



The Rev. David Perkins, Interim Rector

May 16, 2010

Easter C/07

Propers

Lections: **Acts 16:16-34**
 Psalm 68:1-20
 Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20
 John 17:20-26

Collect of the Day, Seventh Sunday of Easter: The Sunday after Ascension Day

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.* (BCP, 226)

Introduction

It is impossible to be a Christian. It is impossible not to be a Christian. It is impossible to be a Christian outside the Church and the Church is impossible.

[Petru Dumitriu, To the Unknown God. Trans. James Kirkup (London: Collins, 1982). Cited by Leander E. Keck, The Church Confident (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p. 13.]

1. I often have felt this way. Can't live with the church and can't live without it. Remember the old joke about how the church is like Noah's ark, "The storm on the outside is worse than the smell on the inside." Yet, the prayer of Jesus exudes such hope for the church. Here he prays for all who will believe through the word of the Apostles.

(Example - continuing Anglican churches. Or, Church of God, Mountain Assembly)

2. This passage is poignant in its intensity. "I want them you have given me to be with me where I am." (Jesus grieves over our separation just as were the disciples grieving over his leaving)

"You love them as you have loved me"

"That the love you have for me might be in (among) them."

3. This passage reveals what God is about in the world--bringing us to recognize and believe in God and then forming us into a community bound by love and a sense of mission to share the message with the world--an inclusive, witnessing community.

Jesus prayed for and prays for us in these terms.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

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I. What Being One is Not

1. It is not being identical in theology. The earliest church (Acts 15) had doctrinal diversity (witness Paul's letters). The earliest church had different theologies of mission. Being one in doctrine may actually mask disunity. (E.G. Terry Sweeney—myth of belonging to a church with theological unity. Two problems—very boring and human sinfulness would make that less than heaven)

2. It is not being one organization. We see in the Episcopal Church that being "one" does not mean that we all are on the same page.

II. What Is This Unity

1. It is grounded in the unity of Father and Son and Spirit and is a given. The Trinity dances in unity, even though each is distinct. Ephesians refers to "preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This unity is a given; we can disrupt it but we cannot create it. Jesus says in our text, "I in you and you in me, that they also may be in us."

So, our unity is based on this gift of love manifested especially in Christ's sacrificial death. We live in the Trinity and the Trinity in us. We connect to Father, Son, and Spirit in each other. We relate to Christ in each other; Christ in each of us reaches out to Christ in the other. The way we treat each other is the way we treat Christ in each other.

Moltmann quotes Cyprian. "'The Church is a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.'/40/

/40/Cited for example in Lumen Gentium, Ch 1 (in Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. A Flannery, revised ed., Dublin 1988)

"In the community of Christ and in the energies of the life-giving Spirit we experience God as *the broad place* which surrounds us from every side and brings us into the free unfolding of new life. In the love which affirms life we exist *in God* and *God in us*. The church is not just the space for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the place indwelt by the whole Trinity. The whole Trinity is the living space of the church, not just the Holy Spirit.

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"In this community the competitive struggle which turns people into lonely individuals is ended, and the social chill of a heartless world vanishes."/42/

[Jürgen Moltmann, Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 330.]

2. We could think of it as a unity of shared story. The master story of our salvation in Christ we repeat in the creed and the Great Thanksgiving, but each of us has a personal story. By faith our personal story has become one with the larger story of our Christian community, our denomination, and the master story of salvation in Christ. The story of our relationship and our journey holds us together. (E.G.—if you move to Minnesota and join St. Andrew's, your personal story will forever be marked by your share in the St. John's story).

"Sharing stories is one of the oldest and most precious ways we have of weaving strong webs of relationship with those among whom it is given us to work out our salvation. Stories bind us into community and sustain us by reminding us what we are about. . . .

"We are deeply responsible to those whose stories we know--or know in part. That responsibility is best served by hearing all stories as subplots in the 'master narrative'--relocating our lives daily in the story of salvation."

[Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, "Learning not to Share," Weavings (xxii:3, May/June 2007), pp. 25, 27.]

3. It is a unity of conviction and belief

Most of us (except for the nontrinitarian) could recite the Apostle's or Nicene Creed together in nearly complete agreement. A basic residuum of conceptual unity, even if we do not take each historical reference with the same degree of literal acceptance. Space for divergence of belief with harmony on the essentials.

"On the necessary points, unity; on the questionable points, liberty; in everything, love."

[Medieval writer Rupertus Meldenius, cited by Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life* (Easbourne, UK: Kingsway, 1993), p. 222.]

4. It is a unity of mission and purpose

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Example--The Jeremiah Group an interfaith community network in New Orleans of sixty churches--Protestant, Roman, Episcopal, black and white churches. Believers united for proclamation and service, for prophetic action in the community.

We are on mission together. Even our worship is mission—it is a public assembly in the world, sharing the story of God's salvation in each Sunday service. We are on mission to do acts of mercy, to speak prophetically to the world's evils, and to witness to God's saving love in Christ. Mission is our trump suit—when we wrangle over budgets and personalities, we resolve all of that in favor of mission. Mission trumps everything.

We are a conglomerate of people from various denominations and no church background. We are here because the witness of this community offers something unique in this community, because there are many people unreached who will be attracted here.

Conclusion

Our responsibility is to pray for, seek, cultivate and preserve this unity. We must take stock of how our personality conflicts, our pet ideas, our pet projects weaken the unity of our church and turn from those in favor of our church's worship, service, and witness.

My flight across S. Dakota and the altered vision of landscape, field, fence, etc. From a Cessna at 3000 feet the fences and hedges and tree lines have no height. All looks united. When we are lifted out of ourselves into our union with the Father, from that elevated spiritual plane the fences separating us from others disappear.

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