

**August 16<sup>th</sup> 2009**  
**1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14; John 6:51-58**  
***Crackers and Cola***

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I start my ministry in the spring of 1980 as an unordained youth pastor in northern New England. With a dozen adolescents, we mix fun, fellowship and activities. I struggle to engage my youth in serious discussions about God and faith; that feels like a losing battle. I learn that youth groups thrive on food, usually lots of carbohydrates and sugar—as if they did not have enough energy. Pizza and cola are favourites foods-- foods? More than once I return to the church's youth room on a Monday morning amazed at the food bits and sticky spots littered across the linoleum, not carpeted, floor.

My last meeting with this youth group before I depart for my seminary studies in distant Chicago is in late September, 1980. We decide to climb Mount Monadnock in southern New Hampshire. Anyone here climbed Mt. Monadnock? They say it is the most climbed mountain in the world.

Monadnock, standing alone, towering over the fields and forests of northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. But in the realm of the world's great mountains, Monadnock is just a pimple. It rises only two thousand feet from the base to the peak. Still, for the youngsters of my youth group, the climb is an expedition. Summitting Monadnock leaves them breathless with the exertions and, AND with the beautiful fiery views of the hardwood trees flaming colours in the autumn air-- New England's glorious fall foliage.

Taking in the views and catching our breaths, we sit in a circle. Eager hands open bulging backpacks, and bring out BIG bags of chips, a huge box of Chees-Its, and gallons of cola. One of the older girls opens chips and crackers and passes them around. One of the younger boys unscrews the top of a two-quart bottle of coke. He pours while I hold paper cups and pass them around.

Sitting in silence, munching crackers and sipping cola, another kid looks around our circle and she says something astonishing. Momentarily stunned by her words, my mind wonders: “Can what she says be true?”

As Jennifer read from John's gospel this morning, we hear Jesus say: “I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” More than one person with whom I have discussed this passage has said to me, “Ew! That sounds just like... *canibalism!*” Even scripturally, we have those gathered around Jesus asking, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” A reasonable question.

We understand...Jesus is speaking symbolically. Clearly the meal we ritually use to celebrate the life, leadership and love of Jesus, clearly communion is symbolic. But what does it symbolize? To what, beyond itself, does communion point?

The early church, those first followers of Jesus, suffer terribly for their beliefs symbolized in communion. These followers of the Way present a great threat to the powers that ruled and controlled society.

Open your eyes. See deeper. See anew, invites Jesus. Jesus shreds Caesar's claim to be god. And with that claim in tatters, Jesus shreds Caesar's authority. Not Caesar, but God rules all; God creates all; God loves all.

“Render unto God what is God's and unto Caesar what is Caesar's,” Jesus instructs. That teaching alone would justify Jesus' crucifixion.

“Open your eyes. See deeper. See anew,” invites Jesus. For the religious elite--the priests, scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees, Jesus shreds their authority. They do not determine who is in and who is out. The social barriers constructed by their rules and laws are torn down by Jesus. A clean, kosher few are not the only ones who receive God's love. Like a parent whose heart longs for the return of an errant child, God searches out the lost and wayward children. The elect, the chosen must share God's blessing and grace with the un-elect and the rejected. The gospels echo with the shouts of the sanctimonious horrified by Jesus' teachings, “Blasphemy! Who is he to forgive sins? Who is he to consort with tax collectors, harlots, lepers, sinners and Samaritans? Who is he to touch the untouchables? Gather the stones! Kill him!”

Open your eyes. See deeper. See anew. Freed from conventional ways of seeing the world and people around us, we live out the love God has for us. We remember God is God. God holds us in warm, loving hands. Our love extended to others, especially the marginalized, poor and oppressed, extends God's love. We live out one of the Phoenix Affirmations as Progressive Christians, To stand as Jesus does, with the outcast and oppressed, with the denigrated and afflicted, seeking justice with OR WITHOUT the support of others. And our lives are enriched by the experience. We fill our lives with meaning beyond ourselves. As community, as the body of Christ, we walk together with God's guidance. Open your eyes. See deeper. See anew. *Pause...*

Back on the summit of Mount Monadnock, sitting in silence, munching crackers and sipping cola, a kid looks around our circle and she says something astonishing. Momentarily stunned by her words, my mind wonders: “Can what she says be true?” Working with youth, sometimes I am lulled into thinking that nothing important will come from them. Or that they lack experience. Or that they lack wisdom and maturity. This fourteen year old girl, looks around the circle on that mountain top as we share the elements of crackers and cola and she says, “This is just like communion!”

My on-the-way-to-ordination mind wonders, “Can what she says be true?” My heart says, “What she says is true.”

I speak of this experience with a conference minister, someone in authority with the church. He is emphatic, “Crackers and cola is NOT communion.”

Yeah, I know what he means. If he could see my youth group most meetings, with crackers and coke... Naw, that's not communion. But somehow, time, space, place

and community have transformed those same elements into a Holy Meal. I wonder if that minister feels threatened. Does he feel his authority as a pastor stripped from him, shredded, because the gathered community created communion, and not someone ordained like him?

Open your eyes. See deeper. See anew.

Let us celebrate that, as another of the Phoenix Affirmations of Progressive Christianity upholds, God's spirit is reflected in all God's creation, including the sacred and the secular. That sometimes, in the most mundane and common elements God's presence, Christ's love are made known to us.

Open your eyes. See deeper. See anew.

Let us pray. God, help us open our eyes, see deeper and see anew. Grant us eyes to see your presence in the world around us, sacred and secular. Grant us hearts to look deeper and see other powers calling out for our allegiance for what they are. Grant us the willingness to see anew, even when that leads to a perception of the truth held by few others. Thank you for Jesus, whose life and witness provide the living bread in our lives. Amen.