

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church

Seventh Sunday of Easter: June 1, 2025

Unity

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on this Seventh Sunday of the Easter Season. Today's Gospel is a prayer Jesus is bringing to God the Father that contains not only concern for the present believers in Jesus Christ, but also is a prayer that includes us. In today's reading we have the past, present and the future of the church represented. Unfortunately, even Jesus has an unanswered prayer.

It's right there at the beginning of our reading as Jesus prays, "I ask not only on behalf of these (meaning his disciples), but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." This means that everyone who has come to faith since the time of the apostles falls under that second category: we have come to believe through someone else's word—someone else talking about and pointing us to God.

If nothing else, our unity follows the pattern of God's unity, which is to give for the good and building up of others. Jesus describes this as the glory that the Father gave to him, the Son, which he has subsequently given to us. And as we participate in this to its fullest potential, becoming completely one with the purposes of God in our life together, we witness to the world this ultimate truth: that Jesus came to the world for us, to love all of us with the same love that God has for God's self.

Jesus knows that the world doesn't know this kind of perfect love, but that is all Jesus wants for us. He's given his life for this purpose, and he will keep giving himself to the task. Notice that Jesus describes it as a task that he has done, will do, and hopes will be experienced right now. "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." Past. Future. Present. Unity in God's love is **that** important.

We live today in a very challenging world with more separation happening than togetherness. There are many people who are struggling in survival mode and have a "me first" attitude. We see that dog-eat-dog ideal living out day after day. It can be a challenge to move aside and let another take the spotlight. It can be difficult to retire, or mentor and allow another to shine. But Jesus tells us over and over that there is enough love to go around.

I suspect that as the disciples gathered for what would be their final meal with Jesus (although they did not know it at the time) they did not feel like one. They were no doubt frightened, uncertain, insecure, scrappy, and squabbling. Peter was petulant; Judas was planning to betray Jesus; and James and John were probably still jockeying for promotions. Did it change after the Resurrection? Probably not. We do have all those letters to different Christian communities who are struggling.

We have to relearn as Christians that just because I disagree with you doesn't mean I hate you or that you don't have something worthy to contribute. However, that is what people in our country are experiencing today. To be honest, if you have 6 Episcopalians sitting next to each other in a pew, there is a good chance there are 6 different spiritual/religious beliefs. Yet we are a community of one. We are a community of one because there is one Jesus, and dare I say this: One Love. One God. That is what Jesus is saying and praying.

As it is for us, it was for the disciples then as well. So, it is crucial for us today to return to Jesus' prayer. It describes his hope, his vision, and his picture of what we, his followers, are to look like and how we are to live our lives together. It is very clear that his words are meant for everyone — then and now — as he prays for "those who will believe in me" through the words of the disciples.

It is a prayer for community. Jesus prays that, "**all** may be one." To be a follower of Jesus is to be a part of a greater whole. According to Jesus there are to be no solitary Christians or spiritual "Lone Rangers." Within that community the prayer is for unity: "that all may be **one**." Does that mean we all have to get along all the time? Does that mean we all have to agree **all** the time?

If one thinks of this as a functional or political statement, it would seem to call for constant agreement and accord. But if one thinks more in theological or spirit-filled terms then it becomes who we are. We are one in Christ whether we agree with each other or not. We are one in Christ whether we like one another or not. To become a part of Christ is to become a part of the community; a part of the one.

Theologian Miroslav Volf calls this “mutual interiority,” much like a marriage where two people each maintain their own personal identity, while opening themselves to each other and allowing the other to be included within their personal space. This is the kind of self-giving love that is more than a feeling. It’s a choice to reciprocate the love God offers us. It’s a choice to love God back by loving each other. This kind of love challenges us “to be enough of a self to engage in self-giving love. Any failure to live in unity is usually a failure to reciprocate – a failure to love God back as we are all created in God’s image.”

We are called to show the world how to disagree and love each other at the same time. This is the reason why our unity is so important to Jesus that he asks for it four times in two and a half verses. It isn’t just for our benefit. It isn’t just for Christ’s benefit. Christ’s prayer for unity has only one goal: ***that the world would know God has sent Jesus into the world by our ability to model Jesus’ love.***

Let us confront the current conflicts in the world with grace and love for one another, so that the witness we bear points others to Jesus – through the love we model. Only then can Jesus finally expect an answer to his prayer that we might be one, even as he and the Father are one. Only then can the Kingdom of God become fully real.

Only then can we gather around this Table, offer one another the Bread and Cup, and rejoice as we hear once again the reminder that, because we who are many partake of the One Holy Communion, we have been made one in Christ Jesus. Amen