

The question that is asked repeatedly, in Protestant churches which affirm the Apostles' Creed is "Why do we claim to believe in One holy catholic Church?" Quite simply there is a difference between the meaning of catholic with a small c and a Capital C. The Capital referring to Roman Catholic, and the lower case c referencing "universal or true church." We do not claim distinction as one holy Presbyterian Church; or Orthodox or Apostolic, which would mean a direct unbroken lineage to the church before cultural adaptation, we have sustained change. But by affirming that we are one holy catholic church with a common c, we are recognizing our unity in diversity. We are a church calling itself Reformed, continually buffeted by societal struggles, thereby continually being reformed by God.

When searching for a church, what attracts me is that diversity abiding together in Jesus Christ. Among our worshippers and members and ordained leaders, are persons with Doctorates and Masters in Divinity as well as persons wanting to be Baptized, we have women and men, we have every political persuasion, Sopranos, Altos, Tenors, Basses and those who could not carry a tune in a bucket, of every age group, and longevity of living in Green Valley. We have those who live year-round in Tubac and Amado, Rio Rico and Sahuarita, LaPosada and the Springs, The Villages and Quail Creek; as well as those who live part of the year in every different State, and several different Countries. Even as a Presbyterian Church we have Baptists, Unitarians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics and Pentecostals, Disciples and Presbyterians. Did I neglect anyone? Yet, as different as we each are, we have unity in our Communion with Jesus Christ and one another.

We were extremely fortunate when moving into a parsonage in Milwaukee, having an enormous yard and existing Grape Vines already growing. Except the vines had been neglected, just left to grow wherever they chose upon the ground and that first year not was there a mare's nest of branches and vines chocking one another out, but they produced no fruit. The following year, I drove posts into the ground and strung wires for the vines to grow upon. As if knowing what they needed to do, the vines grew up the posts and across the wire, having space to grow, sun, rain and air, the vines produced grapes! After a few years, I learned that the old branches began producing less and less fruit. The branches needed to be cleaned up by being pruned, even quite severely, to encourage new vines to sprout, as the new vines coming more directly from the main vine than from older branches produced more fruit. There was a balancing dance, because the vines cannot grow where there is no root, the new vines grow upon the old growth; but when the old growth became overgrown or brittle, the vine needed cutting to find the true vine. I stated we were extremely fortunate finding existing grape vines there, because years later we moved here to green Valley and our yard had numerous rose bushes, which follow the same basic principles of growth, but roses also require that you put your hands amongst the thorns.

Biblically, throughout the Old Testament there are references to God planting a garden with everything needed to thrive, but the vines strangled one another, and tore down the walls around them, which allowed the foxes and vermin to enter in and destroy the garden. All of which sounds somewhat similar to the Garden of Eden in Genesis, and the history of Israel as the Kingdom of David and Solomon began to crumble. But what does any of this have to do with us today?

Quite sincerely, we are a diverse unity, who have one thing in common: our communion with one another and Jesus Christ, Who for a very long time, have been unable to share communion. More so than any church I have known throughout my life, at Valley Presbyterian, if something has been done Individually, in our homes we have celebrated virtually, but grammatically "virtually celebrating communion"/ celebrating the sacrament alone is a problem. The crux of this has its roots in the Reformation, and emphasizes what we believe happens during Communion, how and why. Communion is a communal act,

when we celebrate in isolation we are focusing upon personal atonement for sin, rather than the sacramental act of our being community, of our being the Vine, the Body of Christ for one another!

All religious bodies recognize that as humans we sin, we fall short of the glory of God. In ancient Judaism, they practiced sacrifice to atone for one's sins. All Christian churches, as the holy catholic church, practice communion. We each recognize the origin of Communion, recorded in each of the Gospels and the Epistles, being Jesus' Last Supper with the disciples leading to his being betrayed, arrested, condemned and crucified, providing the context for the Resurrection.

November 1st 1517, Martin Luther recognized a pruning he thought the Roman Catholic church needed. Martin Luther was an ordained Roman Catholic priest in Germany. Among his 95 Theses, one of his arguments was that the Catholic Church had made Priests intermediaries between people and God, and Martin Luther claimed the Need for a Priesthood of all Believers. Related to this, Luther believed the people needed direct access to be able to read the Word of God from the Bible themselves. So, while not as quickly as some would have liked, and more quickly than pleased others, we have put the Bibles into the Pews, asking you to not pass them, as it seems our current virus can only live on hard surfaces for a few hours. Also, according to Martin Luther the Roman Catholic Church had made the Sacrament of Communion into magic: a curtain closed between the Priest and the people with bread and wine being on an altar. The priest said an incantation in Latin, the curtain opened and the substance of Bread and Wine had now literally become something different, the bread and wine changed substance into the Body and Blood of Jesus. By 1620, Court Jesters had corrupted the Priest's Phrase "Hoc Est Corpus" change into the Body, to the Magical Sounding Phrase Hocus Pocus.

Instead of the Catholic practice of Transubstantiation, Luther interpreted that what happened in the Sacrament of Communion was what Luther called Consubstantiation. The Priest prayed calling Jesus to come down out of heaven, to abide in the Communion at the table. In this way, the substance of the elements of bread and wine did not change, but the fellowship at the Table changed by Jesus being present, as he had at each of the resurrection appearances.

Last Sunday, I made reference to Huldreich Zwingli who was the People's Priest in Zurich, Switzerland. In addition to the Plague Song of our last Sermon, Zwingli described that what took place in Communion was remembrance of what Jesus had done for us. As throughout the Bible, people of faith had sinned, then remembered their covenant with God and repented and were forgiven, the Sacrament of Communion was Remembrance of our Covenant with God through Jesus Christ.

John Calvin was never a Roman Catholic Priest, he was French educated to be a Lawyer, was elected to be a City Manager, who when the City he served was without a Pastor, also served that function as well. Being a Lawyer, Calvin recognized that words matter, words make the Law specific and real. As such, Calvin recognized differences between being a Priest and a Pastor. The word Pastor comes from The Good Shepherd pasturing the flock, so ministers to their own flock of people. A Priest is an intermediary between people and God, and a priest is involved in making a Sacrifice on an Altar. According to Calvin, the great High Priest was Jesus, who made the sacrifice for us on the Cross, so this is not an Altar this is a Table and the Table has no great theological or magical symbolism, it is a Table where we share a meal; and the only intermediary we need between us and God is Jesus. Being a Pastor, the minister has no authority from God to make a Sacrifice, any more than the ability to command Jesus to come down out of heaven for us. However, while Calvin recognized Communion was not Magic, or ordering Jesus to appear, Calvin also dismissed Communion as being Remembrance. Instead John Calvin named Sin as being a brokenness. That brokenness may be between Us and God, or between us and one another, or even

between us and ourselves, where we have done harm to our self and our true nature. When there is a wound or brokenness in my life, rather than hiding it where it may fester and become more infected, I seek healing. According to John Calvin, the healing we seek for our sins is forgiveness, which may be forgiveness from God, or from one another, or even forgiving ourselves. However, according to John Calvin, while we celebrate with Bread and Wine which Jesus described as broken and for reconciliation, the point is not the substance of the Bread and Wine, or the Priest or the Incantations we say, or the Altar; the point is the forgiveness. Because when there has been a brokenness which is forgiven, we are what is changed! We are brought closer together, closer to our true selves, and we are brought closer to God.