Chapter Six

Ritual Formation: Liturgical Practices and the Practice of Peacebuilding

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In the midst of a shipwreck on the way to Rome…

> Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food– you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.
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> Acts 27:33-36

Conflict and communion

It was a dire situation. Not just because of the tempest sea that raged around them as it had for two weeks, but because of raging tempers that threatened to rip apart their lives faster than the sea. This scene, from the last of Paul's difficult sea voyages, is part of a story with a cast of characters any playwright would relish for the potential for conflict in the storyline. And indeed, conflict is what we get. There are prisoners (including Paul), soldiers who are there to transport them to Rome, and the sailors of the ship who wonder how they ever got stuck with this lot in the first place. After days of relentless and violent battering from the storm, they "gave up all hope of being saved." [Acts 27:20] In the midst of their fear and frustration, soldiers try to kill prisoners and sailors try to abandon the ship in the lifeboat, leaving the rest to die at sea. But Paul thwarts the attempt by telling the centurion, "unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." [Acts 27:31] In other words, "who is going to drive this thing!?" Or perhaps more to the point, "we're all in this together–no matter how we feel about each other."

And then, in this moment of tempest sea and flaring tempers, Paul urges them *all* to take food–to come to the table and be fed. "You…" says Paul, "you who have shared fear, suspense and hunger, share this food, for it will help you survive. For death will not have you." They are invited to the meal not *in spite of* their broken relationships and uncertain future, but *because* at the very core of each person's story, they all share hunger and fear and uncertainty. They are at a threshold of life and death and Paul calls them to not only a meal, but to a ritual. "In front of them all" he takes bread and gives thanks, breaks the bread and then shows them the way to regain strength for the journey toward life–he eats. They do likewise and are together encouraged.

Just like Paul's intuition that what was needed in the midst of stormy waters was to call the people into a common action, I am convinced that engaging in ritual together is essential as we navigate broken relationships and uncertain futures. Breaking open our lives–becoming vulnerable to one another and residing in these threshold places of the "not yet"–is essential to peacebuilding. We need rituals of care to navigate the "liminal" places. *Liminality* is a term that has been used by ritual scholars to describe a state that often accompanies ritualized life passages such as initiation rites, rites of marriage or death and rites which mark changes in relationship, among others. Taken from the root, "limen," which means "threshold," liminality is a state of "betwixt and between."[1] We are not in the same relationship or identity as before. And we are not yet in a newly defined relationship and identity. We entered the story of Paul's shipwreck at a "liminal" place of uncertainty and fear. It was ritual that Paul believed was necessary at that

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[1] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 94-96.

very moment to give strength and encouragement–an action of choosing life rather than death. Ritual is one way that we pass through this "threshold" state.

I have come to understand that conflict produces liminality. When we are in the "betwixt and betweenness" of conflict, we need ritual processes to help us through it. In conflict, some aspect of relationship which was before, has been breached or broken or changed. But we do not yet see the new thing. We have lost our equilibrium–we have lost our "peace." It is so difficult to be in this kind of liminality, because where we stand in relationship to one another is so vitally connected to our own identity. Relationship is how we know who we are. And so when we are not in "right relationship" it is a deeply disturbing matter. We feel a loss of our sense of self.

The danger is that, because we are so uncomfortable with this liminal state, we won't stay in it long enough to discover a truly new relationship born of honest and difficult reflection on often painful experience. We look for the quick fix, we utilize structures that advocate distancing as a first, rather than last, resort, or we simply turn away because it is too painful. What we often find, however, is that the pain doesn't subside. The quick fix may not be a lasting one. And while distancing may be part of what is needed, feelings of uncertainty may linger if we never come face-to-face. Ritual provides a structure in which to faithfully struggle and search for lasting solutions. Through ritual, symbolic action "makes real" for us God's restorative possibilities and moves (trans-forms) us toward those possibilities. One of the most formative rituals for dealing with conflict is contained in the circle process.

