

**SAN MARINO CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**Reflections by Pastor Donald Shenk**  
(Delivered on Sunday, October 2, 2016)

Text: **Psalm 137 (New Revised Standard Version)**

By the rivers of Babylon—

there we sat down and there we wept  
when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there  
we hung up our harps.

For there our captors  
asked us for songs,  
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

How could we sing the LORD’s song  
in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand wither!

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,  
if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem  
above my highest joy.

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites  
the day of Jerusalem’s fall,  
how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down!  
Down to its foundations!”

O daughter Babylon, you devastator!  
Happy shall they be who pay you back  
what you have done to us!

Happy shall they be who dash your offspring  
against the rock!

Reflections by Pastor Donald: **“Sharing It All”**

A new pastor was visiting the homes of his parishioners. At one house it seemed obvious that someone was at home, but no answer came to his repeated knocks at the door. He took out a card

and wrote "Revelation 3:20" on the back of it and stuck it in the door. When the offering was processed the following Sunday, he found that his card had been returned. Added to it was this cryptic message: "Genesis 3:10." Reaching for his Bible to check out the citation, he broke into gales of laughter. Revelation 3:20, his card, begins, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Genesis 3:10, the parishioner's card, reads, "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid for I was naked."

Now that really doesn't have that much to do with what I'm talking to you about today, but it came in my email this week and was just too good to pass up!

Oh, and just in case you weren't aware of it...the world can be and usually is a crazy place. As Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 24, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars... nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places..." Sound familiar? I think there might also be something in there about the near absolute polarization of our political parties, but I may just be projecting...

And yet in the midst of all this disagreement; all this fighting, all this disparity, which Jesus freely acknowledges exists, Christ calls us to All Be One, in Communion with one another, no matter who we are or where we are on our life's journey.

In conjunction with the way we understand communion as a service of remembrance for the Christ we follow, the dictionary also defines communion as, "an association or fellowship," and "the act of sharing or holding in common."

But my favorite definition of communion is this one:

"an interchange or sharing of thoughts or emotions."

For it is only in this interchanging, this sharing, this communion with one another, no matter who we are or where we find ourselves, that the possibility of being AS ONE can come about.

If we hide from one another's pain or refuse to walk through that valley of the shadow of death with them;

if we aren't willing to work at finding out what's actually going on in someone else's world,;

if we concentrate too much on only our own experiences and no one else's we really don't have a chance of being united in faith or, for that matter, much of anything else.

In our Psalm for today, which Faith read so beautifully for us, we hear the lamentations of the exiled community of God's people after Babylon's destruction around 587 B.C.E.; and, as one of our greatest living theologians and biblical historians, Walter Brueggemann tells us, we hear reflected there, "the need of those who have been forcibly removed by the Babylonian imperial policies of relocation and yet...cling to their memory and hope for homecoming with an unshakable passion."

It's this "hope for homecoming" that struck me as I encountered this incredibly profound Psalm once again. Hearing the lamentations of the exiled Hebrews, we can understand this beautiful song of lament in its historical context, but I find that it is within its spiritual context where we can find God calling to us most powerfully in the present day and leading us forward from our own banks of sorrow and sighing.

For me, this Psalm speaks to our need to come home to God, it's a call to keep coming back to our center, and the call to be drawn together by the steadfast love of the One who is always calling us to return to our kin-dom Home.

As we hear the cries of the marginalized and the rejected so poetically spoken here, we are reminded of those times when each of us has felt his or her own form of rejection and marginalization. It is in these times that we truly connect with everyone else in the world and even throughout history. Through our willingness to hang up our lyres and our lives next to those forced to hang up theirs we come into solidarity with our brothers and sisters. Singing a song of peace and love for those who

feel they have lost their voice or have had it taken from them, we begin to join hearts and hands to heal and restore.

As you may remember if you have participated in other Sundays such as this, World Communion Sunday originated with the Presbyterian Church (USA) back in 1936, and was created as a call for all Christians - of whatever background - and of whatever theological tradition - to recollect that we are in fact one in Christ - and that the table we receive from, and the communion we share in is at God's table - not our own. As the World Council of Churches tells us, "The day has taken on new relevancy and depth of meaning in a world where globalization often has undermined peace and justice – and in a time when fear divides the peoples of God's earth. On this day we [come together to] celebrate our oneness in Christ, the Prince of Peace, in the midst of the world we are called to serve – a world ever more in need of peacemaking."

I've recently been reading a novel about a young man coming of age in Syria who travels to America to further his education and discover who he is in the midst of a very foreign land and culture. It brought home to me this great desire we all have to connect and how one of the simplest things we can do with those who speak a language different from ours and come from a different culture than ours is to take a little effort to learn how to say, "Hello" to them or even "Thank you," the universal phrases of gentility and respect.

These simple attempts can bridge a gap and make a connection in ways we may not think are possible – creating a kind of peace between those who may have thought their differences were too great to bridge.

How well I remember a few summers ago when I had the great privilege of traveling in France and had many people tell me that even my pathetic attempts at speaking their language gave me an "in" and softened their hearts; providing a welcome I may not have received otherwise. I know this is true, as I have experienced it many times myself in learning another's language and in them learning mine. The mere willingness to let go of our own ego, and our own way of doing something so that we can experience another's culture and customs means so much to the person with whom you are communing. This kind of openness and willingness allows our hearts to open and be filled with the universal spirit of connection we all share. It's not about giving up who you are or what you believe or how you do things, it's about seeing the infinite variety God created and delights in and celebrates every moment of every day and constantly invites us to do the same!

On this World Communion Sunday, I thought it might be a great idea to sing once again a song that connects us to many of the world's peoples who are saying "THANK YOU, GOD!" today... We sang this beautiful song of inclusion and connection last May and, amazingly enough, again last Sunday at our Worship in the Park experience.

*After the singing of "Malo! Malo! Thanks Be to God" by Jesse Manibusan, Pastor Shenk read the following poem:*

A Ritual to Read to Each Other

BY WILLIAM E. STAFFORD

If you don't know the kind of person I am  
and I don't know the kind of person you are  
a pattern that others made may prevail in the  
world  
and following the wrong god home we may miss  
our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,  
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break

sending with shouts the horrible errors of  
childhood  
storming out to play through the broken dike.

And as elephants parade holding each  
elephant's tail,  
but if one wanders the circus won't find the  
park,  
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty  
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something  
shadowy,  
a remote important region in all who talk:  
though we could fool each other, we should  
consider—  
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the  
dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,  
or a breaking line may discourage them back to  
sleep;  
the signals we give — yes or no, or maybe —  
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.