

October 5, 2025

Rev. Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson, "One Bread, One Body"

First Congregational Church, Loveland UCC

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 & 23-24 and 2 Timothy 1:1-7

Song: "One Bread, One Body"

Will you pray with me? God of all the world, of every time, place, and person, of every language and voice, culture and ritual, of every poem and song, we come before you on this world communion Sunday asking to re-member. To re-member what it means to be your people. Asking to re-member what it means to belong. Asking to re-member that you give us a spirit that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts bring us closer to you, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We almost didn't go to Inanda Seminary. It's a high school for girls, not a theological college. It has "Since 1869... built a proud reputation for educating black South African women who have gone into the world exemplifying the school's motto of 'Shine where you are.'"

We almost didn't go. It was rainy, and my mom hadn't driven the roads in some odd 35 years. In 1983, she had moved to South Africa with my dad to serve at Inanda Seminary as the chaplain. My dad took a post as a maths teacher. All of the students were black South African girls, mostly Zulu, but the staff and faculty crossed the gamut: black South African, Indian, so-called colored and white. The school offered an oasis in the midst of still-raging apartheid where people of all races could live, learn, eat and play together, things that were otherwise against the law in South Africa.

Inanda was my first home -- where my parents brought me from McCord's Zulu hospital where I was born. Of all the places we visited during my sabbatical our Inanda house was least changed. The same small tidy white-washed structure looking pretty much the same, though trees now tower all around.

I had no memory of Inanda before this latest visit. I was all of 6 months old when we moved to Mfanefile, but photos show school girls crowding around their chaplain and her newborn daughter.

Because of this, I'm reminding you to revive God's gift that is in you through the laying on of hands. I read Paul's words and imagine all the hands of the young women, girls, and elders who held, rocked, and burped me.

Hands that, without words, told a white American baby girl that this was the world to which she belonged -- one of many colors, languages, and voices. One in which we are each called to shine where we are. One in which the authentic faith of our grandmothers and mothers is also inside of us. One in which we who are many are one body in Christ.

This week began my 6-month training in a restorative practices. Along with two other clergy and four lay people, I am learning the history and method of listening circles -- spaces in which everyone is valued, everyone has equal power and responsibility, everyone's story is gift, and in which all are co-creators of sacred space, collective imagination, and community healing. The trainer, Leah Hager learned these restorative practices in the Navajo community into which she married. She shared with us the Navajo word K'é, a word that captures a foundational essence of interconnectedness, of kinship, of belonging. Can you guess its Zulu counterpart? UBUNTU.

K'é and ubuntu invite us into deep, authentic and right relationship with ourselves, one another, and the wider world. They proclaim our interconnectedness, our interdependence. To quote Kay Pranis in

her Little Book of Circle Processes: “Harm to one is harm to all. Good for one is good for all.”¹ Or, in Paul’s words: “No one should look out for their own advantage, but they should look out for each other.”

K’é. Ubuntu. We belong to each other.

The truth that I got to live into this summer was one of belonging. That I still belong to those now-grown-up girls and long-gone grannies who held me as an infant. That I belong to the rolling hills of Kwazulu Natal and the still-rural and poorly resourced community of Mfanefile. That there is no requirement for my belonging. No Zulu fluency necessary. No particular skin tone. No papers or citizenship documentation. “How’d you get this name?” airport officials asked, knowing the common Zulu name Thandiwe and the uncommonness of it belonging to a white woman. When I said I was born in Durban, the consistent response was: “Welcome home.” The unspoken message: you belong here. We belong together.

And I felt that over and over again, a profound belonging
As a white woman with a Zulu name
As I washed my family’s clothes by hand and hung them up to dry before the winter’s day was sapped of its last light.
As I shared a bed with my children and we shared the room with two other women I hardly knew.
As we swum on the once all-white beaches now open to everyone: people of every race, color, gender, religion, health situation, and social status playing together in the waves and on the sand.

Social scientist Dr. Brené Brown writes: “When we can...own our story, we can gain access to our worthiness -- the feeling that we are enough just as we are and that we are worthy of love and belonging.”

What parts of your story need owning? Who are you in your fullness? What does it feel like when you show up as your full and authentic self?

God’s beloved, this church where we can come with our questions, our curiosities, our quirks, our doubts, our wounds, and our dreams is such a precious gift. Especially at this particular moment when the world is so hard. I need our congregation! Our world needs our congregation. And we get to commit to showing up as our best and fullest selves, to collaborate, to communicate with gentleness and care, to hold one another accountable with love and grace, to make space for one another to show up fully, and to love with vulnerability and courage.

One of the gifts of World Communion Sunday is that it invites us to look at who we are individually and also who we are together. It invites us to look at the Body of Christ as a whole -- speaking a hundred different tongues, singing a thousand different songs, with different elements to represent body and blood, but one story: the story of God’s love in Christ. The story of unity across difference. The story of a struggle for justice that no one goes alone, but all together. A story of interconnectedness where “there is no such thing as an objective observer or a detached perspective. Everything is connected.”²

And this day invites us to re-member. To put back together the body of Christ of which we are part. To re-member the faith of those who have gone before us and claim that faith as our own. To revive God’s gift that is in each of us through connection. As we prepare to come to God’s table, a table that is open to all, a table that connects us across difference, across language, across time and space, I

¹ Page 26.

² Kay Pranis, “The Little Book of Circle Processes,” pg 26.

want to offer this prayer written in Palestine for World Communion Sunday by Loren McGrail. Let us pray together:

God of our grandmothers and mothers,
of Eve and Sarah, Miriam and Hanna,
Mary and Martha, Mother Mary and Mary
of Magdala, of Lois and Eunice
we come to your table today,
[World Communion Sunday,]
in this season of repentance
of leaves turning colors
of pomegranates bursting with seeds
to celebrate your love poured out for us
our trust rekindled.

You call us to stand
at your watchtowers
to wait for your vision
You call us to put on our aprons
and serve you first.

Host of the open and expanding table
we come to give up
our appetites for power
our thirst for revenge
our addictions to despair
our shame about suffering
we come empty handed
hands out to receive you

Host of the open and expanding table
we come to partake
of your body broken
your spirit living
in this bread.

We come to drink
from the cup of blessing
your love
given for us

Host of the Feast
we remember today
our ancestors in faith
our Jewish and Christian
grandfathers and fathers
our Jewish and Christian
grandmothers and mothers
we come to celebrate our heritage
the ties that bind us
generation to generation
one to each other

God of today and tomorrow
we live between memory and hope
for your kin-dom come
here on earth as it is in heaven
feed us
rekindle your light in us
to be your faithful servants
your seeds of transformation

For this moment in this place
And for all the world every day. Amen.