

**Sermon: Making Love**  
**Scripture: Mark 14:22-25**  
**Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans**  
**Date: February 1, 2009**

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The pastor and scholar Eugene Peterson, the one who translated the Bible into The Message that we sometimes use said “In a kind of rough-and-ready sorting out, most words can be set in one of two piles: words for communication and words for communion. Words for communication,” he says “are used to buy stocks, sell cauliflower, direct traffic and teach algebra. Words for communion are used to tell stories, make love, nurture intimacy, develop trust.” (p. 191 from Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness)

It’s an interesting distinction, words of communication versus words of communion. Obviously we need both in our lives but I think it’s worth stopping and thinking about how much communication we do with one another and how much actual communing we do, for while communication is necessary for the health and functioning of our outer lives, communing is what is essential for the health of our spirit, our inner lives. We live in a hyper-communicative world these days wouldn’t you say? Our airwaves and cyberspace, our radios, televisions and computers, are all in the business of communicating. In our work places, on the slopes, in the gym, in our shopping, even in our busy family lives we do a lot of communicating with each other, hopefully, but how often do we encounter one another in moments of communing.

Sometimes our efforts to communicate with one another can be the problem when what is needed is communing. I ended my sermon last Sunday by sharing my experience at the Interfaith course down in Hartford where we had this evening exercise when the Muslim Imam and I shared with one another about our experiences of God. We were doing a lot of communicating throughout the week about our various beliefs but when we were asked to share about our experiences of God, I told my story and he told his, it was then that we moved to a whole new level. It was then that we weren’t just communicating but communing together. When we were merely communicating, I could stop and say “mmm? That’s interesting. I get that. I don’t get that. I agree with this, I don’t agree with that.” For sure there is value in that but it’s only activity of the mind for

the most part and such mental activity can only go so far at best and at worst can get us locked into conflict about who is right and wrong, whose is good and whose is bad, which is better and which is worse, cause our minds like to do that sort of thing, splicing and dicing, evaluating and judging, separating and distinguishing. But when he began to tell his story about taking his wife and mother on the Hajj to Mecca and his struggles to get there and his resistance to it because it cost a lot of money and he was having a hard time justifying the time and expense and then his joy in finally making it and the rapture that resulted, of course the slicing and dicing, judging and categorizing was the last thing I was thinking about, in fact I wasn't thinking at all I was feeling for we moved from communication to communing.

Even when we are talking about the inner things of the spirit, to tell somebody what we believe is usually an act of communicating but to tell someone what you believe, as Marcus Borg I think coined the term, to tell someone what you *be-love* and not just believe is to open the door to communing with another. To speak for myself there are times when I can feel threatened or defensive as I hear someone telling me what they believe because often what we believe is usually articulated over and against what someone else believes or doesn't believe, but when words are put together around what it is that we believe - when words arise from the heart, down here - we often enter a more deeply connected realm.

To return to Eugene Peterson's thoughts around this: He says "implicit in the communications industry is an enormous lie – that if we improve our communications we will improve our life. It has not happened," he says point blank, "and will not happen. Often when we find out what a person 'has to say' we like them less not more.... Words used as mere communication are debased words, the true gift of words is for communion: a part of myself enters a part of yourself. This requires the risk of revelation, it involves the courage of involvement." He goes on to say "at the center of communion there is sacrifice. Working at the center, we don't use words to give *something* but to give up a piece of ourselves." (p.192)

Speaking about what we love, what is true in us, sharing with another "what we live for", as the writer Thomas Merton put it, "and what keeps us from living for what we most want to live for," sharing that deep innerness of ourselves is not just an act of

communication but an offer of communion and an offer of communion is risky cause it inevitably makes you vulnerable. We cannot commune with one another unless we can be vulnerable with one another because communing is an act of sharing our vulnerability with another. This is most obvious in the communing act of love-making where we are most intimate with one another at exactly that moment and in that place where we are most vulnerable with one another. If we cannot fall into that vulnerability with the other, that submission to one another then what we *make* will inevitably be something less than love.

But we can ask the same question about how we relate to our spouses outside of the bedroom and our friends and our community members. Are we will to be vulnerable enough to do more than merely communicate with one another? Can we be vulnerable enough to enjoy communion with one another. And the great gift of being a part of the church is the opportunity that it affords us to commune with each other rather than fall into just communicating like we do so much of during the week and I our other circles. Let me tell you, it's amazing the stories that the people sitting beside you have to tell. Stories that will break your heart, stories that will amaze you, stories that will crack you up. Many of you know that don't you? But do we listen for them enough? Are we telling them enough? Are we communing with one another enough because that's what we are about here. Whatever else we do out there it might be just fine and necessary to have our focus be communication but in the church, our goal, our purpose, our drive, our great desire is for communion. The Book that we will start reading together next week, "The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace" is to a large extent a methodological approach how we commune with one another, a how-to for building deeper more intimate community.

The Lord's Supper, of course is the back-drop for everything I've been saying, it's the central example of what we are about. This is why we call what we do here at the table Communion and not Communication. We are not being communicated with by God through this sacrament, we are being invited into communion with God. We do not communicate with one another at this table, we commune with one another when we partake. But we are all fully dressed here and we aren't sharing intimate stories about ourselves and speaking about what we be-love here, so then where is the intimacy and

vulnerability necessary for true communion? Well, that's what Jesus provides for us in this sacrament. Jesus offers all the vulnerability, the giving of himself. This is my body given for you, this is my blood shed for you. He is the word made flesh, the word that God spoke, broken in his vulnerability and given so that we can receive a piece of the very vulnerable nature of God and in that way commune with God in our own vulnerability as well. We don't have to communicate what it is that we believe to come here. You don't have to communicate with me before receiving what is here, you only have to allow your vulnerability to meet the vulnerability of God and in that communion, ideally, we all make more love in this world.