

## “The Religion of Tomorrow: A Eucharist for the World”

---

October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017

Rev. Dr. R. Scott Colglazier  
Senior Minister  
Matthew 26:26-29

First Congregational Church  
Los Angeles, CA

*I want to welcome all of you to our service today, and I'm especially excited to begin a fall sermon series this morning titled – The Religion of Tomorrow. I think you're going to find the series interesting and challenging, and if I'm lucky, even a little inspirational.*

*But in all honesty, I'm doing this sermon series for myself, because we are living in the most dynamic period of change in human history, and I want to explore how faith could change, should change, might change at the beginning of the 21st century.*

*Now, I know that for many of us the one thing we count on NOT changing is our faith! After all, “God is the same yesterday, today and forever.” I get that. And I believe there is part of the Christian faith that does not change.*

*The idea that God is a God of love, and goodness and grace, that doesn't change. The idea that Jesus calls us again and again to love our neighbor as ourselves, that doesn't change. There's an eternal core at the heart of Christianity. And not just Christianity . . . I look at the great religions of the world and all of them have something deeply true at their core.*

*On the other hand, there is a part of faith that is always changing. Christianity was formed in the crucible of human history. The Christian faith didn't drop down from the sky, as if Jesus parachuted from the heavens. No. The Christian faith was shaped by real people and real events in real-time history.*

*And it's still being shaped by real people and real events. This is a good thing. This is a necessary thing. And it makes religion a living thing, not some museum piece, but a faith that breathes the oxygen of human experience. The deepest tenets of the Christian faith have always been shaped by the world, and I think the religion of tomorrow must embrace this evolutionary dimension of faith.*

*But embracing a dynamic faith is a choice – we can either resist it and try to preserve a certain historically-limited perspective on religion, locking in to a particular place or time in history, or we can be open to the evolving, progressive, developing nature of faith itself.*

*I personally think this is the problem with a fundamentalist, evangelical-style of Christianity – and I really do say this with all due respect – but they take the Christian faith and try to lock it into a particular time or place.*

*Where I grew up in the Midwest there was a group of Christians called the Amish. I don't doubt the sincerity of the Amish, but the Amish don't use electricity, and they don't use automobiles, and they don't use technology, and they still ride in horse-drawn buggies and read at night by candlelight. (Actually, now that I think about it, it doesn't sound too bad!)*

*Look, I'm not ridiculing Amish, but clearly they believe the Christian faith should be frozen into a particular time of cultural history.*

*For me at least, it is profoundly more exciting to think of the Christian faith as evolving, as a living experience that is always changing and developing. I think of the Christian faith as a bundle of divine energy, and energy keeps pushing outward, pushing and pushing and pushing, and moving us toward the real issues of our day.*

*Sometimes the Christian faith helps us critique some of the ideas of our day, ideas that are destructive and negative. For example, in the Congregational tradition, clergy railed against the evils of slavery in the early years of our country.*

*But at other times, the Christian faith helps us embrace the ideas of our age, ideas that have come of age and are completely consistent with the message of Christ.*

*Today we are celebrating World Communion Sunday. As you know, in the Christian faith, Communion or the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist has its roots in the Jewish faith. Jesus was celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem, and like all faithful Jews, he was remembering God's liberating presence in Jewish history.*

*But Jesus takes the Passover and changes it. Notice that. Religious tradition is dynamic. He doesn't replace it. He doesn't repudiate it. Instead, he pushes it forward into a realm of new meaning. And so he takes bread and says, "This is my body." And he takes the cup and says, "This is my blood." Now, I don't take that literally, nor should you.*

*But he is saying, "When you eat this bread and drink this wine, you will also think of me, you will think of the love of God embodied in my life, death and resurrection." And so Communion eventually became a centerpiece of the Christian faith – and today – over two thousand years later – churches are still breaking bread and sharing a cup around a table.*

*But what if the Eucharist could evolve again? I believe the table of the Eucharist, which literally means, the giving of thanks, should now morph into an iconic symbol of human love, dignity and acceptance of others.*

*Yes, we're thankful for Jesus, but have you ever thought that maybe what Jesus wants is for us to be thankful for one another? I mean, really, when I was a kid I used to take Communion at my home church, and I would close my eyes and try to think about Jesus dying on the cross!*

*I thought if I could just get a picture of Jesus in my head, then I would be taking Communion in a way that pleased God. Yet, now I imagine Jesus sitting behind me in a pew, tapping me on the shoulder, and whispering, "Hey buddy, I like you too, and I appreciate the attention, but I really want you to be thankful for the person sitting next to you. I want you to be thankful for that kid at school who can be a real jerk. I want you to be thankful for that teacher who was born in a bad mood. And I want you to be thankful for that black kid, that gay kid, that Asian kid, that kid with a disability that sits by himself day after day in the school cafeteria."*

