

In This Together
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29
Mark 9:38-41
October 1, 2006
World Communion Sunday

Gracious God, to all who have hunger, give bread. To all who have bread, give a hunger for justice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Isabelle (a thirteen year old) and I spent some quality time together last Sunday night. We watched a movie that premiered on the Disney Channel earlier this year. The name of this movie is *High School Musical*. If you have grandchildren or nieces and nephews in upper elementary school or in middle school, probably most of them could sing half the songs on the soundtrack of *High School Musical*. When this movie debuted on the Disney Channel, the soundtrack started flying off the shelves. It's one of those popular culture things that makes tons of money while flying pretty low on the radar unless you have children who are at the right age to bring it into your world. I heard about *High School Musical* for the first time when I went to camp last summer because the worship team based their skits on the movie. I wanted to know what the hype was all about, so I bought the movie and watched it with Isabelle.

Disney is really good most of the time about inserting racial balance into their movies so the stars of the show feature a white guy, a Hispanic girl, another white guy but he's pretty obviously supposed to be gay, another white girl, and two African-Americans. So, the high school reflects an integrated racial balance, but this Disney high school is stratified by clichés according to what you do. If you play basketball, you can't sing in the musical. If you sing in the musical, you make sure you get the lead parts of the musical because it's all you do. If you're smart, you do the smart kid thing and don't do anything else. So when Troy, the school's star basketball player, and Gabriella, the brainiac, dare to try out for the high school musical, the school goes bonkers because they can't handle any disruption in the rigid social structure. In fact, in pure Disney style, the entire cafeteria erupts into complete disarray with a song and dance number when Troy and Gabriella challenge the caste system. Once other people find out that a jock and a smart person also want to sing, they feel free to let loose of their unconventional aspirations. For example, one of Troy's basketball teammates confesses that he likes to bake and is fixated with crème brulee. Another brainiac looks up from her books and talks about how much she likes to dance and a skater dude announces to his crowd that he plays the cello. As each of these confessions break, the entire time the rest of the school urges them to stick in the status quo.

One thing leads to another. First the rival groups work together to break up Troy and Gabriella, but once they have the big fight, their friends try to bring them back together. In order to bring them back together, the brainiacs have to cooperate with the basketball team as well with the musical theater folks. It's a Disney movie so everything works out in the end: Troy wins his ballgame, Gabriella wins her High IQ Bowl, they both win the lead parts in the school play, and the entire school is united by being "Wildcats" rather than being different groups within the school. They conclude with a massive song and dance number in the gym in which they sing over and over again: "We're all in this together." The movie ends with everyone unified, having fun together, and with all the social barriers broken down.

If life was only as simple as a Disney movie....

Our scriptures tell us two stories which more accurately reflect real life than a Disney movie. When Moses and the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, God supplied them with manna- the bread of heaven- to eat during their wanderings. The children of Israel got sick of their meals without variety so they romanticized the past.

If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic, but now our strength is dried up and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at!

Their whine sounds fresh in my ears every time I hear this scripture. How quickly we move from the freshness of liberation to complaint after complaint about the burdens of the here and now. The Israelites conveniently forgot their labors and the cruelty of their bondage and they complained against God and they complained against Moses. Both God and Moses got mad about the situation. Sometimes during the wilderness sojourn Moses interceded against God's wrath, but in this story God interceded on Moses' behalf because Moses was at the end of his rope. Couldn't take it any more. "Why have you treated your servant so badly?" I can guarantee you that 99 out of 100 pastors giggle whenever we read this

scripture because we understand his comment. "Why have you treated your servant so badly?" So God provided Moses with some help. The Lord redistributed Moses' spirit among 70 elders from the tribes. These elders prophesied. This spiritual redistribution took some of the load off Moses because he couldn't shoulder the responsibilities all on his own. The part about this scripture today that gives us the most pause, however, is the fact that two of these elders prophesied although they had not been convened as the others who were designated to prophecy. They received the Holy Spirit as well as the others who were in the tent because they were on a high spiritual level. Joshua, usually a level headed person, pressed for Moses to stop these two from prophesying since he didn't think that they qualified because they weren't part of the specially designated group who gathered in the tent. Moses, who had been doing the leadership thing a lot longer than Joshua at that point, replied with the wisdom "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets...."

A very similar situation occurs in the New Testament. A man exorcised demons on Jesus' name, but the disciples tried to stop him because he wasn't "one of them." Jesus said "If we're working together, then we're not enemies. Even if he's not one of us in the conventional sense, he's one of us insofar as the purpose and integrity of his mission. Don't stop him."

