

I want to begin with a story, one I may even have told here before many years ago. It's about mistaken assumptions of the kind we all make, and I hope it's a good lead-in to reflecting on where we are after this election and how Christianity might be of help. With the story, I start where I think we must, at home, here in our familiar neighborhood, with a situation in which any of us could find ourself. It's a true story.

A woman walked into what used to be Bread and Chocolate on the Hill at 7th and PA Ave. She was tired after a long day's work, and was thinking to treat herself to a snack and a brief rest before heading home to more responsibilities.

She ordered a cappuccino, and spotting some large yummy looking chocolate chip cookies, she bought one of those too. She found a table and sat down, pulling out her phone to check e-mail. Soon after, a man came and sat down across from her at the table - he was black and looked perhaps homeless, shabbily dressed and a bit unkempt, but he offered a smile. Then he reached for the cookie on the table and helped himself to a bite, breaking it off. The woman was surprised, but felt she should be generous, and tolerant, so she smiled back and helped herself to a bite of the cookie as well. And so they continued, taking turns, until the cookie was gone. The woman felt proud of this nice sharing moment with the stranger.

Then the woman got up, gathered her things and left the shop, reaching as she did into her handbag for her keys as she started for home. And there, in the handbag, was the cookie she had bought, untouched.

So, a small thing, just a misunderstanding about a cookie, but clearly rooted in assumptions the woman had about the man who joined her.

This story convicts me when I'm tempted to believe I'm pretty good, pretty self-aware when it comes to biases, and that my mostly liberal friends are too. It reminds me of all the baggage we do carry around about others who are different from us. And it makes me want to get better about not acting on such biases, makes me want our country not to be still so in the grip of them.

The presidential election took most of us by surprise, and as we gingerly pick at the scabs that begin to cover our wounds, we have been forced to realize that there is a lot we don't know about a huge portion of our electorate, a lot we assume about them. We have talked about demographics but not really understood the lives of 59 million fellow citizens who think our country is so broken, that radical, even if threatening, change is called for. My assumptions about how this election would end were proven wrong. And I realize that we are not all of one mind, even here in this room, about the election, not to mention our families and friends - we have not all voted the same way, and our reactions, no matter how we voted, are quite various. I speak

only for myself, perhaps making even here, some false assumptions about where many of us may be.

Since the election, I have been living with grief and rage, wandering around in the sad, bleak landscape of defeated hopes and nightmare fears. I have cried; I have spat out every profanity in the book, I have had the same conversations over and over with so many people, all of us echoing each other in our desire to get beyond this desolation, at the same time all of us blaming and claiming the reasons and causes for Trump's election. I've been ranting about how the electoral college ought to be abolished and about how the media blew it and about Comey's colossal blunder. As if I really know...and I don't; none of us knows why, exactly, this happened. And there are many who are elated, relieved, hopeful for a new and better day...how can we know now about that? We must wait, and watch. And for me, that is really hard.

And so I have been trying to be constructive, to be open and to let our new president lead, as Secretary Clinton so generously urged in her concession speech. I'm trying to understand what life in our country has been like for those who have essentially voted for a revolution. To that end, I've been reading the just published memoir by J.D. Vance - Hillbilly Elegy - the story of a Yale Law School graduate's chaotic upbringing in the hollows of Appalachian Kentucky and in a poor town in Ohio. I want to understand, from someone who has lived it, the rage and disaffection of so many white working poor who feel our country has abandoned them.

In my better hours of trying to calm myself down, trying to be hopeful and positive in how I live in this world, I also ask myself about my Christianity. What is it that we do here that can chip away at the barriers among us, that can help us shape a better, fairer world? How can we alleviate our helplessness with effective action? A neighbor emails that she is giving \$10 very single day to some organization that she thinks will especially need it as the new administration pushes forward with its agenda. She says this cheers her up, gets her through the day, though she also notes it is probably unsustainable. Odd, how giving, of time and money, can help when we feel taken from. And perhaps the many outreach opportunities that this and other churches offer can help in the same way.

But I need more than just outreach projects and encouragement. I have described myself since the election as dispirited, and I mean that literally - dis-spirited. I need spiritual support - an underlying way of understanding the world that helps me to act loving to my neighbors - all of them, even those who seem obnoxious. I need to find some way to feel willingly a part of the whole roiling, conflicted, yearning mass of our collective humanity - the humanity that the famous singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen so loved and celebrated. Cohen once said: "I wanted to stand with those who clearly see G-d's holy broken world for what it is, and still find the courage or the heart to praise it. You don't always get what you want. You're not always up for the challenge." I'm certainly not feeling very up to it these days - and yet, I want to love God, I want to believe in the

goodness of people and of our country, and I want to live in hope. How can I get back to Hallelujah?

