

A Place at the Table

Getting Ready for a World Communion Service

by Katie Cook

Things You Might Need

This group of resources for a world communion service are designed for World Communion Sunday in October, but can be used for any worship service you choose, at any time of year you choose. We have written up an order of worship, with the accompanying sermon by Dawn Ripley. We encourage you to freely adapt these ideas to your own congregation.

We suggest that you look at the order of worship on page 13 and see if you have the suggested hymns, or decide if you would rather substitute your own ideas. The service calls for the playing of a Rich Mullins song, "I See You" from the CD of that name. Depending on the size of your congregation, you may need more than one song. If you have a choir that learns quickly, you might teach them the song and ask them to sing it softly, *a cappella*, as the congregation continues to participate. Otherwise, instrumental music would probably work best. Your pianist or organist could choose some music, or you could ask a youth to play oboe, flute, or acoustic guitar.

You will need at least four tables, some international artifacts and fabric, and some dry food. (We suggest that you make sure the food gets used in some way after the service is over; ask people to take it home and cook it, or give it to a local soup kitchen.) You will need four speakers to read the call to worship and the invitation to the table.

At **Table One** (Zimbabwe) you can arrange an African display. Find some batik cloth, or fabric that looks African, for your tablecloth. Then find some ebony statuettes or wooden carvings of African animals or masks. (You might want to display a map of Africa somewhere on the table.) To represent the food of Zimbabwean people, you could display a bowl of dried hominy corn and a pitcher of water. It would be meaningful if, during communion, you send the people to the different tables for the elements. If you choose to do this, you will want to leave room for the elements. Some congregations might decide to use the food of these peoples as the elements. This is where your own needs must take precedent.

If you decide to use Zimbabwean food instead of bread and wine, we would suggest something like hominy grits. This would resemble their staple dish, *nhopi*, a kind of corn porridge. You could give the congregants plastic



art by Sharon Rollins

spoons to dip it with, and small cups of water. (If someone in your group knows how to make *nhopi*, that's even better.)

For **Table Two** (Chiapas), you could use a colorful Mexican serapi or cloth, and pottery or handcrafts from Mexico. You could display some dried corn, and serve corn tortillas and water for the "elements."

For **Table Three** (Rural Mississippi), you could use a checkered cloth and objects that evoke thoughts of the rural South. (Old, cracked Blue Willow dishes would work—along with "jelly glasses.") For elements, you could use cornbread and sweet iced tea.

For **Table Four** (Cambodia) you would need to find an Asian cloth and artifacts. For the food you could display *bok choy* (an Asian vegetable), dried rice, and baby corn. For the "elements" you could serve torn-up rice cakes and water.

You may choose to use only two or three of these tables, or you may choose to use all four. You may be studying another country or population, in which case you might want to represent that country instead. Or you may want to "branch out" and add more tables. Be creative. Don't make it too difficult. Get a committee together and brainstorm.

An Activity for Youth and Others

This is an activity that should precede your special communion service by at least a couple of weeks, since it will probably take two or more sessions to finish. It should be especially appealing to youth (and other creative people). You will need lots of magazines and booklets—anything that is a source of pictures of people eating together. Try to find sources that will include pictures of people from different countries (you could try old mission education magazines.)

You will also need sources of large words, unless you want to type up and print your own. Ask your youth to find words that are connected to people eating together: community, food, nourishment, family, thankfulness, togetherness, etc. (You could also have someone do hand lettering for your words. First, however, you should organize a session in which your youth choose a list of words and phrases.)

Here's an idea: ask the group to prominently display (at the top or bottom of the collage) one of the following phrases:

There is inside of me
an unknown quantity
left unexplored—
and waiting
for the dawn.
But will the day
reveal the
hidden
treasure?
Only if
I overcome
the deep suspicion
that I'm overrated
and have less to offer
an impoverished world.
-Daniel G. Bagby



art by Sally Lynn Askins

• Jesus said, “You give them something to eat.” (from Luke 9)

• “In remembrance of me, feed the poor.” (from “In Remembrance of Me” by Buryl Red and Regan Courtney)

“We know each other in the breaking of the bread, and we know God in the breaking of the bread.” (Dorothy Day)

Or you can come up with your own, to go with the theme of your communion service.

Next, ask the group to find and cut out pictures of all kinds of people eating together. (Some of them may want to depict someone eating alone as well. If so, ask them to find words to go with that. Encourage them to put their own “spin” on the interpretation.) They will then glue the pictures and words into a giant collage. Encourage them to make the design their own, but remind them that this is for the entire church to see and ask them to keep this in mind.