I have been privileged to work with Tom Porter and JUSTPEACE several times as a ritual leader at training events for circle processes of restorative justice. As a person who studies how ritual shapes and forms us as disciples, I have been deeply moved by the ways in which

circle processes facilitate our interactions and provide a safe space for sharing deeply about difficult matters. I have experienced the circle process *as* "communion" in the best sense of that word–a restoration of persons into a wholeness of relationship. These experiences have brought to mind some questions for me: What can we learn from circle processes of restorative justice that would be helpful as we seek to facilitate ritual that becomes the place *par excellence* for dealing openly and honestly with our conflicts? What difference would it make to the ways in which we view and deal with conflict if our worship tutored us–patterned us–in the habit of breaking open our lives to one another and sharing our hurts and our hopes?

Ritual Formation

In a recent service of consecration for a new conference building in the Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, Bishop Gregory Palmer quoted Winston Churchill, "We shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us." Bishop Palmer then went on to ask the provocative question, "What kind of shape are we in?" So it is with any structure that we inhabit. The kind of "shape" we take on is influenced by the shape of our "practices." Ritual scholar Catherine Bell says that we structure our rituals and then we are structured by them. As we engage in ritual practices, we internalize their basic patterns and carry them with us into the world as the basic forms of practices that shape our lives and our decisions.[2] The practices of our rituals form us–whether they are rituals of coming to work every day in a building with a baptismal fountain at the center, rituals of Holy Communion, or rituals of dealing with conflict as in the circle process.

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[2] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 115-116.

> Practices shape us into being certain kinds of people; they confer identity, identifying us to ourselves and to others. Initiated by these practices into a certain way of life, we come to identify ourselves as people who do these kinds of things.[3]

This is the powerful link between our ritual practices and the forming of our very identity as lovers of justice and seekers of peace. And because of this power, what matters deeply is not just what we say in our rituals, but also how we do what we do. For when our ritual practices contain within them the embodiment of particular ways of being, particular dispositions, we, through that practice, become the sorts of persons who are disposed to be *that way.* The act of acknowledging shared experience and then sharing bread together affected, perhaps, the ways in which Paul's fellow shipmates acted when faced with later decisions.

This shaping and forming happens, in part, because our brains think in images or "schemas" that act as organizational maps, helping us navigate our world. The brain likes to categorize experience into these schemas in order to literally "make sense" of the way things are. Because there is so much sensory information coming at us at any one moment, we are what cognitive scientists call, "cognitive misers." [4] We have selective memory by necessity. While we have numerous schemas available to us, only some of them are *easily* accessible to us. These then are the schemas–views of the world and our place in it–that shape our motivations and affect our decision-making.

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[3] Martha Ellen Stortz, *A World According to God: Practices for Putting Faith at the Center of Your Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 7.

[4] David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 80.

One of the factors that makes particular schemas "accessible" is the frequency with which we are faced with it.[5] Neuroscientists tell us that the more frequently we visit particular images, the more our memories are strengthened through the strengthening of neural synapses. "Cells that fire together, wire together."[6] When this binding occurs, the connection between the two is strengthened, making the next occasion of firing easier. Memories are made, and the potential for these memories to enter the long-term memory is greatly enhanced, as the frequency of firing escalates. *Remembering* particular schemas structured within the ritual is imperative for the ability of participants to access those constructs outside the ritual. Being neurally facile (having certain neural connections that fire without us having to think about it) comes with repetition. As we associate deeply-felt emotions to ritual practices, the impact of the memory is even more greatly enhanced and these schemas become powerful motivators for our action outside of the ritual.[7] We become the sort of person for whom certain behaviors become "second-nature." This is the neurobiology of habituation, or of "practices."[8] If our repeated ritual practices, like circle processes or Holy Communion, are formative of our lives and our relationships, we must look closely at the images, or "schemas" we create in those ritual practices. We must ask, to what are we being formed?

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[5] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, 80.

[6] Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1996), 214.

[7] For more on the role of emotions, see Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

[8] For more on the neuroscience of ritual practices, see "Forming Disciples: How Theologies/ Ethics are Lodged in the Body," in Marcia McFee, *Primal Patterns: Ritual Dynamics, Ritual Resonance and Polyrhythmic Strategies for the Forming of Disciples*, (Ph.D. Diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2005), 47-94.

