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John 17:21-23

A Place at the Table: Extending the Table

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John 17:21-23 New Revised Standard Version

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Last week we had Annual Conference, the yearly meeting for Methodists in North Texas, and the Reconciling Churches had a table. Greenland Hills is a Reconciling Church, a Reconciling Church is dedicated to the inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in both the policy and practices of the United Methodist Church. So, I went to the Reconciling Churches table and there was a gentleman there from Rockwall. I knew that there aren’t any Reconciling Churches in Rockwall, so I asked him to tell me his story of why he was volunteering at the table. Unfortunately, I think I actually said, “Why are you here?” with a questioning look. Very inviting, that’s me.

He shared with me that he and his family had moved to Rockwall from another state and their neighbors invited them to a large, nondenominational church out there. He said that they enjoyed it, so they made an appointment to talk to the pastor about joining the church. He said that he was surprised that the head pastor met with them because it is a very large church. As they were sharing about their family, they shared that their 15 year old son was gay. He said that he and his wife knew that his son was gay when he was 3 years old. The pastor looked at him with understanding and said to him, “Don’t worry, only 3 more years until you can tell him he is not welcome in your home.” They quickly left the pastor’s office and never went back to that church. He joined the local Methodist church and he said he and his family, including his gay son, have been welcomed with love.

This has been a hard week. 49 people dead, 53 injured in Orlando - targeted at a gay nightclub on Latinx night. I kept thinking about the father who decided not to listen to the hate from the pastor that day. I have to admit to you that I had to ask the man from Rockwall more questions because I didn’t understand what the pastor was implying. When you turn 18, your parents are no longer legally obligated to shelter you. Your parents are no longer legally obligated to show you love and compassion by providing you food, clothing, basic care, a home and a safe place. If you don’t provide those things for your minor children, you can be charged with neglect or abuse.

I thought about all of those people who might have been in that pastor’s office and heard those same words of hate. How many have been banned from their homes? How many are living on the streets right now because of that pastor?

In America it is estimated that 1.6 million youth are homeless each year and that up to 40% of them identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. LGBT youth are 40% of the homeless population and only 7% of the total youth population in America.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The horrible violence in Orlando last Sunday follows a long history of violence against LGBT people. By not fully affirming who people are and who God created them to be, we in the Christian Church have continued this idea that made LGBT people less than fully human. Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel urge us that we may all be one. Until we fully affirm the wholeness of all people, we continue to foster a culture that says it is okay with violence towards LGBT people.

All people are made in the image of God. All people are of sacred worth. All people have inherent worth and dignity. Bishop McKee, the Methodist Bishop for the North Texas area said yesterday in a letter, “Hate directed toward any particular group of people has no place in the life of a Christian.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

God is eager for us to do something, to have a different kind of community.[[3]](#footnote-4) With each tragedy, with each massacre, I have felt more powerless. I write my representative, I sign petitions, but nothing changes. I have to remind myself that “injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action”. In his Letter from a Birmingham Jail Martin Luther King Jr. said those words, “injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

Everyone gathered here can testify, condemn, speak up and speak out, we can organize and act[[5]](#footnote-6). We are Methodists and Methodists have a long history of believing that “God should not only be loved but also served, not only respected but also obeyed, that evil must not only be noted but also actively confronted by the risk of righteous deeds in Christ’s name.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

We have created the most violent society on earth, God didn’t do that, we did.[[7]](#footnote-8) And it is up to us to do something about it. If gun restriction legislation didn’t pass after Sandy Hook and the death of 20 children aged between 6 and 7 years old and 6 teachers, it felt like there was no hope. But that doesn’t mean we should give up. “Injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action.”[[8]](#footnote-9)

I do know today that we can all do something about homophobic hatred. This massacre happened on Sunday morning. A day when so many feel unwelcome in church. We are in the sanctuary right now. This is a place where all are supposed to feel safe, unconditionally loved, and a place where all are one. For the gay teen that has been thrown out of their home or grew up hearing in their church that homosexuality is wrong, the church has not been a safe place.

May we speak up and act out to say that this is wrong. Church should be a safe place. Just as the gay bar was a safe place where there was no judgement, only welcome and acceptance and love. May the church, every single church, every single mosque, every single synagogue, every single Buddhist temple, every place of religious worship, may they all be safe places. Repentance does lead to reconciliation so I hope that many pastors and churches and Christians are realizing the harm and pain that they have caused. 50% of LGBT people are Christian. I wonder how many used to be Christian until they realized that they didn’t want anything to do with the Christ followers who were filled with hatred.

