



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**Many Breads, One Body  
1 Corinthians 12:1-7  
Rev. Dr. John E. Manzo  
October 7, 2007  
World Communion Sunday**

Bread comes in many forms and many styles. Cultures have displayed, as we have seen, many, many different type of bread in many forms.

Archeologists have determined that people have been making and eating bread in its various forms for 8000 years. Bread became a staple because grain could be store through entire winters and bread became the food that kept many people fed and alive through the most difficult of times.

In the Bible bread becomes a centerpiece of the original Passover Meal, bread, as manna, keeps the Israelites fed and alive in the desert for forty years, and at the last supper Jesus takes bread, blesses it, shares it as his body, and commands us to do likewise.

On this day, the first Sunday in October, Christians world-wide intentionally gather around the table of the Lord, all celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Like the cultures around the world, there will be many breads and one body of Christ.

As I look at this day and as I reflect on the words of St. Paul in First Corinthians where Paul so marvelously speaks of many gifts and one Lord, I find several things about which are so significant.

My impression of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is that the letter is something of a primer on how to be a church. In chapters 12-14 Paul speaks about gifts given by God to God's people. Many people are familiar with Chapter 13 where St. Paul speaks about the gift of love---but the words in that chapter are part of a larger discussion about spiritual gifts. Paul's words today echo that. There are many gifts but always one God. Our closing hymn today, one of my favorites, "Let Talents and Tongues Employ," is a hymn that speaks of the multitude of gifts as well as gathering around the table of the Lord.

This day is a special day because all around the world, using many breads, the Christian Church comes together to gather around our mutual tables of the Lord. We have many gifts but we

always serve one God.

Holy Communion is often referred to as 'bread for the journey.' It is seen as a time of encouragement to people; a way that people are encouraged by God and a coming together when people encourage one another. This whole gift of Holy Communion seems to be married to encouragement.

People seem to do well when they are encouraged.

Years ago the University of Wisconsin had two particularly famous literary groups. One was called *The Stranglers*. This was a group that would come together and rip into each other. Their approach was like that of Simon Cowell on *American Idol*. No matter what you wrote, when you brought it to the group they would attempt to strangle you with yours and mercilessly dissect each person's work. Their hope was that this kind of harsh criticism would make people better writers.

There was another group on the campus called *The Wranglers*. When they would come together, their rule was that everything had to be supportive, affirming, and complimentary. When you read a manuscript, people would seek to find things that would good to say. Even if all you did was type well, you would be complimented by the group. Their hope was that this kind of encouragement would wrangle people into being better writers.

A study was done with several classes after twenty one years to find which group had produced the better writers. None of the Stranglers had any writing accomplishments where as many of the Wranglers had become quite successful.

It seemed that the Stranglers had promoted self doubt in people and destroyed their confidence whereas the Wranglers words of encouragement had gone a long way in making people better writers.

Encouragement is important. So is community.

The very words, Holy Communion, remind us that as we gather around the table of the Lord we are a community of believers coming together to do something profoundly holy. When we eat the bread together, we put aside all that separates us and come together in community. When we drink the wine we celebrate a common faith in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we learn about what being a community is from the most unlikely of sources.

A few years ago at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the start line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with relish to run the race to the finish and win. All that is, except, one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a few times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. They all turned around and went back--every one of them.

One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked to the finish line together. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes.

This story has been around for a long time and people still retell it. Why? Because deep down inside of us, we all know one thing. What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What matters in this life is helping others win even if it means slowing down and changing our course. What matters in this life is being one in Christ, and coming together to share as a community of believers.

And it is a community of believers with many gifts, from many cultures, all around the world.

We gather today and share many different kinds of bread. The bread we are using today reflects many cultures and ways of being. As we gather and break these many breads, we celebrate that we are one in Christ with all believers, as we, across the world, share many breads as one body.