Jesus as "Shape-Shifter"

While not particularly concerned, I'm sure, with the neuroscience of ritual formation, Jesus consistently and repeatedly presented his followers with schemas that would reorient their understanding of who they were called to be. Jesus' table practice contained the embodiment of a particular and radical way of being in relationship through which he taught about the reign of God. The rituals he engaged at the table aimed at reshaping popular conceptions of relationship. In our day we may say the phrase "you are what you eat." In the time of Jesus, it was "you are who you eat with." The Greco-Roman and Jewish banquet practices were rituals that communicated social values, ideologies and social stratification. Dennis E. Smith's book, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* shows drawings reconstructing "banquet practice" in the ancient world.[9] Rather than the familiar scene from DaVinci's *Last Supper* where Jesus is placed at the center of the group, Smith's drawings show that proper banquet practice placed the honored guest–the "highest ranking" person–at one end of a square configuration of reclining couches with an open space in the middle. Thus, who sat "at the right hand" of the most honored person was "number two" and so on around the seating arrangement. Each person had a place in the order and certainly each one had a role, including servants. The drawing shows that even the lowest ranking person at the "end of the line" ranks above the servant who kneels and washes his feet. Jesus' ministry of table practice redefined many things about the social configurations entrenched in the table practices of his day. Radical hospitality is embodied as he himself takes the place of the "lower than the lowest"–the servant

[9] Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003).

role. Whom he invited to the table and what he did there became a controversial "reshaping" of ritual through which his followers could see what sorts of persons and relationships God was calling them to be and have.

Our communion rituals are, in part, extensions of Jesus' table ministry, and are therefore rituals of redefining relationship and hospitality. They are the symbolic roots of peacebuilding communities–creating right relationship as persons gather together around the table–those who are friends, those who are strangers, even those who are enemies. If we answer this call to the table of Jesus, we can be formed through our rituals as persons working to shift the shape of our own society's dominant images of separation and retribution.

In light of this basic purpose of Jesus' rituals we need to ask, *are* our communion rituals embodying radical hospitality and mutual relationship? Do our rituals tutor us in right relationship, giving us access to reshaped images of the way God calls us to be with each other? Have we embodied the reign of God that we proclaim in our worship in such a vital way that our peacebuilding practices live on beyond our rituals into our everyday relationships? To be sure, as stated above, our rituals are forming us, but *to what* are we being formed in our worship? For instance, we might ask whether our communion practices actually form us communally. Receiving communion in a single-file line or kneeling at the rail with eyes shut tight is not "wrong," just as understanding communion as partly a moment of opening our individual *selves* to God is not to be replaced. However, if it is the only way we eat at the communion table, we neglect some communal layers of meaning in the ritual. If we hardly ever, or never, reconfigure ourselves and our tables to emphasize the communal aspect of Holy Communion, if we never dare to look into the eyes of our neighbor, find our voices in order to speak honestly of the pain

of our lives, of the world and our communities around the table or extend our hands to serve one another, we are missing a large portion of our Eucharistic theology. To redress this neglect of communion as community-forming ritual, we can turn to circle rituals.

Sitting "in circle"

The circle process of restorative justice is a ritual that can be used in many situations but is often used to facilitate decision-making and healing of relationships in the face of wrong-doing. The *whole* network of persons affected by the wrong-doing–victims, perpetrators, families, friends, colleagues–agree to (literally) "sit in circle" and, one at a time, voice their hurts and hopes. The process continues at the direction of a steward as many "go-rounds" as it takes to come to a good place for all involved. Its goal is to move from processes of justice-making that are solely retributive to solutions that are restorative of relationship; from the punitive to the curative; from the retaliatory to the reconciliatory.[10] In order to accomplish this, the very structure or "shape" of the ritual shapes its participants. This Native American saying expresses this well: "You can't get to a good place in a bad way."[11]

We need rituals of care that provide safe spaces in which to feel the full range of emotions inherent in conflict, to speak the truth in love, and to come to a healing place. In other words, we need rituals that get us to a "good place in a good way." The circle process is a ritual form created to give us a structure for passing through the liminal state of conflict and guide us

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[10] Tom - I know these phrases come from you… what is the citation?

[11] As quoted in Carolyn Boyes-Watson, "Healing the Wounds of Street Violence: Peacemaking Circles and Community Youth Development," *Community Youth Development Journal* Vol 2, No. 4 (Fall 2001).

in such a way as to include all voices, taking enough time to come to a new and restorative relationship. It is an extended "rite of passage" that moves us through conflict in three stages. There is a beginning ritual and closing ritual that bookend the circle process itself. Each stage is equally important for creating a safe space and facilitating a newness of relationship.

