

May 17, 2020

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace from
God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Our gospel reading from John is a small part of a big conversation with Jesus and his disciples before the passion. In essence Jesus is giving his disciples last minute instructions...

Jesus says that he will send an advocate, or the Holy Spirit, so we have a little foreshadowing for Pentecost which we will celebrate in two weeks.

Jesus then talks about the Holy Spirit as being the spirit of truth, and we have the language of union, "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." This very mystical language of "oneing." Of many being one...

This morning I'd like to do some reflecting on this indwelling language of union. I read recently that the deepest desire of all human beings is to be at one with one another. To be completely known, to be understood, and completely accepted and loved, exactly as we are. To deeply belong... I think there might be something to that.

In our Trinitarian understanding of God, we have the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and although we describe them as separate in how we experience them, they are also in union with one another. God, is three in one and one in three. And we are a part of that indwelling union...

This trinitarian understanding God is fundamentally relational. God is relationship, within Himself, and with also with us. It is this relationship that draws us toward God, and consequently then, also toward one another. When God dwells in you and dwells in me, we are connected in and through God.

So, in other words, the truth is, in God's love, we are all connected together. We belong together, even though we are all different from one another. And all together, we are the body of Christ. There is wholeness in this understanding. There is union and love in this understanding.

And this is how I think of the spirit of truth; that God is love, and we are to love one another. Which is exactly the new commandment Jesus gives us, which we celebrate on Maundy Thursday-- to love God, and love our neighbor. All pretty simple...

Unfortunately, this loving God and loving our neighbor is probably the hardest spiritual exercise we can possibly engage in. And at the same time, as difficult as it is, it also offers the greatest chance for transformation. And the change I'm talking about, is not that everyone suddenly comes around to your way of thinking, but that you find capacity to love people who are different than yourself. This is not changing other people, it's a change that happens to you...

As human beings we are covetous creatures. We want things the way we want them. We want our stuff, and we want our agendas, and we want to get our way. This means we are rivals with one another... And instead of finding ways we are connected; we mostly experience ways in which we are disconnected from one another.

The spirit of truth says we are connected, but the spirit of lies says otherwise... This is just the same old, same old; Republicans and Democrats, fighting and squabbling; finger pointing and de-humanizing.

And I wonder about social media, in the midst of all this coveting... I've seen great examples of how social media connects people together. And unfortunately, I've also seen examples of how social media has disconnected people from one another.

One of the things I've noticed about Facebook is it's easy to find things that you agree with. It's pretty easy to find organizations that pander to your particular point of view. Or perhaps I should say, there are organizations that find you and feed you with their way of seeing the world.

What this self-selection does, is to split us even further apart in different cultural camps. And consequently, we isolate ourselves even more from things we might not agree with. Whether we do it ourselves, or whether technology does it for us or to us, it is happening. Perhaps now, more than ever we need to be intentional about finding ways to love one another in our differences.

One of the tools of learning to love people who are different, is listening. And not listening to agree, but listening to understand. There's a big difference...

Quick story... In the church I used to be at, I hosted a current events class about once a month. I'd choose a couple issues in the news and find stories from different perspectives.

I'd start the session by talking about the Apostle Paul, and being the body of Christ, and needing one another, you know the right-hand and the left-hand stuff... Kind of setting the stage for respectful dialogue. And people loved participating... It was a popular class.

We usually scheduled Adult Ed classes a year ahead of time. Typically, a mix of bible studies, special speakers, topics... Well, unbeknownst to me, we scheduled a current-events class the Sunday after the general election of 2012.

That was the year President Obama won re-election against Mitt Romney and Representative Tim Walz won reelection to congress in Southern Minnesota... When I was looking at issues to bring to the class, avoiding the election results would have been like talking about hang nails, at a pandemic news briefing... So, I had to bring it up, there was no way to dance around it.

When we started the class, I gave the usual talk about being the body of Christ, and listening to one another, and respecting differences... And immediately I sensed things were emotionally raw, it was palpable.

There were some people who seemed to be over joyed, and giddy and congratulating one another. And there were also some people who looked as if they wanted to cry. I could see their discomfort... And sitting almost next to one another... I was scared the meeting was going to blow up!

So, I got preachy, I preached at all of them a good long time about listening to one another, and loving one another... And then I asked some of those who were sad to talk. Just to express how they were feeling.

And the most remarkable thing happened... The people who were sad spoke from their hearts, and talked about their disappointment, their fears and how their hopes were gone... They were honest and truthful...

And people listened! And instead, of being all happy and clappy, those who were on the other side, listened and heard-- authentic hurt. Their expressions changed... For some brief moments, in a small way, that morning there was love and understanding between people who were different from one another.

Nobody in that room changed their minds about anything, but there were moments of love... There was some union, some “oneing” going on, some understanding, and compassion. There was some resurrection happening...

I think this is how we experience the spirit of truth. When the walls that separate and divide us fall, and we experience our common humanity, we discover we really aren't all that much different.

The good news is that we are all joined to this Body of Christ. We are all one in God... In this very mystical language, we deeply belong... We are fully known and fully forgiven... We love one another, because we have first been loved...

Amen... Let us sing a couple verses of Abide with Me...