

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA  
Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B, May 13, 2018, Mother's Day  
The Rev. Bill Queen, "That We May Be One"  
John 17:9-16

in John's gospel Jesus began a long prayer for his disciples starting in chapter 13 which continues even into our reading today; and since we are Jesus' current disciples—you've heard me say that many times from this pulpit—we can be sure that Jesus continues this same prayer for us still too; and what is it that he most hopes for us in his prayer?: that we "may be one" in the same kind of way that Jesus and his Father God are one

it does not take any special insight to see the many ways that Jesus' Church seems anything but one in our day; think of divisions between Protestant and Catholic churches; or of divisions between liberal and conservative Protestants—some of that is seen between denominations, within denominations, and even within individual parishes; it seems that any hoped-for Christian oneness is far too often overwhelmed by the divisive aspects of our human nature

but there is room for hope; within Jesus' prayer we are given ways to think and pray and work towards oneness; not towards a oneness that will erase denominations or force every Christian to understand or express the faith in the exact same ways; but towards a oneness that comes from the recognition that we are all tied to each other... through our relationships with God; and that our connection to each other ... through Christ is more powerful and more important than any of the differences of ideas or of practices that may divide us; the phrase "brothers and sisters in Christ" that we find throughout the New Testament is not an empty figure of speech

notice that Jesus prays that we may be one as he and the Father are one (and you could add in the Holy Spirit for good measure); now without getting into Trinitarian theology of oneness in threeness, the main idea behind what Jesus is saying is that of unity and identity; Jesus is deeply connected to the Father (that's unity) without losing his uniqueness as Christ (that's identity)

one helpful example in understanding how to seek unity without losing one's identity is Christian marriage; the best marriages are the ones where there is

a balance between the needs of the individuals and the needs of the couple; in Christian marriage God becomes a partner in that relationship, in a sacramental way; it is each of the individual's relationship with God which provide the strong foundation for that balancing act of individual and couple

this is a model we can apply to other Christian relationships; God becomes a partner in our relationships with all other Christians in a sacramental way due to our baptism; so our individual, parish, and denominational relationships with God provide the strong foundation for us to share ideas with and work with other Christians finding unity while still retaining our identity

this is a model we can apply to other relationships too, even to those with people outside of religious circles; our Baptismal Covenant speaks to all of our relationships when we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves;” it is clear that the unity which Jesus is praying for is one of the key ways that the world may come to know God—it is our best witness to God

people all over the world are split into tribes, factions, political and religious groups, races, and nations which are often at odds with each other; each group usually seeking its own good at the expense of others; Jesus recognizes that if Christians can succeed in getting beyond the divisiveness that seems such an inbred part of human nature, that that would be our most powerful testimony that something special is going on among Christians—something so special that it could only come from the presence and power of God

Jesus' prayer gives us one more way to think and pray and work towards oneness, when he prays that the love with which the Father has loved him will be in us too; that familiar song says it in other words: “they will know we are Christians by our love”; and remember my sermon of two weeks ago, that the kind of love we talk about in our faith is not the love of feelings, but the love of actions; in a world so full of hatred, any group that can demonstrate acts of love—looking out for others to the same extent as we look out for ourselves—stands out in a way that again witnesses to God's presence and power

the Vestry met yesterday to plan for the major activities we will undertake for the rest of our interim time together; we'll be sharing those details more with you soon; we looked at our church's role in Spotsylvania in many of the same

terms I'm using here; we also looked for one thing that seems to be the common thread that holds all of what we are doing and plan to keep doing together, and we came up with this: "engaging people inside and outside of our parish to provide peace and hope for our community;" to do this, we are going to explore ways to share activities with other nearby churches; to do this, we are going to offer training about how to share our faith and become ambassadors for Christ in our communities; to do this, we are going to look at ways to invite young people to participate in a wider range of our parish's life and ministries

and isn't what we are talking about here also reflected in the best of motherly love, which we celebrate today on Mother's Day? think of how mothers strive to love all of their children without making distinctions among them; Lynn Ellen always told each of our children that she loved each one of them the most—and she meant it; God loves each of us the most too, and God's wants us to reflect and demonstrate that kind of undifferentiated love to everyone around us

know that Jesus continues to pray for us in our day; Lord knows, we need it; take heart that his prayers for us are powerful; take heart that living into a deeper and deeper relationship with God allows us to balance our lives in such a way that we can seek unity with others without losing our identity; take heart that Christ's love has been given to us, so that we can share that love with the world; be Jesus' disciples, and be the church that Jesus wants us to be; be his disciples, and be the church that he prays for us to be