The steward and ritual leader of the circle process opens with a ritual that "sets apart" the space and time as special and sacred. The presence of all participants is acknowledged and affirmed. Introduction of the talking piece (whether it is a feather or Bible or bowl full of some significant and meaningful objects such as seed) by having participants pass it around the circle in silence is a way of embodying the reality that all will have access to voicing their perspectives without interruption. This action can also symbolize the willingness and openness of all participants to enter and honor the circle process itself. Words, scripture, and/or a song may be offered that set a calming tone and provide verbal encouragement based on scripture or other appropriate and meaningful sources. The introduction of a centerpiece–a symbolic object that will remain at the center of the circle throughout the entire process–can provide metaphors to affirm what will happen in the process. For instance, broken pieces of pottery set alongside a chunk of molding clay can acknowledge both the presence of brokenness and the possibility of a new creation. Lighting a candle may signify the illumination that is hoped for. A living plant may offer a sign of the possibility of growth and renewal (and the pruning that may have to happen to ensure this). Water or salve may speak to the possibility of coming to a healing place. Salt, an ancient preservative, can function as a sign of a covenant agreement between participants as they make promises regarding how they will conduct themselves in the circle and perhaps the confidentiality that will cover the proceedings. Perhaps a loaf and cup will reside in the center

that will be used later in a Service of Word and Table to mark this passage. Appropriate symbols will differ from situation to situation. One of the things I have discovered about the power of symbol in this context is its many layers. A ritual leader may suggest meanings but often it will be the participants themselves, as they search for words to describe their feelings, who will uncover, layer by layer, the depth of the metaphors. Participants help open up the symbol and, likewise, sometimes it is the symbol that helps open up the words and feelings of the participants when words are difficult to find.

The second stage is the circle process itself. In experiencing this process, it has struck me that this is truly a kind of "liturgy" in the basic sense of that word. *Liturgy* literally means "work of the people." In this process, unlike in most typical courtroom processes of justice where it is often primarily the work of the lawyers, it is the people themselves who name and define past, present and future realities and relationships. Past relationships that have been broken and lost are remembered and mourned. Present pain and uncertainty that is defining relationships because of wrong-doing are named and sometimes cried over, raged over, sighed over. One of the most fascinating things to me about the power of the ritual of circles is that because the structure itself models respect for all voices, the voices themselves take on an almost reverent tone most of the time–a respectful demeanor. Even in the midst of heated and painful emotions, the power of being heard without interruption allows a kind of honest expression that facilitates listening rather than shutting off. The circle facilitates speaking of and hearing the most difficult of things. As persons share, reflections on understandings, misunderstandings, responsibility and accountability begin to redefine present reality and finally, with the careful urging of the steward of the circle, naming of future relationship is attempted. "What is needed

to address the harm and bring us to healing?" It is, indeed, very hard "work." And it is certainly "of the people."

Finally, the third stage of passage through the conflict is that of the closing ritual. The steward confirms a plan for restoration and healing as defined by the group, names the new relationships (at the very least we are persons who have heard each other) and then leads the people in a symbolic action that embodies the exit from liminal states to a new "state of being" together. Because the circle process may take more than one day, this last step is reserved for the time when all feel they have come to such a state of being.

Shaping Relationship

The circle process creates important symbolism in its very form. Symbols help us address our yearning to make the mysterious, the ineffable, or the seemingly impossible more real, more tangible. So, the *possibility of reconciliation* in the midst of conflict is made "more real" to us the minute we engage in the circle. All persons in a circle are equidistant from the center and everyone has equal visual access to one another. This creates a non-hierarchical relationship and fosters the sense that all are equally accountable to the process and the outcome. The role of the community and the truth of an action's effect on that community, not just on victims and perpetrators, is embodied in the shape and process of sitting in circle. The circle is a symbol of not only what "could be" but what, at the same time, *is* an act of mutuality in the very process. Circles help us try new configurations on for size. In the circle process we create a space in which we begin to pattern our very bodies to the possibility that we will be restored to a new form of right relationship as we grapple with the consequences of actions and become mutually

accountable. While the process is anything but easy, by sitting in circle we are more likely to arrive at a solution that comes out of our having dealt honestly with our *interconnectedness*. Sitting in circle is a practice whereby we begin to view relationships within a schema of the connectedness of all persons and actions. We begin to see the world beyond the circle in this same light. This is exemplified by a statement by Michael from the Roca community near Boston[12] that utilizes circles with at-risk youth.

