Sunday, October 1, 1978
GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD
John 3:16-21

"God so loved the world," proclaims the Gospel according to John, quoting the words of Jesus Christ. Notice Jesus said, "God loves the whole world," not God loves the church, or any particular denomination or expression of the faith, not just any group of people, not just some nations. God loves the world and all that is in it — the Arabs, the Jews, the Russians, the Chinese, the people of Africa — everyone!

Today, on World-Wide Communion Sunday we want to remind ourselves of some parts of the world which God loves and we're going to use as examples same parts of the world that are in trouble, where healing is especially needed. We still live in a broken world and to be reminded of this brokenness can make our coming to the Lord's table for Communion more honest.

In the midst of brokenness, healing is always taking place. The recently concluded Camp David Middle East compromises, for example, offer hope for a part of the world that has been broken for many many years. As Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State recently said, "The ratification of this framework for peace will be painful and anguishing, and in the coming weeks many provocative trivialities and exaggerations will be expressed. But a profound historical process has started and if it is given a chance to work, both sides and all of us will be living in a different world within six months."

We also need to be reminded as we come to the Lord's Table, that there are other parts of the world where our brothers and sisters in the human race are not living in peace and harmony.

According to the best knowledge that can be obtained, one of the worst atrocities in the history of civilization is going on right now in Cambodia. In the last four years, somewhere between two and three million people have died, fully one-fifth of the country's population. Execution, starvation, unchecked disease are being used, in the words of the Communist leadership, to break up the imperialist spy rings working to subvert the revolution.

Former civil servants and their families, former army officers, teachers, students, technicians, businessmen, all are being exterminated. Anyone with a trace of education, anyone who resists programming into the new and harsh agrarian economy of Cambodia which is meant to pro-duce the purest form of Communism ever, is marked for death. Nothing so brutal on such a scale has occurred since the Holocaust. And yet, as with Hitler's extermination camps, there has been no cry of public outrage and little effort on the parts of other governments to halt the killings. It's almost as though we do not want to know.

In Korea there is brokenness. Christians with a social conscience operate largely underground — those who aren't in prison. Phones are tapped; mail is opened; everybody who is anybody is watched. What might precipitate another government crackdown on dissidents is the question which permeates all Christian gatherings.

In South America, there is brokenness. Recently in Chile, a hunger strike spread to many locations as Christians and other concerned citizens attempted to bring pressure on the government to release information on the whereabouts of their disappeared relatives and friends who had been arrested and are being held without charge.

One reporter who had visited Chile during the strike asked over and over again, “Why are you here? What is motivating you? What do you want?” A young woman responded with a typical answer, “In 1976, my father was suddenly arrested, as he was leaving for work. We waited for him that night, but he did not come home. Then a neighbor told us that he had been picked up. Since then, we have not heard anything. No letters or petitions have helped. My mother is working in order to support me and my four brothers and sisters. I decided to join the hunger strike in hopes of getting information on the whereabouts of my father.”

To love is not to hide is the motto in this effort. These are just a few examples from various parts of the world that need to be remembered by all of us. There are some problems in the world which we as individuals can do very little about in a direct way. But at least we can be aware of them.

Furthermore, I mention these on World-Wide Communion Sunday because Communion is a feast that takes place partly in hope. The prayer, “Come Lord Jesus,” was an early Communion prayer. What we celebrate is, among other things, the promise that the day will come when people will live in peace and harmony, when none shall hunger or thirst.

If this is our hope, what can we do now to express it and witness to it? There are no easy answers to these questions. But we do know that as Christians who believe that in God’s world, we all are brothers and sisters and who believe that God loves the whole world, we have to be numbered among those who work and struggle so that this world moves toward peace for all. It is in this spirit that we come to the Lord’s Table. Amen.