You will need butcher paper or some other large sheet of paper. Once the collage is done, attach it to a wall in your foyer—or you might want to make it vertical and turn it into a large “banner” to hang from the sanctuary ceiling behind the pulpit.

A Place at the Table

An Order of Worship for a World Communion Service

by Katie Cook

Call to Worship

First Speaker: Come, all you who hunger and thirst for justice, all you who are weighed down by life,

Second Speaker: Come and sit together at the table of the Lord.

Third Speaker: Come, all you who are oppressed, and all you who cry for the oppressed,

Fourth Speaker: Come and sit together at the table of the Lord.

Invocation

Hymn

Let Us Break Bread Together
(Hymn #776 in *The Worshiping Church*)

Old Testament Reading
Deuteronomy 14:22-29

Gospel Reading

Luke 24:13-35

Meditation on Community

We cannot love God unless
we love each other.
We know God in the breaking of bread,
and we know each other
in the breaking of bread,
and we are not alone anymore.
Heaven is a banquet, and life is, too
— even with a crust —
as long as there is companionship.
We have all known loneliness.
We have learned that the only solution
is love.
And love comes with community.
— Dorothy Day

Hymn

“A Place at the Table”
(Hymn #2 in *Sing Justice! Do Justice!*)

Epistle Reading

1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Meditation on the Supper

And then I find that you bring divisions to worship— you come together, and instead of eating the Lord’s Supper, you bring in a lot of food from the outside and make pigs of yourselves. Some are left out, and go home hungry. Others have to be carried out, too drunk to walk. I can’t believe it! Don’t you have your own homes to eat and drink in? Why would you stoop to desecrating God’s church? Why would you actually shame God’s poor?

—1 Corinthians 11:20-22 (The Message)

Children's Sermon

“A Feast Fit for the World”
by Mark McClintock
(see page 19)

Sermon

“Telling Stories at the Table”
by Dawn M. Ripley
(see page 16)

Invitation to the Table

First Speaker: My name is Shepard. I am a man of 32 years. I live in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. I work in an orphanage downtown. We go through the streets of our city and find children who have run away or have been abandoned. We bring them to our orphanage and make sure they have food, clothing, shelter, education, and—most of all—love. People in our country, when they have it, eat things like peanut butter stew and salted ground nuts. More likely, though, they will eat *nhopi*, a kind of corn meal porridge, sometimes flavored with pumpkin.

Our country is suffering from an unstable economy, political unrest, racial tensions, and drought. Our country is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, but things are sad and frightening. This is happening in several surrounding countries as well. I am

most concerned for our children. As you come to the table, remember the children of southern Africa, and all of the orphaned children in the world.

Second Speaker: My name is Alicia. I am 26 years old. I live in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico, with my husband and five children. The mountains of Chiapas are beautiful, and the people are courageous. But there is much suffering here. The landowners are sometimes very cruel to the *campesinos*—the peasants. Some whole villages of *campesinos* have been forced to leave their homes and live in refugee camps. There has been much bloodshed between the *federales*, the Mexican troops, and a group of revolutionary soldiers called Zapatistas. Our corn crops are sometimes burned by soldiers. We have a shortage of corn, and this is our main food. We hope there will be enough corn to make *tortillas* for our families, but as long as there is fighting in our mountains, there will be hunger. As you come to the table, remember those of my people who do not have enough corn.

Third Speaker: My name is Nim. I am 45 years old and a rice farmer in Cambodia. My country is still rebuilding from decades of warfare in which a million of our people were executed or died from the hardships of exile. Our country, which is a little smaller than your state of Oklahoma, is mostly forest and rice paddies. Although one-third of our people live in poverty, things are gradually getting better, as we begin to farm more land and produce more food. People are working to remove the landmines that have blanketed our land, and also to rebuild irrigation systems. Even now our farmers are planting rice in dry fields and hoping for rain. Our people have been through much sorrow. As you come to the table, remember us as we work to overcome the many years of war, as we work until all of us have enough food.

Fourth Speaker: My name is Rosie. I am 15 years old, and I live with my family on a farm in Mississippi. My father is what they used to call a share cropper. That means we live on somebody else's land, and we work to get a small share of the profits from the crops—mostly cotton. Our state has a bad name sometimes, with the highest numbers of poor people and the lowest numbers of people being helped. I also learned that most of the poor people in the United States are country people like me. I have to say that life is sometimes hard. Sometimes we miss a meal, maybe twice a week, maybe more, because there's no food, and no money to buy food. I

hope that when I grow up I can get out of this way of living. As you come to the table, remember young people like me.