*That's what this bread and wine is all about. It's about sharing a table and welcoming the stranger, and it's about all God's children having a place of dignity in the human family.*

*Isn't it just a little bit ironic that some churches, and they shall remain nameless this morning, but some churches use the Eucharist like a secret handshake, as if belonging to a God-Club. "If you are a member of our church and if you believe as we believe and if you were baptized the way we baptize, then you are welcome to take Holy Communion; and if not, I'm sorry but you're not welcome!"*

*I'm not exaggerating. This happens every Sunday in churches. And its exclusion! And its judgment! And as far as I'm concerned, there's nothing holy with this kind of Communion. The point of Communion is not to exclude; the point of Communion is to include, not on the basis of a common religious belief, but because as a faith community we're trying to love others the way Jesus taught us to love.*

*As long as Christianity is about getting people to agree with our beliefs, then Christianity will continue to divide the world, as will other religions trying to do the very same thing. But if we see that the point of religion is to bring people together because of the love and compassion we offer our fellow human beings, then we at least have a chance to redeem the human family, and redeeming the human family should be at the center of the religion of tomorrow.*

*And by the way, given that last week was one of the weirdest weeks ever in pro sports, I would just highlight that taking a knee during the National Anthem, started by Colin Kaepernick, over a year ago, was not about disrespecting the country or the flag or the military or anything like that.*

*I love our country and I would never want to disrespect the flag. I grew up in a deeply patriotic family and I'm still patriotic! But this was simply a proud, talented, thoughtful, black athlete trying to say that African Americans are still being marginalized and threatened by the power of racism in our country. That's it.*

*Now, you can agree or disagree over how he chose to protest. I understand that. And you can disagree with NFL players protesting before a game. If you don't like it, I get that. But friends, this is the United States of America, and people are free to have their opinions and people are free to express their thoughts.*

*But why did it all start? It started because he was trying to say that everyone, yes, everyone, has a right to a place of dignity and respect at the American table. Holy Communion is about saying that everyone, everyone has a place at the table of God.*

*Let me take you back to another day and another sport. October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003. The Chicago Cubs were playing a home game in Wrigley Field, and they were on the verge of making the postseason playoffs. It had been forever since the Cubs had made it to the playoffs.*

*A towering foul ball was hit, and the outfielder for the Cubs ran toward the stands to catch it. He was running. The fans were standing. He was running. The fans were cheering. All he needed to do was catch the ball and the Cubs would win.*

*The ball came close to the first row of seats in the leftfield stands, and just as the Cub's outfielder reached out his glove, a fan reached up too, it happens every single day in stadiums all over the country, it's one of the great things about baseball, you might catch a foul ball, but the fan reached up and grabbed the ball. The outfielder missed it. The Cubs lost. Their hopes for a World Series title were over.*

*The fans went nuts. And that young man who got the ball, but lost the game for the Cubs, was booed and vilified. His name was Steve Bartman. A lifelong Cubs fan. Security had to escort him out of the stadium. He became the most hated figure in the city of Chicago, and trust me, if you know Chicago, that's saying something.*

*For 14 years this man has lived under the radar screen. Depressed. Ridiculed. Unable to ever return to Wrigley Field to see his beloved Cubs. Had the Cubs rallied to win that game and go to the World Series, perhaps all would have been forgotten.*

*But they didn't rally. They lost that infamous game. And so the city of Chicago blamed this man – Steve Bartman – for over a decade. If there's such a thing as the Table of the Cubs, not only was he excluded from it, he wasn't even allowed to get within a hundred miles of it.*

*That was 14 years ago. That's a long time to live in a marginalized, miserable hell. But last October a miracle happened. The Loveable Losers, the Chicago Cubs, won the World Series! The Cubs celebrated in a hundred different ways, but one way they celebrated is that they found Steve Bartman.*

*The owners of the Cubs invited him to the front office. And that afternoon they presented Steve Bartman with his very own, completely authentic, just-like-the-players-received, World Series ring. NPR commentator Scott Simon put it like this in his new book.*

*He said, "I was as proud of the Cubs for giving Steve Bartman a ring, as I was for them winning the World Series. Maybe prouder . . . just to put their arms around the guy and say, 'It could have been any of us; it just happened to be you. And we're really sorry for what happened.'"*

*You know what . . . there's a little bit of Steve Bartman in all of us . . . we want to be accepted and all we want is for a few people to love us and welcome us to the table of the human family. When that happens . . . it is always a Holy Communion. We want it . . . and God calls us to give it to others. That's the Eucharist of Tomorrow. Friends, I love you all. Let's love one another. Amen.*