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I've been watching the eagles flying over the pond behind my house, for these majestic birds are hard to miss as they soar through the air. After eagles mate, they live together for rest of their lives, which can last from 20 to 30 years. The eagles often sit motionless in a tree before they dive toward the water at speeds approaching 175 miles an hour. You can see the eagle's feet strike the water as she grabs a fish, and one can observe water splashing her beautiful wings—wings that can measure 7-1/2 feet from tip to tip. You won't notice, however, the ring of bony plates surrounding her eyes that protect them from the air pressure of high speeds. You also won't see the three eyelids—an upper, a lower, and third transparent lid she pulls over her eyes to keep out the dust as she dives and soars through the air.

It's no wonder that Moses used the imagery of an eagle to describe God's care for the Israelites as they escaped from the slavery of the Pharaoh. Since eagles stay together for life, they remind us of God's faithfulness—a love that remains with us

throughout our lives and beyond. The eagle eyes remind us that God watches over us, for nothing can prevent God from seeing the struggles we endure. The large wingspan of an eagle reminds us that God has enough room for everyone, a place of safety that keeps us secure in the chaos of life. Listen again to how the book of Exodus describes God's care: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."

God then suggested through Moses that if the people kept God's covenant, they would be a treasured possession out of all the people. The Hebrew word *ammim* translated as "people" means those of one's own kind, kinsmen. So, on the one hand God's vision sounds like an exclusive promise, just for those of their own kind.

But then Moses said, "Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation," and here the word translated as nation comes from the Hebrew word *goy*, usually

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referring to those of other nations, which sounds like a universal vision.

In other words, God has chosen certain people to bring hope to the entire world by being a priestly kingdom. Depending on how you view the words *kingdom* and *priestly* might affect how you understand what God invited them to become. If you think of a priest according to recent new stories about abuse, you won't find this priestly imagery helpful, but during the time of Exodus the word *priest* carried an understanding of someone called to serve as a mediator between God and the people, as a religious leader who guided the people on their journey from slavery into freedom. Moses' brother, Aaron, was considered the first priest, and later in Israel's history other priests came from Aaron's lineage.

Now what about the other word, *kingdom*? Since we don't live in a country ruled by a king and our nation began in rebellion against a king, we don't have much positive experience with the word, but

once again the word refers to a leader, a political leader.

God invited the people to become a priestly kingdom, but that doesn't imply that everyone would become a religious or political leader to guide a nation or serve in the temple. What did God have in mind?

One Jewish website suggests that the phrase describes "the innate closeness to G-d of each individual.... A further aspect, however, is that it emphasizes the responsibility of...each...man or woman...Closeness to G-d, being like a "priest"... imparts also the power and responsibility to make the world into a dwelling for the Divine, a realm where holiness can be expressed. This means teaching, guiding, having an effect" on the entire world.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately following this invitation, God offered the Ten Commandments, teachings on how to get along with one another and God. Honor God and your parents, take only what belongs to you, care for yourself with rest, and cause no harm to

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anyone else. By living in harmony with the world, I suggest we serve as a priestly kin-dom, as kin, a family who brings hope in the midst of a fragmented world. We serve as a kin-dom of hope when we listen to those who often are overlooked whether due to their religion, their sexual orientation, their level of income, or their color of skin. By having a conversation with those who differ from ourselves, we build bridges of trust within the kin-dom of humanity. That's something Rev. April Johnson strives to encourage as our Disciples Minister of Reconciliation through an initiative she created called ["One Bag of Tea, One Conversation, One Relationship."](#)

After 10 years of offering anti-racism trainings, Johnson saw that many participants had never talked about racism in any intentional way. Moreover, trainings were often held in groups of people who had never met or worked closely with each other.

She sensed a need for a new kind of entry point into reconciliation work.

"Racism is a very emotional topic, so we can't enter into that conversation with people we aren't in relationship with," Johnson says.

As she thought about how best to start those kinds of conversations, she was inspired by tea. Johnson knew that in various other cultures, tea is more than a beverage; it is an activity. On a trip to Kenya, she remembered being invited to "take tea," which served as an invitation to sit and visit without distraction.

The idea developed as Johnson asked herself, "What if we were to invite people we don't know to sit down and have tea and an intentional, structured, dialogue?" ...

To encourage conversation over tea, they created a tea bag wrapper that lists a question on each panel, so that "the conversation literally unfolds as you unfold the wrapper."<sup>2</sup>

Bringing people together to talk about difficult topics reminds us that we are kin, that we are all from the same family of humanity. As we come to the communion table today on this World Communion Sunday, we gather with Christians around the world to celebrate our oneness, that we are kin, family of God. The idea for a day of celebrating our oneness at the communion table began at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh in 1933. During WWII the idea spread

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since people were longing for unity in the world, and in 1940 what we now call the National Council of Churches expanded the idea when Disciples pastor Jesse Bader launched World Communion Sunday on the first Sunday of October in 1940, a celebration now in its 78th year.

As we gather at the table today, this event reminds us that we are kin to all those who gather at the same table this morning. We don't all look alike, and we don't all believe the same thing, but at this table we are one. In today's fragmented and divided world, this table represents something different. Here we're no longer male or female, Democrat or Republican, rich or poor, conservative or liberal. We're all hues of skin tones from all corners of the world, young and old who celebrate that we are one kin-dom of hope.

In the church of "La Reforma" in the state of San Luis Potosí, México, Elena Huegel describes how

they celebrate communion by inviting those often overlooked in a congregation:

The children have the responsibility of serving the elements of communion. We have a list with all the children, and every Sunday, one serves the bread, one the wine and another takes up and prays for the offering. Each one prays for the elements, though sometimes we have to help them, and they also read a Bible text. The children love this moment, and I believe that it has helped them be more self-confident and to feel like they are an important part of this church and community."

Even the youngest among us are part of God's kin-dom, and they often reflect a deep sense of hope. They trust that God is part of their lives, and they serve as wonderful members of God's kin-dom. On this World Communion Sunday, let's celebrate that God has invited all of us to treat one another as members of the God's kin-dom who lifts us up on eagles' wings.

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<sup>1</sup> Tali Loewenthal, "Kingdom of Priests," [www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/358235/jewish/Kingdom-of-Priests.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/358235/jewish/Kingdom-of-Priests.htm)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://disciples.org/general-ministries/reconciliation-ministry-celebrates-first-year-of-one-bag-of-tea-initiative/>