband and wife creates not merely a partnership or a working agreement but a new entity, a new human being. And as far as Jesus is concerned, what Genesis says about marriage, God says.

(My question is “where is the love?” Did the couple love each other when they married? Does the husband want a divorce only because he lusts after a different woman?)

Jesus’ comment on Moses’ permission is important as a clue to what he thought was going on in his own ministry. Jesus says, Moses gave you this rule because of your hardheartedness; **(They forgot about love. They were greedy and wanted other spouses.)** in other words, Israel in Moses’ day was not able to fulfill the creator’s intention, and needed laws that would reflect that second-best reality. Hardheartedness, the inability to have one’s heart in tune with God’s best intention and plan, thwarted God’s longing that Israel would be God’s prototype of renewed humanity. The problem was not with the ideal, nor with the law, but with the people: Israel was, when it all came down to it, just like everybody else. Hardhearted. Eager to take the precious gift of genuine humanness and exploit or abuse it.

Jesus is expected to have a cure for hardheartedness. But the cure has to be one that is easy and that everyone agrees with. Perhaps Jesus thought that when God’s kingdom comes their hearts would be softened, but no one knew when that would happen. Perhaps we all

need to look somewhere else for an answer. Don't look at the law. Look at the couples who have been married 40, 50, 60 years. How come they stayed together? Millions of Christians have prayed for grace to remain faithful to their marriage vows, often under great stress, and have found the way not only to survive but to celebrate as "one flesh". As they say, those couples "work at" **love**. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: "Yes, My Jesus Loves Me" Video

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God for all nations, all cultures, all species, draw together all things in Christ, so that all creation and all humanity may learn to live in peace, all cultures are shared with appreciation, all natural resources are used with care for the benefit of the whole creation. However, we all know that nature sometimes causes disasters, undoing lives and homes. We pray for all those affected by Helene, especially those who lost loved ones because of this hurricane.

Holy One, make your church an example of the breadth and length and depth of your understanding and love, not only through the connection of denominations in world councils of churches, but in the openness of any congregation to all the races that may live around it. Show us how to be helpful so those in need will find respect and we may find ways to serve them in love.

We pray for those on our prayer list. May they find comfort knowing that you, God, are with them under all circumstances and that there are many, many people praying for them. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus,

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: 773 "Remember Me"

Remember me, remember me, O Jesus, remember me.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

When we consider the gifts of God, stewardship of our resources rises among them. The psalmist marveled, "What are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet." The Sovereign God has given us responsibility and care of our sibling, creation. May we respond to the call to glorify God by the work of our hands, the allocation of our resources, and the generosity of our hearts.

OFFERTORY: "Tell Me the Stories of Jesus" W.H. Parker

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen**

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:**

Holy One, we thank you for our abundance and the privilege to share in the flourishing of our community and the world. Bless these gifts and be glorified by our generosity and trust in your provision, sufficiency, and renewing power. Amen.

COMMUNION LITURGY

WORDS OF INVITATION

Faith communities around the Earth gather to observe World Communion Sunday. Some call it Holy Communion, others refer to it as the Great Thanksgiving (Eucharist) or Lord's Supper. Some place elements on an altar. In the Protestant tradition, we approach the Table. Every language and tongue, every tribe and nation, every continent and hemisphere represented as the Body of Christ accepts the invitation to unity around a meal prepared by the One who entered a body, the human condition, and the brokenness of the world. Let us join together in the name of Jesus the Christ to commune as one.

One: God be with you.

Many: The Holy One is with us.

One: May our hardened hearts be softened.

**Many: We lift them up to the Holy One
with thanksgiving and in hopeful expectation.**

WORDS OF THANKSGIVING

Gracious God, you are holy, and you make us holy. We declare glory and honor due to your precious name. Like generations before us and the heavenly chorus beyond us, we cry,

Holy, holy, holy, God of power and might. All realms are filled with your glory. Redeem us, restore us, renew us. Blessed by your Holy Name.