All Speakers: Jesus Christ invites you now, with us, to come to the table.

Music for Coming to the Table

"I See You" by Rich Mullins

(See "Getting Ready for a World Communion Service" on page 12 for more ideas.)

Benediction

As the congregation finishes partaking of the elements, ask them to pass the peace of Christ and dismiss them with the following benediction:

My sisters and brothers, go from this place in peace, and may the spirit of the living God empower you and me to look for the face of Christ everywhere we go. Let us go into the world and break bread. Let us go into the world and not grow weary until all God's children are fed. Amen.

art by Placid Stuckenscheider, OSB



A Blessing for Bread

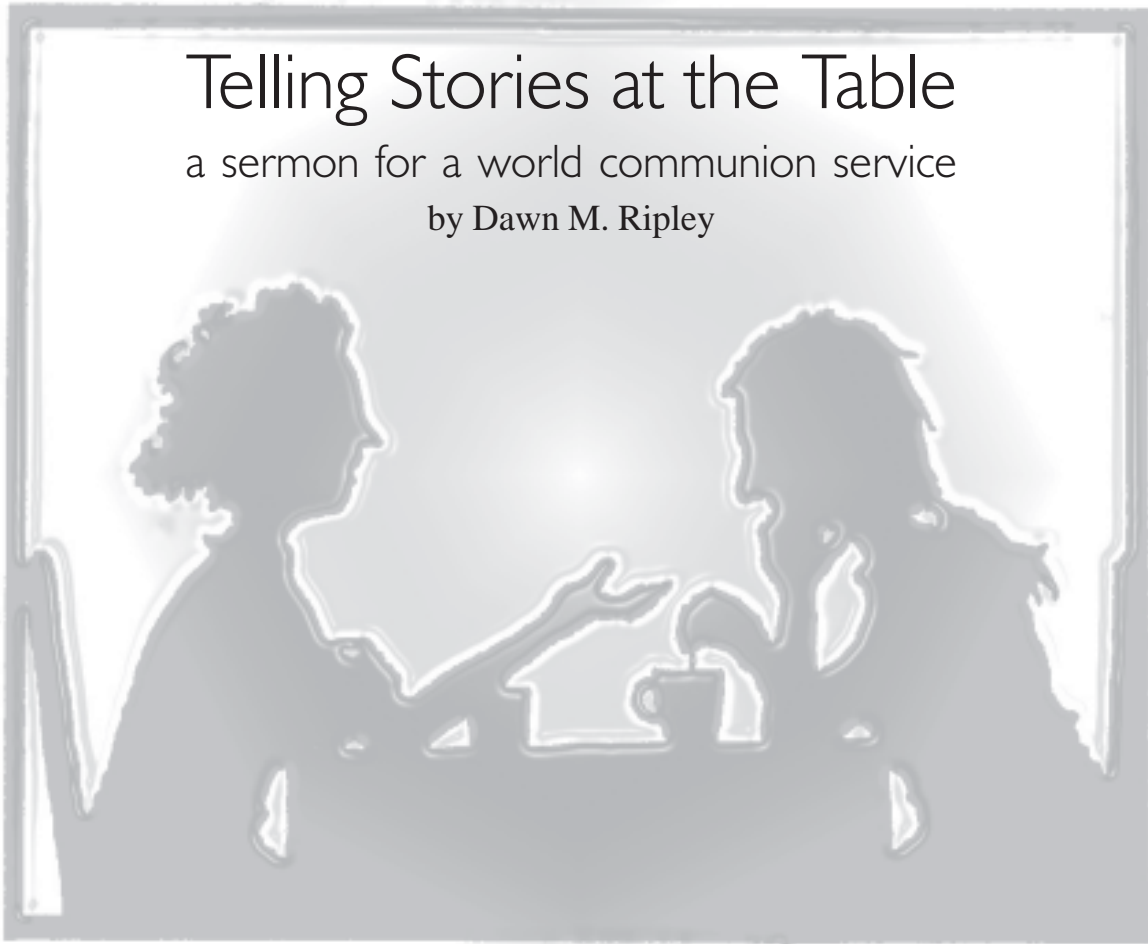
Through your goodness, we have this bread to offer which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.