May we speak the truth of God’s love for all and then love our neighbor through acts of love.[[9]](#footnote-10) Methodists are about making the world be a better place. We are about the work of social holiness. We follow Jesus to live as Jesus lived, to love as Jesus loved, and to make a difference in this world.

If we treat all as one, that means we treat everyone as if they are our neighbor. We love everyone. We show up for one another. We cook meals, share stories, and try to see the world through one another’s eyes.[[10]](#footnote-11) Love grows in relationships, and the best way to support one another is to show up, to listen, to lament and cry together.[[11]](#footnote-12) Healing happens in relationship.

We proclaim our hope “that we may all be one” as Jesus said, but we become bound, even imprisoned, by our fears or distrust of those who seem different from us in some way. At Greenland Hills we make Blessing Bags of Manna Bags for the homeless. When I am out of bags, I don’t have anything to give, so I avoid eye contact, I change lanes, but I instead could unroll the window and say, “I don’t have anything to give you but just wanted to say Hi and see how you are doing.” When I let my fear bind me, I forget my calling to be a witness in the world of the love of God seen in Christ Jesus and in each of us. When we listen to that fear of difference, we retreat and separate ourselves from others. We let the fear of difference imprison us in cells of our own making.

The good news is that God is at work in us and with us. The glory of God is given to each of us so that we may live and love as one, because in Christ, we are one. If we are open to one another, God dwells in us. We have to preserve that openness and fight for it with all our hearts. There can be no understanding when there is mutual rejection. When we accept one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept God, we thank God and we love God with our whole being. God’s promise to us is to rescue us from the hand of anything that binds us and separates us from God, and one another. God’s Holy Spirit breaks through all our boundaries of fear and injustice. God’s love sets us free.

Today is Father’s Day. It is a day for us to celebrate the men in our lives who have loved us, who have stood up for us, who have hugged us when we hurt and bandaged our wounds. It is a day for us to celebrate the men in our lives who have stood up for their sons like the father that I met from Rockwall.

We have spent the last weeks talking about the table of love and the table of grace as we have talked about Communion. We talked about setting the table and the invitation to everyone to come to the table. We talked about how we ask the Holy Spirit to bless the food on this table, but also to bless us. The food on this table is not just nourishment for our bodies, but it is full of the presence and ministry of Jesus. We are to be transformed into the presence and ministry of Jesus Christ for the world, following in the footsteps of Jesus.

We are called to extend the table to everyone so “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). When we come together at this Table of Jesus, the connections we are called to make extend beyond this time and place, beyond this table to include a connection to the needs of a hurting world. Because we have been invited, blessed and loved here, we too must invite, bless and love the world into connection and wholeness. As we say the Great Thanksgiving prayer before Communion we will ask God to “make us one with each other and one in ministry to all the world.”

Can you think of one person with whom you disagree about fundamental issues? It may be politics, economics, biblical interpretation, church, or even a sports team rivalry.[[12]](#footnote-13) I want to invite us to pray for that person for the next 40 days. Pray for that person until August 1 and ask God to open both of your hearts, theirs and yours, so that you can see one another through the eyes of divine love and help move toward a greater unity as children of God.[[13]](#footnote-14) We are all children of God. May we extend the table and draw the circle bigger and wider as we set more places at the table. May we celebrate the gifts we all have to bring and to share.[[14]](#footnote-15) “Make us one with each other and one in ministry to all the world.” Amen.

1. https://truecolorsfund.org/our-issue/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.northtexasumc.org/bishop-mckee-1/orlando [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6995/we-need-to-do-something [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6995/we-need-to-do-something [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6995/we-need-to-do-something [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6995/we-need-to-do-something [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6995/we-need-to-do-something [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6995/we-need-to-do-something [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6995/we-need-to-do-something [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <http://julie-rodgers.com/?p=16473&utm_content=buffer0ad42&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer>

    holeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept God, we thank God and we love God with our whole being. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. [http://juli-rodgers.com/?p=16473&utm\_content=buffer0ad42&utm\_medium=social&utm\_source=twitter.com&utm\_campaign=buffer](http://julie-rodgers.com/?p=16473&utm_content=buffer0ad42&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2013/05/one-for-all-all-for-one/ [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2013/05/one-for-all-all-for-one/ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2013/05/one-for-all-all-for-one/ [↑](#footnote-ref-15)