Well, at the heart of our worship is the ancient sacrament of communion, sharing bread and wine at the altar, blessed as living symbols of Christ's body and blood. Body and blood - this is it - this is what we all are, right? Body and blood - is that perhaps the only thing common to all human beings? No matter what, no matter how different, we all live in bodies. Each body is unique, yet because of them, we are also, all one.

The first reading by the poet David Whyte gets at the uniqueness. He reminds us that our bodies are the only place we can really live, the only place where we can know what is true for us, only one life we can call our own.

But then, all the other bodies, everyone else. The ones we love and know, the ones we respect and care about, the ones we don't know, don't love, don't understand. We are all bodies, longing somehow for connections and yet so estranged, so divided - must we always be just many, or can we ever celebrate ourselves as one? Can we do that around this altar - can this be more than a friendly circle; can it point beyond and mean more?

In today's gospel, when Jesus describes himself - his own body as the bread of life - given for all, given to raise everyone, everyone up - we get an earthy, embodied love; we get God's body finding a home in ours. "Though we are many, we are one, for we all share the one bread." We say

or sing these words automatically, but they beckon us to something that can save us. This ancient sacrament of communion can speak to us profoundly in these days when we so much need to come together despite all that separates us.

There is real power in the Eucharist, but not in the quaint beliefs surrounding it during my childhood. Communion used to be seen as a magical business guaranteeing some kind of heavenly benefits, a sin offering in order to obtain a state of grace, a matter of groveling, not worthy to gather up the crumbs under God's table! And thankfully, wafers are out in more and more places - I'm reminded of a young woman from my former parish where we used real bread who told me that on their vacation they went to church and received wafers at the altar. Later at home, when she was doing the laundry, she found a wafer in the pocket of her 4 year old's shorts - he told her he had no idea it was something to eat!

But seriously, how can communion help us? How can it come alive?

Roman Catholic Liturgist Gabe Huck has said:

“The Eucharist can become a kind of product created for individual spiritual customers. [But] It's supposed to have a transforming effect on us so that we leave church determined to do something. We should be seeing the world in a different way and have different priorities because of the Eucharist. It should affect what we do with our time,

how we spend our money, how we look for a job, how we vote.”

For this to happen, every once in a while, at least, it might be worth it to dramatically change the actual words of the Eucharist. We do this in various fairly tame ways here at St. Mark’s, and we do, as in recent weeks, sometimes return to the familiar cadences of the Prayer Book. But I think we need to push further. This last Sunday before Advent, is generally celebrated as Christ the King Sunday. Usually all the hymns are like the first one we sang - all about a royal Jesus enthroned on high, with scepter and crown, redeeming us with his precious blood. We need a different way of thinking about what this body of Christ that we share in communion actually means.

So here is, to my mind, one of the most radical Eucharistic prayers I’ve ever come across, and we’ll use it later on at the altar. (variant for 9 am) It’s by Jim Burklo, Associate Dean of Religious Life at the University of Southern California.

Here’s the prayer:

“This is my body.”

by [Jim Burklo](#)

This body knows what it is like to have a nice house and a good job

It knows what it is like to feel uneasy about being wealthy

**And it knows what it is like to be lonely, a stranger
It knows what it is like to live under a bush in a
city park**

**It knows what it is like to try to sleep in a rain-
soaked sleeping bag**

**This body knows what it is like to sit politely in
meetings**

And it knows how to howl in protest at injustice

**It knows what it is like to eat right and exercise
often**

**And it knows it is like to wake up in the morning
after drinking a fifth of vodka**

**This body knows what it is like to do a triple flip
on the bars of a jungle gym**

**And what it is like to lie paralyzed in a hospital bed
for five years**

This body knows what it is like to make love

And to make war

**This body knows what it is like to be shunned
because of the way it looks**

And to be wanted because of the way it looks

**This body knows what it is like to be afraid even of
being afraid**

And it knows what it is like to delight in taking crazy chances

This body knows what it is like to be treated like any body instead of like a some body.

“This is my body.”

Take it in, take it on: receive the body of Christ.

I love it that Burklo connects the body of Christ to all bodies - to our bodies, to the whole range of human experience - so different from placing Christ's body in a separate holy realm, remote in time and place. Using our bodies, caring for them, enjoying them and offering the minds and hearts that inhabit them to care for others is, I believe our best response to God.

And in these days, when we struggle so mightily, or maybe not mightily enough, to understand and accept differences, to widen our circles of neighbors and move beyond our biases, perhaps this sacrament of shared bodily life can help. Perhaps it might prompt us to think about how we embody God's love in our being, our bodies. Communion isn't about worshiping Jesus; it's about being what he was, a human being showing God's love in the world - being Jesus in the world, if you will. It's a high calling, a sacred human calling, and now is no better time to respond. And my hope is that Church, this community we call the Body of Christ, can indeed help.

Amen.

