Today we begin a new month of October! You know what that means? It means not only do we get cooler autumn weather but also the beauty of the fall foliage is about to take shape. It also means that the baseball post-season is about to begin. As a matter of fact, October is a unique month when it comes to sports. You see, it is the only month of the entire year when all four major professional sports here in America are being played. We’ve got baseball, football, hockey and basketball all being played at the same time.

Although some of us might have been “retired” from our competitive playing days, many of us still enjoy following and cheering for our favorite teams from the stands or on our couch in front of the TV. We become spectators cheering on our teams from the sideline.

Unfortunately, in recent weeks, the world of sports has turned into a political battlefield among the politicians, players, ownership, as well as the fans, over the on-going protests on racial inequality and social injustice of our time in this country. What goes on the field became secondary comparing to what took place on the sideline and off the field.

Even among the churches, we too have often found ourselves being caught in the midst of social and political controversies and debates. Over the years, the church has been challenged to take a stance while seeking guidance and obedience spiritually in accordance to God’s will. We strive to maintain our social responsibilities with the real world that we live as “ambassadors” for Christ.

However, the church often finds ourselves standing on the sideline, at the edge of our seats, not sure of what we CAN or what’s the right thing to do when it comes to meeting the needs and concerns of others as we pray for God’s discernment and wisdom.

Since the days of the early church, the gathered faith community has constantly been caught in the web of political, as well as theological controversies. Christians had been targeted for persecutions and sent into exile because they stood up and held firm to what they believed in. They refused to worship other forms of idols, ideologies, and stand up for the injustice of power and oppressed.

Throughout history, the church (including the *Presbyterian Church*) has found itself being called to take a stand upon various issues of our time and in our society. Even our very own esteemed former pastor – the Rev. Dr. David Corey was famously known for his social activism while standing up and advocating for the rights of the many Native Americans (the Mohawk Indians) who came mostly from Northern New York State and Quebec, Canada to work as ironworkers building the infrastructure of New York City in the 1930’s. He learned their native language, translated hymns into the Mohawk-Oneida dialect, while ministering to the Mohawk people’s spiritual, emotional, and physical needs at the same time. In addition to the Mohawk native American, Dr. Cory also helped provide a voice among the voiceless including many early immigrants who came to seek a better life here in America back in the 20’s and 30’s. To Dr. Corey, to be involved with the issues of society in its relevant time, was a fulfillment of one’s personal calling from God. He not only coach on the sideline, but he also played on the field reaching out to those who are oppressed and neglected.

Even if we are simply being spectators along the sideline. We can still choose to take a stand by the way we live our lives, how we interact with others (both in person or across social media) or by exercising our civic duty when we vote. How we live our lives matters and bears witness to our personal convictions and affirms our allegiance to our sovereign God.

As we read earlier through his letter to the church in Philippi, the Apostle Paul reminded us of how we ought to model our lives based on the humility as exemplified by Christ, while seeking to maintain the unity of the body in the midst of our diversities and differences. The early church, as you know, was just as polarized and divisive as it is today. By the miracle and the grace of God, the early church was brought in together despite their many traditions and cultures that they follow, along with various customs and rituals of how they worship and practice their faith. All of a sudden, they found themselves in a great challenge learning how to cope and co-exist with one another. They weren’t quite sure of how they should interact with one another. **Can the body of Christ still be edified and glorified with One common mission, with One mind, through One faith, One Lord, and One baptism?** This is the core of Paul’s gospel to the early church, as they wrestled and explored their new identity in Christ by learning what it means to be a called community with a common faith, mission, and purpose.

Paul repeatedly appealed to the Philippians for unity as he challenged them to “***be of the same mind, have the same love, and be in full accord, and of one mind together****.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* But wait, there was more. He also urged them to “***do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Look not to your own self-interests, but to the interests of others.****”[[2]](#footnote-2)* This was the harder-part.

Paul illustrated the ultimate self-giving act of Christ, who came to be among humankind, in the form of a slave (or a servant). He emptied Himself to a point of “nothingness” by taking on all the shame and humiliation upon the cross. He paid the ultimate debt of our sins on our behalf. Christ didn’t have to do all of this but he did it simply out of God’s outpouring love and his obedience to his Father. It was his calling and his mission. Only he could do this, no one else!

Jesus could’ve easily stood on the sideline and watched us battle it out on the field, but he didn’t. He chose to engage himself into our place in the trenches and be fully participating on our behalves on the playing field. He was hitting the sacrifice fly and laying down the sacrifice bunt while bringing the runners home for the Kingdom of God.

In the same way, Christ has also challenged each of us here today to be pro-actively involved with the community and those around us, if not physically, at least prayerfully. Through our prayers, donations, or volunteer opportunities to those who might be in needs. We do it, not because we think highly of ourselves or we are better than the others. We do this because that’s what Christ exemplified for us through his humility and servanthood. This is our command, in order to building up the body of Christ and the community around us.

In this spiritually and morally challenging times, we shall look no other than Christ, who served as the ultimate mediator and reconciler of this world. Christ came in the midst of human desperation and hopelessness. Even among believers of other faiths (or non-faith at all), we still find ourselves living alongside with others bearing witness to those who may look differently, dress differently, think differently, or even behave differently from us as well. Christ loved and died for them also!

On this *World Communion Sunday*, we stand united in the testament of our common faith in Jesus Christ, across this global community. Through the unity of the Holy Spirit, we come to recognize and celebrate our unique differences and orders of how we are ever so inter-dependent upon one another. **The bread that we will break is the same bread that Christ has broken for us. The cup that we will drink is the same cup that Christ has poured-out for us**….as a sign of the unity of faith and commitment of hope in this fractured society and broken world that we live today.

There have been one too many incidents of violence and injustice, one too many innocent bystander being shot, children being stabbed and bullied in the school, or randomly drive-by shooting or hit-and-run. There have been too much bureaucratic social abandonment, hopelessness, despairs, and systemic neglects by those in power and authority, in the wake of natural and human-caused disasters all around us.

As the people desperately cry out “*Hosanna, Hosanna! Lord, Save Us!”*, we echo their cry and proclaim to the God whom we exalt.[[3]](#footnote-3)  Let us lay aside our differences across our boundaries of race, culture, tradition, denomination, or even petty theological interpretation difference. But instead, we shall focus upon the true saving grace of our LORD and Savior – Jesus Christ, to whom every knee should bend and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This table has been set out before us to remind us that **we are here NOT to be served but to serve others. We are here NOT to proclaim we are more righteous or worthier than the others.** But instead, this table reminds us that we are a people in need of God’s mercy. Let us feast on God’s abundance of blessings of what God has prepared for us to share with others.

**This is not OUR table, but the LORD’s.** For Christ has extended his invitation to us ALL who profess their faith in Him. This table will always be a place for inclusion and welcome among strangers and friends. There will always been room for more.

**Friends, we may be “On the Sideline”, watching it “From the Stand”, but it’s time that we get ourselves back into the game once again and make a difference in someone else’s life.**

**This Table, This Bread, and This Cup do NOT discriminate or divide us, but instead they welcome us all into God’s presence, in God’s house, and in God’s time!**

**So Come, Come just as you are, however broken, however lost you may be in this world and along your journey of life…Come!**

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Philippians 2:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Philippians 2:3-4* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Philippians 2:9-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Philippians 2:10-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)