—liturgical blessing from *Nothing Sacred*

Telling Stories at the Table

a sermon for a world communion service

by Dawn M. Ripley



Author's note: One of the translations drawn upon herein uses some startling language. Rest assured that the author, Clarence Jordan, was one of the civil rights movement's most daring advocates. The language he uses was intended to shock and surprise, much the same way that many of Jesus' stories did when he first told them. Therefore I have decided to quote from Jordan's translation precisely the way in which it was published in 1969, without amendment.

Most of what I remember from my childhood Sundays I have either forgotten or would just as soon forget: the frantic scrambling of getting three less-than-eager children cleaned up and dressed up and to Sunday School on time, the overwrought prayers of well-meaning Sunday School teachers trying to save my soul, the interminable sermon, and the endless refrains of "Just as I Am." But I also remember Sunday dinner.

Uncle Currey would head into the kitchen at 4:00 A.M. to get the meal started; yeast rolls took time to rise, and he would have been embarrassed to offer less than fried chicken and another meat or two. Then aunt Louise would join him, making sure that the meal would include fried potatoes, green beans, creamed corn, fresh tomatoes, butter beans, and anything else that their neighbors' gardens might be yielding.

And aunt Louise would apologize if she hadn't made time for a green salad and a congealed salad, rounded out with a raisin or chocolate or butterscotch pie and a jam

cake or angel-food cake, and sweet tea that would lock the jaw of any unsuspecting Yankee to help it down.

A feast, offered after church 'most every Sunday, open to any guest that might happen by, with a standing invitation to any and all family members—just show up on the backdoor steps. Conversation during the meal was routine and predictable—who was ailing, whose crops

Why, of all the things our Christian forebears could have made high and holy, did they choose something as common, as mundane, as hopelessly necessary, as feeding our faces? Maybe it's because that's where the stories that define us are best told...

were thriving, who'd just gotten married, who'd just had another boy—and God help you if you thought you were leaving the table when the main dishes were cleared. With belts eased a notch, Baptist coffee poured, slabs of cake and pie served—and the children excused, at last—the real stories began.

Why, of all the things our Christian forebears could have made high and holy, did they choose something as common, as mundane, as hopelessly necessary, as feeding our faces? And why on earth do Christian churches around the world choose communion to celebrate our unity in the midst of astounding diversity? Why a meal? Why a table? Maybe it's because that's where the stories that define us are best told, and today we get to hear one of the best ones. Listen closely, and imagine Jesus' Aramaic

I imagine that, in the dark days and weeks, then months and years, that followed Jesus' death, folks who knew him best, and then others who wished they had, would get together, probably over a meal, and try to remember his stories about the Kingdom of God.

with just a hint of Arkansas twang, told between bites of jam cake washed down with weak coffee:

Now all the “nigger-lovers” and black people were gathering around him to listen. And the white church people and Sunday school teachers were raising cain, saying, “This fellow associates with black people and eats with them.” So Jesus gave them this Comparison [Jordan's synonym for “parable”]:

“A man had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Dad, give me my share of the business.’ So he split up the business between them. Not so long after that the young one packed up all his stuff and took off for a foreign land, where he threw his money away living like a fool. Soon he ran out of cash, and on top of that, the country was in a deep depression. So he was really hard up. He finally landed a job with one of the citizens of that country who sent him into the fields to feed hogs! And he was hungry enough to tank up on the slop the hogs were eating. Nobody was giving him even a hand-out.

“One day an idea bowled him over. ‘A lot of my father's hired hands have more than enough bread to eat, and out here I'm starving in this depression. I'm gonna get up and go to my father and say, Dad, I've sinned against God and you, and am no longer fit to be called your son—just make me one of your hired hands.’

“So he got up and came to his father. While he was some distance down the road, his father saw him and was moved to tears. He ran to him and hugged him and kissed him and kissed him.

“The boy said, ‘Dad, I've sinned against God and you, and I'm not fit to be your son any more.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘You all run quick and get the best suit you can find and put it on him. Get his family ring for his hand and some dress shoes for his feet. Then I want you to bring that stall-fed steer and butcher it, and let's all eat and whoop it up, because this son of mine was given up for dead, and he's still alive; he was lost and is now found.’ And they began to whoop it up.

“But his older son was out in the field. When he came in and got almost home, he heard the music and the dancing, and he called one of the little boys and asked him what in the world was going on. The little boy said, ‘Why, your brother has come home, and you daddy has butchered the stall-fed steer, because he got him back safe and sound.’ At this he blew his top, and wouldn't go in. His father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look here, all these years I've slaved for you, and never once went contrary to your orders. And yet, at no time have you ever given me so much as a baby goat with which to pitch a party for my friends. But when this son of yours—who has squandered the business on whores—comes home, you butcher for him the stall-fed steer.’