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE

We join in remembrance of your incarnation. Your humble beginnings affirm that the strength of God is perfected in weakness. The years of obscurity left unrecorded and unknown to us remind us that good things benefit from preparation and patience. The record of your baptism reminds us of our own baptism as we entered the waters of life and community with you. Recalling your ministry encourages us to engage in the work of healing, teaching, and presence. Revisiting your passion challenges us to expand our capacity to love generously, sacrificially, and relentlessly.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

For it was the night of betrayal when Jesus enjoyed a meal with his community of faithful disciples. Imperfect people committed to follow his way encircled that table. The one who would deny him was at the table. The one who would betray him was at the table. Many who would flee in fear of the risk to their own lives sat at that table. All were welcomed. All were known. All were loved.

All were nourished as Jesus took the bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. As he offered the bread to the gathered, he declared, "This is my body. Take and eat in remembrance of me."

After supper, Jesus took the cup, gave thanks, and blessed it. As he offered the cup to the gathered, he declared, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Take and drink in remembrance of me.”

Ministering in the name of Jesus, we offer bread and cup as we proclaim **Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose, and Christ lives again.**

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

Receive the gifts of God for the people of God.

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Communal God, we give you thanks that as you shared in life and death, you lead us into the resurrected life. At this table, we acknowledge your abiding presence among us. You offered us bread and cup, which we receive in remembrance and expectation of your movement in human history. Form us as your faithful community and shape us as servants and stewards of your realm. By your Holy Spirit, may your covenant reign within our hearts and manifest in the witness of our lives now and forever. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN: 391 “In the Midst of New Dimensions”

BENEDICTION:

May the Holy One be an ever present companion and partner as you encounter the tests of life. May your softened heart break over the pains, pangs, and problems of the world.

May the strength of the Spirit fill you, the power of the Spirit embolden you, and the leading of the Spirit guide you as co-creators of the

kingdom of God...now and forever. Go in abundant hope, peace and love.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE: “Let There Be Peace on Earth”**

POSTLUDE: “Come with Rejoicing” R.S. Morrison

PRAYER LIST:

Dear Friends,

As we gather together for World Communion Sunday, I wanted to share with you a special prayer that speaks to the times we are living in. It is a prayer of unity, hope, and peace—a reminder that, no matter where we are in the world, we are connected through our faith. This week, as global tensions weigh heavily on our hearts, may we seek comfort in the presence of God, whose love knows no borders.

Below is a prayer I invite you to reflect upon as we join together with people of all faiths across the globe, praying for peace and for God’s grace to be felt by all.

God of might and mystery, on this World Communion Sunday, reveal yourself to us and to your people once more. As disciples of your Son, we see ourselves and our ministries in the great company of the saints who went before us. We may not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. This should be comfort beyond measure, but our comfort is shaken by the events of this past week. The threat of all-out war in the Middle East haunts our dreams and our waking nightmares.

Rote recitations of faith ring hollow in our ears. Songs of assured deliverance falter in mouths too dry to sing. We need you now, Holy One, more than we care to admit. We need you to know how much we need you. While we may dwell secure this day, many of your people—of all faiths and traditions—do not. Bless your people with peace, O God, that our communion may truly be world-wide. Bless your people with grace, hope, and love, that all may taste and see that you are truly good. In Christ Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

May this prayer offer you solace and strength as we continue to navigate these challenging times. Let us lift each other up in faith, trusting that God's love and peace can heal even the deepest divides.

In Christ's peace,

Mary Scifres & Team

Being World Communion Sunday, our bread for today is called **Naan**. **Naan** ([/na:n/](#)) is a [leavened](#), oven-baked or [tawa](#)-fried [flatbread](#), that can also be baked in a [tandoor](#). It is characterized by a light and fluffy texture and golden-brown spots from the baking process. Naan is found in the cuisines of [Central Asia](#), [South Asia](#), [Southeast Asia](#), and the [Caribbean](#).