> The more you are in circle, physically sitting in circle, the more you get to be in circle when you're not in circle.[13]

We see how the pattern of the circle–the ritual of the circle as it is repeated over time–infuses Michael's interactions outside of the time and place of the actual circles. He is given a schema–or image–that becomes "second-nature" for him. His life becomes steeped in this model of mutuality.

> When we sit "in circle," we are being a different way with one another. Circle rituals are a way of creating a space for new behaviors, which extend beyond the circle itself. The rituals affirm a social order based on inclusiveness, equality, and respect for all participants.[14]

As we engage in the practice of sharing food and forgiveness, offering honesty and receiving grace through our ritual of Holy Communion week after week, we internalize this paradigm of relating and carry it into the world where it can mold our relationships outside of the

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[12] Roca is a multicultural, youth, family, and community development organization. Download "Holding the Space: The Journey of Circles at Roca," by Dr. Carolyn Boyes-Watson, a document that describes more about peacemaking circles at Roca at www.rocainc.com.

[13] As spoken by Michael at a training event at [Tom, help me remember the event and year this was??]

[14] Carolyn Boyes-Watson, "Healing the Wounds of Street Violence."

ritual.[15] To rephrase Michael's wisdom: "The more you are in Communion, physically participating in Communion, the more you get to be in communion when you're not in Communion." As Holy Communion takes a more central place in our worship practices, it becomes a ritual that shifts the shape of our relating, calling us to a social order based in the example of Jesus.

Liturgy as the Deepest Things We Know

The practice of sitting in circles of restorative justice has much to offer us, I believe, as we reflect about our own liturgical practice. Celebrating Holy Communion in an actual circle configuration is one way to bring the communal dimension of Eucharist to the forefront of our practice. This may happen in small group settings of Word and Table outside of the Sunday service that can incorporate actual dialogue around the circle about difficult issues.[16] Additionally, the power of the circle may be experienced within a congregational worship setting with larger attendance by creating several smaller circle configurations after the Eucharistic prayer and serving one another the communion elements.[17] Holy Communion, understood as a practice of peacebuilding (whatever the context), takes on significant depth as we look into each other's eyes and direct our attention and intentions toward one another. The invitation to the

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[15] The interpretive document *This Holy Mystery*, encourages United Methodists to reclaim a weekly practice of Word *and Table*. "As we return to the Table again and again, we are strengthened repeatedly… we are progressively shaped into Christ's image… It is… a lifelong process through which God intends to shape us into people motivated by love, empowered and impassioned to do Christ's work in the world." *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (Nashville: General Board of Discipleship, 2004), 14.

[16] See William Johnson Everett's chapter in this book for an example of a community who practices Holy Communion in a circle configuration.

[17] See Appendix [?] for an example of liturgy prepared for this kind of setting.

table becomes an invitation to reshape our relationships. Confession and forgiveness opens us to the possibility that we are mutually accountable to the whole. Passing the peace, giving thanks for the saving relationship of God through Christ and asking the Holy Spirit to transform us so that we might be bread for the world takes on special dimensions as the circle is broken open and widened with new faces and sometimes challenging relationships.

However, reflecting on what circles of restorative justice teach us sparks some broader questions regarding the whole of our liturgies as well. Do we understand our liturgy as a place where transformation can happen? As a passage from perhaps a state of conflict or regret to a more restorative and healing place? Further, do we expect this from our liturgies? Do our words and songs and symbols vividly portray this possibility and carefully set a tone and safe space where that can occur? My friend Nina Reeves says to me when I see her only occasionally, "Let us speak about the deepest things we know." Indeed. Do we invite our communities of worship to speak about the "deepest things?" Do we invite dialogue at all? Do we truly believe that God invites us to speak honestly, in the context of our rituals of worship, of pain and uncertainty? To lament? Karen Lebacqz names the consequences of avoiding conflict,