“But he said to him, ‘My boy, my dear boy, you are with me all the time, and what's mine is yours. But I just can't help getting happy and whooping it up, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive; he was lost and has been found.’ (Clarence Jordan's interpretative translation of Luke 15: 1, 11ff.(1))

Have you ever stopped to think about just how much time Jesus spent eating and drinking and partying, and then telling stories about eating and drinking and partying? In fact, Jesus so thoroughly enjoyed eating and drinking that rumors started flying about his being a glutton and a drunkard (Mt. 11:19). The fact that he dared to dine with low life, the folks that no upstanding person would invite home for dinner after church, made him an outrageous affront to everything decent and orderly. Stories about a Kingdom where the undeserving are rewarded, stories that don't end the way they're supposed to—kept him off the a list of those invited to Jerusalem's swankier dinner parties. But it was his cryptic words over a certain Passover meal that made that Supper his Last:

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is

my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after supper, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22: 17-20, RSV).

To suggest that Jesus himself could become a proper sacrifice to replace the traditional offering of sacrificial animals was blasphemy, pure and simple. It was just the kind of rewriting of the Torah that the Temple leaders had been hoping against hope that Jesus would make—and it became the legal technicality that got him arrested, and killed.

I imagine that, in the dark days and weeks, then months

...this is the place that we learn whose children we are, and the names of all those aunts and uncles and cousins, and all their wild stories. This is the place we learn how to set the table, and learn that real hospitality means everyone—absolutely everyone—is welcome.

and years, that followed Jesus’ death, folks who knew him best, and then others who wished they had, would get together, probably over a meal, and try to remember his stories about the Kingdom of God. Eventually word spread, in the disciples’ careful telling, that Jesus had said, “Do this when you remember me” the last time they ate with him.

Perhaps this is how the remembering was ritualized, and the ritual sacramentalized, until the Last Supper that we now celebrate became—as it had for those who heard Jesus’ stories firsthand—a table spread somewhere between memory and hope. I wonder if that Last Supper was ritualized because the disciples wished they’d been listening harder to those stories, paying closer attention to the details. I wonder if, after hundreds of years of arguing over who’s got the right version of the story, we’re not still yearning for a sense of Jesus’ presence, and recreating this Meal is often as close as we can get.

It’s a commemoration, certainly; on its simplest level, it’s an exhortation to remember Jesus every time we break bread together. But I think it’s so much more than simply a reminder of who Jesus was. This meal is a festival, one of the parties that Jesus so loved, from which no one is excluded, a celebration of all the hope wrapped up in all those stories about how the Kingdom would break into our lives and how shalom would be born and what it would grow up to look like. These stories are our best catechism, the words that survive and persist when doctrine fails.

And it has. The scattered believers and seekers who naturally gathered at table to talk and to remember and to dream became a church who spent centuries arguing over who can come to the table and who can’t. Although the tables are many, the meal is the same: it is still the place where all those who lay claim to the way of Christ are struggling to learn the stories that will teach us how to follow that path.

Much the same way I did all those years ago at Currey and Louise’s table, this is the place that we learn whose children we are, and the names of all those aunts and uncles and cousins, and all their wild stories. This is the place we learn how to set the table, and learn that real hospitality means everyone—absolutely everyone—is welcome.

This is the place that heartburn painfully reminds us that anger is the only unwelcome guest, and forgiveness the only antacid. This is the place where, perhaps, we are occasionally even given permission to eat dessert first! This is where we tell Jesus’ stories over and over again, stories bursting at the seams with surprise, abundance, delight, and grace. This is where we’re reminded, every time we break this bread and drink from this cup, that following the way of Jesus means taking seriously the very real possibility of God’s shalom, even when those Kingdom stories seem outrageous—and the very thought of trying to live them seems nigh unto impossible.

The stories we hear and tell at this table are indeed just as elemental as the bread and the wine, and no mere wordplay; they are more than sufficient to feed our every hunger and slake our every thirst. At their best, these stories become the syllables on which we drape the sighs of our prayers, and by which we are emboldened to cry out, as Jesus taught us, “Abba, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”

—Dawn Ripley cares for an 80-acre spot of land called Holdfast Farm, near Albany, Indiana, where she is working to create a retreat and sanctuary for spiritual pilgrims. This sermon was first presented at Covenant Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky in October 2001.

