"A Table with 7,660,501,394 Seats!"
Matthew 26:26-29

26While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; 28for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.

“Poured out for many.” Who are the “many?” At the time we printed the bulletins, the world population was 7,660,501,394. (Seven billion, six-hundred and sixty million, five-hundred and one thousand, three-hundred and ninety-four!) It’s growing as we speak. So, who are all those people?

They are wonderfully diverse, speak a multitude of languages and are of various colors. So, God didn’t make everybody the same. That’s not by accident, it’s by design.

Many of them are parents and some grandparents, and great-grandparents. They have hopes and dreams. They practice a variety of religions. Some have no faith. Some of them will accomplish great things, others will get lost and waste a lot of their lives. All of them need love. They are complex in body, mind and spirit.

We have more in common than we think. Every one of us eat, drink, sleep, struggle, get sick, experience death and grieve. All of us laugh and cry; work and play, hope and dream. Music, art, dance, literature, and even the constraints of time, are a part of all 7,660,501,394/plus lives.

All of them matter. Would there be any of them that do not matter? And who would decide that? They are all children of God. Every single one of them. They are “the many” of whom Jesus speaks.

So how did we get so torn and separated? Why is there so much hate? How could you walk into the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and brutally murder 11
innocent people, injure others and terrorize the rest as they worship God? Because they are Jewish?

Or how do you send 15 pipe bombs to innocent people simply because they are Democrats? Are we back to Americans killing Americans? The North/the South, the Red/the Blue? Is the body of Christ to be broken yet again, and again, and again? Is the wine poured out only for a few? The right few?

The sad thing is, all this is not new. History records our discrimination, our prejudice, our wars, our quests for power; our slow response to those in need of basic security, food, shelter, employment, health care, or education. Seems we repeat history rather than learn from it. And while we are hating each other, we neglect the greater needs of each other. That’s sad.

We know all too well what divides us. We are divided by nation and race, gender and social class. We are divided by neighborhoods and schools, political parties and religion. We are divided as conservatives, moderates and liberals on the social issues of immigration, abortion, gun control, sexuality, the economy and foreign affairs, just to name a few.

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Last year Catherine and I attended The Richmond Forum which hosted two award-winning American presidential historians; Jon Meacham and Doris Kearns Goodwin. The moderator was Steve Inskeep of NPR. Part of the discussion was on the things that are currently dividing this nation. After a while, someone asked, “Is there anything that unites us?” Good question.

Jon Meacham made a profound comment. I’m paraphrasing, but it was along this line, “It’s the things we love that unite us, and we love too few things.” (The Richmond Forum, January 21, 2017). There it is.

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**Jesus said to love God above all things, and to love your neighbor as yourself.** Jews and Muslims have those very same laws in their holy writings. As simplistic as that sounds, we have seen what the world looks like when we do not abide by these laws. It’s devastating. It’s a world in which none of us want to live. It’s a painful, violent, angry, disrespectful, evil world that is void of the law of love. It’s a world in which schools, planes, mailboxes and places of worship are not even safe.

It’s interesting that the way Jesus presents this is that to love your neighbor follows the love of God. If you truly love God, you would love what God loves. You would honor God with your life. You would say “No” to those things that are disrespectful to God. It would matter to you what God thinks, what God wants, the
vision God has for what the world is to be. Yet some people use God to validate their own evil.

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So how different do you think the world would be if all $7,660,501,394/plus$ were to love God, and in turn, love one another? You couldn’t pull that trigger. You might not even own that Assault Rifle. You couldn’t mail those bombs. We might spend more money on mental health than we do on prisons. You couldn’t say those derogatory things against another person, simply because they disagree with your political views.

It’s over. You don’t live that way anymore. Respect, sensitivity, the common good, civility and the value of human life would prevail.

And people think the Church is dying and irrelevant; that Jesus was some historical figure out of touch with the modern world? Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. Those laws are embedded in the Jewish, Christian, Muslim teachings. They couldn’t be more relevant. They’re not irrelevant, they’re ignored. Not by one party, but by all parties. Not by one race, but by all races. Not by one religion, but all religions. And when we ignore those laws, we suffer the consequences. We are suffering the consequences.

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There is one more seat at this Table. Jesus said he would join us one day to drink the wine of forgiveness and reconciliation in our Father’s kingdom. That’s a different world. That’s a world with different rules, different power, different priorities, and a different purpose. It’s a world in which all $7,660,501,394/plus$ people matter.

We don’t have to wait until we die to get into that world. Christ rose from the dead so we could begin to live in it now! This Table invites “the many” into that world!

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

Congregation: Amen