> Bland worship avoids both pain and joy. In our anesthetized life, we are so afraid of pain that, in our desire to mute suffering, we sometimes stifle joy. The gospel is good news. But it is good news in the midst of pain and suffering… If we try to avoid the pain and suffering, we will also not be able to hear or embody the gospel. We will not incarnate the Word.[18]

I was asked to design and lead worship for the meeting of a regional body who had, the year before, voted to merge two conferences into one. As is true with most mergers of any sort, there were conflicting feelings that surfaced during the decision-making process. But the

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[18] Karen Lebacqz, *Word, Worship, World, and Wonder: Reflections on Christian Living* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 72-73.

decision had been made to merge although the conflict and difficult feelings had lingered on. After speaking with several people at the heart of the conflict, I knew that to simply celebrate the creation of the new conference without recognition of the "liminal" state that lingered through feelings of uncertainty and anger would be a mistake. We needed to acknowledge the depth of emotion in order to move toward that celebration. During the first day of the meeting, I invited anyone who wished to do so to spend some time in a meditative ritual space set apart for this purpose and write their hopes and/or fears about the direction of the conference on pieces of paper. I then fashioned these into the Prayers of the People in preparation for our Service of Word and Table. The statements were read by someone recognized in the conference as a healing presence, along with improvised music by a jazz musician and improvised movement–idioms that, when allowed the full range of expression, can often speak what words cannot. What was offered in the statements was exactly what was asked for–some were hopeful and some were expressions of deep pain. There was harmony and dissonance, soaring gestures as well as heaviness of heart and limbs. The prayer asked that God bless it all. And we acknowledged that there was room at the table for all of it. That indeed, the table was *the* place for all of it. The hard work of conferences and congregations who merge takes a long time. But in that moment, the fullness of that community was taken up, blessed, broken open and shared. And persons who especially felt that their positions had been dismissed by the decisions made, saw they would continue to have a voice and a place at the table.

To engage ritual practices of naming conflict, and breaking bread in the midst of these "deep things," is to be faithful. To do this is not "magic" in the sense that it always accomplishes a predictable outcome. Even after Paul's ritual moment of offering bread in the midst of tempest

sea and raging tempers, soldiers still wanted to kill prisoners to keep them from escaping. But, some hearts had been changed, some attitudes shifted, and the lives of the prisoners were spared. All who had eaten together swam together to the shore. Those who could not swim shared planks of the broken ship to help them to the shore. Yes, the broken pieces proved to be what saved their lives.

As peacebuilders, as stewards of the table and of circles, we are called to follow Jesus' practice of table fellowship–reshaping relationship and the ways we deal with our conflict. Peacebuilders are to issue, as Paul did, the call to the fourfold pattern of Christ at the table. The call to "take"– the invitation to bring our brokenness to the table, to touch it, to deal with it, to take it up. The call to "bless"– to name the table as the appropriate place, the sacred place to bring conflict and to bless that conflict, and to understand the liminal places as blessedly re-creative. The call to "break"– the invitation to break open our lives and feelings to each other, to speak of the deepest things we know. And the call to "share"– empowering *all* voices in the process of healing. To say to each other, "we as a community cannot do without *your* piece… we cannot do without your *peace*."

Questions for discussion:

1. Imagine, or literally sit with your group in, the configuration of a typical courtroom. Explore what the spatial configuration says about relationship and the process of coming to a resolution. Then imagine, or sit in, a circle. What are the differences? What does the circle represent and bring into being about relationship? Now, reflect on the different configurations you have experienced in Holy Communion rituals. Since often "actions speak louder than words," what do the ways in which the ritual is enacted say about relationship? What feels congruent? What might be missing if only one manner of coming to the table is practiced?

2. What “liminal” places of passage are you experiencing now in your life or in the life of your community? Do you have rituals of care where change and conflict can be addressed in safe and welcoming ways? Can you imagine how communion might become a ritual of care that helps encourage and sustain the community even, and especially, in the midst of that conflict and change?

3. What symbols/metaphors could you use in the context of the Service of Word and Table that would help participants to reflect more deeply and openly on such topics as the need for growth and pruning (a plant, for example); brokenness (pieces of broken pottery)? Name several. How might these be woven at times into the Confession, the Peace or the Prayers of the People?

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