1. Clarence Jordan, *The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts: Jesus’ Doings and the Happenings—a Modern Translation with a Southern Accent, Fervent, Earthy, Rich in Humor* (Clinton, NY: New Win Publishing, 1969).

A Feast Fit for the World

a children's sermon in the form of a dialogue

by Mark McClintock



Author's note: I use the following script as the basis of a dialogue between me and my puppet, Big Red, but it could be equally effective as a play performed by two human actors. For flexibility, I have simply used the appellations "ONE" and "TWO" to designate the two parts. The particular snack, of course, may also be substituted.)

ONE: *(To the children)* I've been looking forward to this morning, because we get to share one of my favorite snacks—cheese crackers. I invited my friend, Big Red, to join us today, because he loves cheese crackers, too. Isn't that right, Red?

TWO: *(Nods head)*

ONE: Are you glad to be here, Red?

TWO: *(Nods head)*

ONE: Are you ready for a cracker feast?

TWO: *(Nods head)*

ONE: Do you want to greet the children first?

TWO: *(Shakes head, "no")*

ONE: Oh. A little bashful today, I guess. Well, anyway, we are talking this week about communion. What do you think of when you hear the word, "communion?" *(Allow children to express ideas, and affirm them*

for volunteering answers.) In our church, we celebrate communion together to remember that we are one family—the family of Jesus Christ—and to remember how great Jesus' love for us is. Communion is a time for sharing. That's what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Can you say all that? *(Open your Bible and help the children repeat the scripture reference.)* How about you, Red? Can you say all that as well as the children?

TWO: *(Shakes head "no")*

ONE: Oh. Well, that's okay. Not only do we have Communion with the members of our church, but with Christians all over the world. Sometimes we call Communion, "The Lord's Supper." The way Paul describes Communion in the Bible, it may have been like a real supper or a small feast, not just a little piece of bread or wafer. This morning, as we talk about sharing, we are going to share a small feast

of cheese crackers. You did bring them, didn't you, Red?

TWO: (*Nods head*)

ONE: Great! Where are they?

TWO: (*Hands, uncovers, or points out a basket, which contains only two crackers*)

ONE: Um, Big Red, there are only two crackers there.

TWO: (*Nods head*)

ONE: I just filled this basket this morning, and I know there were plenty of crackers to share with everyone here. Where in the world are they?

TWO: (*As he opens his mouth to speak, crackers fall out of his mouth**) I don't know. Oops!

ONE: Red! You ate all our crackers?

TWO: Not all. I left some.

ONE: Two crackers, Red! How in the world are we going to share two crackers?

TWO: Oh, that's an easy one. One for me, one for you.

ONE: But we were supposed to share with all of these children. We're talking about communion, and that means everyone shares the feast.

TWO: Oh...well, you're a Christian—can't you break the crackers and multiply them?

ONE: Well, Jesus did do that, but I'm not so sure it would work here. You see, the way we multiply food is by sharing the abundance we have with people who have little. Why on earth did you eat all the crackers, Red?

TWO: Well, I was afraid if we shared them with all the children, there wouldn't be many left for me.

ONE: Oh, Red... That's the kind of attitude Paul was

scolding the Corinthians for having. Some of the Christians there were coming to the Lord's Supper early and eating everything up before the poorer people got there. Paul says that we must not be greedy but be sure that everyone shares the communion, especially taking care to share with the people who have little money and would otherwise go hungry.

TWO: I'm hungry!

ONE: I understand, Red, but I mean *really* hungry. There are people all over the world who may go for days with no food or perhaps nothing but a little bit of rice.

TWO: Whoa! They must be starving!

ONE: That's right. And most people in the United States have more than enough food.

TWO: Oh, I see... We're sort of like those people Paul was writing about... the Corruptions...

ONE: Corinthians, you mean.

TWO: Right. We got to the food first, and now we're hogging it for ourselves.

ONE: Yes, many of us are greedy, or we just try to ignore all the other people.

TWO: I'm really sorry, kids. I should have shared. I wonder if the Corrosions—

ONE: Corinthians.

TWO: Yeah, them. I wonder if they learned to share?

ONE: I don't know, Red, but I hope so. What's important is that *we* learn to share.

TWO: Good point. Can we bring crackers again some time? I want to share them with everyone!

ONE: Great plan, Red. We'll try again. Let's pray.

—Mark McClintock is a minister in Waco, Texas. In addition to being a skilled minister with children, he is an accomplished ventriloquist.

* If a human plays the part of TWO, rather than dropping crackers from the mouth, she or he should simply talk as if her or his mouth is full.