Year A, Easter 4, 4.26.26

The Rev. Barbara Ballenger Awesome Communion

Today everyone is invited to make an Awesome Communion, led by some of our youth who have taken a closer look at this sacrament, which is central to our worship. They are wearing stoles today, and will be your guides. A few weeks ago several of our youngsters brought their favorite adults with them to Bread Day to explore why bread is such an important art of Sunday worship.

We talked about our names for this meal: Communion, for example. It sounds a little like Come and Union. And we explored how this meal helps us to come together and be one – which is what union means. And we learned it's also called Eucharist, which is a fancy Greek Word that means Thanks! Jesus gave thanks to his Abba God for the bread and wine that he broke and shared. And we are thankful for God's gift to us in Jesus.

Why do we receive this bread every Sunday, we wondered? Because it's Awesome! Our celebration meal of bread and wine help us to remember what Jesus did for us at Easter – how he gave his life to help us give our lives to God, how God raised him from the dead so that we could have new life too. We remember it so well that it actually happens right there inside of us – Jesus becomes present in the bread and wine and becomes food that fills us with Jesus' love.

We imagined that there was a special kind of bread that remembers everything that's spoken in its presence. So you better be careful what you say in front of that bread. Because if you eat it, you'll swallow everything it remembers – the good things you say, and the bad as well. We told a story about a community that two of its members with that powerful bread. You can ask the kids with stoles to tell you the story. Or me, after the service.

Then we made some Bread that Remembers. Suzanne Teleha helped us make that wonderful Indian flatbread called Naan, which uses flour and yogurt and an egg and gets your hands really sticky. We made sure to add words of love, and kindness and appreciation to our bread, so that when we went home and shared it with our family members, they would take in all the good things that the bread remembered. Suzanne and Kelly Sacco baked it on the stove top for us, while we explored other aspects of the meal we have with Jesus each Sunday.

Inside the church we set up a little table and looked at my little communion kit, which is like a picnic basket for taking people communion. It has a very cute little chalice and plate and linens. We learned they have special names – the napkin is a purificator, the table cloth is a corpus, the plate is a paten, and the cup is a chalice. Because it's a special meal with special dinnerware. We learned a song that we will sing for you after Communion.

We learned that somehow in all our remembering about the story of the Last Supper Jesus becomes really present in the bread we eat and the wine we drink. When he said it would be his body and his blood he was using an expression that meant all of me. When people in Jesus' day talked about their

body and their blood, they meant, their whole selves, like saying body and soul. When he died on the cross, Jesus gave us all of himself, and wanted us to remember that in the bread and wine that we eat and drink. And since it's bread that remembers, his entire self would be in the bread and wine as well. And his whole self would be inside of us when we ate that bread. When we eat food it becomes part of us – it's in our bloodstream, and strengthens our muscles, it's part of our bodies. That's pretty genius when you think about it. Bread is fairly easy to make and to find. We even have gluten free for those who need it.

We learned what you're supposed to say when you receive the Bread and Wine, when Jesus offers us his whole self. When we are offered the bread to eat and the wine to drink, we receive it with the words Amen. Amen means Yes! Jesus says Here I am, and we say Yes, I believe it's you. Amen sounds a little like Come In! Jesus comes to visit us as bread and wine, and we say Come In, Jesus, Amen! That's the real question of Communion -- whether you believe that Jesus would like to live within you, be in communion with you. If you do, say Amen when the time comes. After that you can say thank you if you like.

Then the kids made stoles and the adults they brought with them helped. They stuck symbols of communion to their stoles. You might ask them what they put on their stoles and why when you see them later.

That's what we learned and that's what we would like to invite all of you to remember when you make an Awesome Communion today.

We not only take Communion at this Eucharist. We become a communion – A Communion that includes all of us with Jesus.

Another word for such a communion is a flock, like a flock of sheep led by a Good Shepherd. Being a flock is another kind of awesome communion, it's a communion that has feet, that's on the move.

On the fourth Sunday of the Easter Season we always remember that Jesus is a Good Shepherd and that we are his flock. So today Leo helped us pray a kid-friendly version of the 23rd Psalm that describes God as that shepherd who leads us and feeds and brings us through hard times on through to the other side.

Leos' version said: *When those who make fun of me are watching, he spreads out a feast in front of them. A feast just for me. And he anoints me just as a king would be anointed. My cup is running over. My happiness is complete.*

There's that meal again, a meal for the flock, a meal that brings abundant life and happiness.

Jesus liked to describe himself as a shepherd, and his followers as sheep, as a flock that God loved and would take care of. That's because in Jesus' day sheep and goats were a big part of life – they provided a lot of things people needed – wool for clothes, and hide for containers, and food for hungry people. Tending flocks took a lot of work, and shepherds had to be really tough and brave to make sure the sheep weren't attacked by wild animals or stolen by bad shepherds. Sometime a shepherd would lay

down right at the doorway to the pen where she kept her sheep to make sure that if anyone tried to get in, they had to go through the shepherd.

Sometimes when a lot of shepherds got together there would be a lot of different flocks. How did the sheep know whom to follow? Well sheep know the voice of their shepherd, so they just had to listen and they'd know whom they could trust and follow.

Makes sense that Jesus would talk about himself in that way, like a shepherd who leads a flock. He was always using things that were part of people's lives, things that people knew and understood, like bread and wine and sheep and shepherds and sowers and seeds. Because he was part of their lives, and wanted to stay part of their lives. And he's part of our lives and wants to stay part of our lives.

That's why Communion is so Awesome. It makes a union, one flock, out of all who would come to the table. We bring gifts to God – bread and wine – and God turns them into a gift for us – Godself, Jesus. And then we become gifts for others – people who love and care and feed and nurture. People carrying Jesus out into the world.

And that's pretty good news. In fact, it's Awesome!