Human nature reveals its ugly, exclusive head in Joshua and in the disciples. Joshua and the disciples want to exclude people because they don't fit the bill according to their preconceived standards. "You weren't in the tent; you shouldn't prophesy." "You're not a disciple; you shouldn't exorcise demons." Never mind that these people are doing good things. The only thing that mattered in Joshua and the disciples' minds are who belongs according to carefully defined standards and who doesn't belong because they don't meet the perceived, established, conventional order of things.

I think about how the world looks from outer space all the time. I think how we're on this big blue and green orb floating in the middle of space. I think about how impressive the land mass and how beautiful the blue water. I think about how there are no lines on this planet at all. No boundaries demarcating north, south, east, west. No lines running horizontal or vertical. No names affixed to land masses. No visible borders. No territories. No nations. No divisions. That's how God created the world - an impressive land mass and beautiful blue water and no boundaries defining people inside and keeping others out.

We are so used to social stratifications that we forget how we're made. We're made as one people, God's people, placed on this earth to provide for each other, to sustain the civilization, and to worship the Creator who gave us life in the first place. We're not Amazons or Americans in God's eyes. We're just people, sheep of God's green pasture. We're all loved. We're all cherished. We're all admonished when we sin. We're all in this together because of who created us and because we all ultimately ride this same ship called earth. We are passengers, fellow sojourners, in this life. We're called to name each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. If we can't do that, we can at least recognize the humanity of every single person alive and honor that humanity that is God-given inside them.

Today of all days in the year, we set aside time to concentrate on the fact that God created us with equal love. From that, very smart human beings finally figured out that God's equal love imbued us with equal dignity and with equal rights. It is taking us forever to figure out how to govern these equal rights, but it's a holy governance when we strive to recognize and provide for that equality among all of God's children. That's why at night we don't just pray for children who are blood relatives or our friends' children or even just for our children in this church. Although we do pray for our family, our friends' children, and for the children within this church, we pray for all children. It's not just OK that our children are fed and educated and that's where our aspirations and responsibilities begin and end. It's all children. Children in shantytowns of Soweto. Children in war torn Lebanon. Children in Harlem. Children in rural Appalachia. Children in sweat shops in China. Children being bombed or kidnapped or traumatized by the prevalence of mutilated bodies in their streets of Baghdad. Children orphaned by AIDS. Children living in a dump in Mexico. Street children trying to just survive in Brazil. Abused children anywhere. Uneducated children anywhere. Homeless children anywhere. Hungry children everywhere. God's children. All of God's children.

It's so easy to believe the exclusive myths that infiltrate our culture. There's not enough food. They're lazy. Why can't they stop having more children? That's just their culture. The spiritually righteous only come in this package. It's just business. All of these are myths, falsehoods, deceptions, and misdirections of a culture that doesn't fear God and doesn't respect humanity like it should. We're all in this together. God's greatest sign of hope to us before the cross existed was the rainbow. All colors of the visible spectrum are present in the rainbow because, quite simply, God takes delight in diversity.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I know how tempting it is to feel estranged from this world. I

know how tempting it is to sequester one's self, to insulate one's self from the challenges of the diversity of this world. I know how tempting it is to believe that we're each in this world for such a short time that the best we can do is to provide for me and mine. But this is not God's way. Diversity, pluralism, multiculturalism, internationalism, ecumenicism, inter-religious dialogue- these can be hard, hard ideals. They bring challenges. In a world where inter-racial dating can still break up a family, we seem hard pressed to figure out what we have in common with warring factions of Sunis vs. Shiites in Iraq. But that's our world. It's complicated. It's diverse. We have a tendency to be warring with each other, pronouncing our differences, and living in as much insularity from one another as we can afford. Our way isn't God's way. The wars, the racism, the xenophobia, the ethnic conflict, the homophobia, the religious snobbery, the economic elitism, education gaps, technological gaps, medical disparities, the difference between access to clean water and not having clean water... these aren't God's ways. This is our human mess that we've created.

Today we try to keep our focus for just a few minutes to concentrate on God's way. God's way is that we're on this orb together. This orb doesn't have any lines of boundaries or territories. This orb doesn't have any distinction between black or white, dark brown, or Nordic light. This orb is God's world populated by all of God's children, equally loved and equally endowed with potential and human dignity. We're all in this together. That's the way God intended- not just this Sunday of world communion. Not just this Sunday when we walk for those who are hungry. But everyday. When we see a person of color in the car next to ours. When we hear another language being spoken. When we hear reports of violence and murder in Baghdad. When we see an interracial couple holding hands. When we see a child on television or in the grocery store and the child just looks ragged. We are all God's children. We are all in this together. May we do a better job in our spiritual lives and in our real lives making this world interact with each other and to love each other like God intended.

Maybe just one day, all of the billions of us on this globe will get this balance just right for a minute. Or maybe only twenty something seconds. Maybe, just maybe right at that time, peace will break out and all of us will be singing and dancing in that moment in which all are truly welcome, and loved, and healthy. Amen.