

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Year C

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

John 17:20-26

In our reading from the Gospel according to John, Jesus is concluding His discourse to the disciples. In this, we have what has become known as the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus has turned His attention from the disciples and is talking to God on their behalf. He is not just praying for His original disciples who were gathered in the upper room with Him, but for those who are to come after them as a result of their teaching. We read about how Jesus and God are One and that we are to be one with Jesus. What does it mean to be one with Jesus? And, why is this important?

To explore oneness in Christ, we must first look at what it takes to be one with each other - to have the same unity that exists between Jesus and His Father. At the core of this unity is love - God's love for Jesus is the same love Jesus has for us. To be at unity with our fellow Christians, we must love them as Christ loves us. That is where the rub might exist. How can we love those who worship differently than us? How can we love those - as in the case in Ireland during the Troubles - who are fighting against us and bombing our homes?

To truly love one another, we must get beyond the surface disagreements and get to know the people individually. In the case of Ireland, one of the ways that happened was through an effort called the Dublin Project, which brought Protestant and Catholic youths to the United States for a couple of months and had them interact on a daily basis doing activities together, worshiping together, and making friends. It becomes difficult to hate someone with whom you celebrated a birthday. In Palestine, making music together in an orchestra made up of youth from Israeli and Palestinian communities has made a difference there. We need to make the effort to get to know each other on a personal basis; then we can begin to love one another. Paul makes the point in his letters that we are all part of the Body of Christ. And, like the human body, we must all work together as one - to love each part of the body. Thus, the first step in being one with Christ is to be one with our fellow Christians.

Our oneness with Christ is also linked to our ministry to those around us. Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons from all who came to Him - not just those who might be able to support His ministry, or those who might aid in its growth because they were great orators. He took the humble, the disadvantaged, and the poor as the subjects of His ministry. He went to those who were in need, wherever they might be. Therefore, we are called to examine our ministry in the same light - who has needs that we might be able to meet. Is the Wednesday evening meal still where the need is? We have begun to ask that question. Obviously, the AA ministry is still very important. Where else can we focus our time and talents?

One of the detriments to our ministry as Christians worldwide, is our lack of unity as Christians. Others look at the quarreling between denominations and wonder how we are all part of the same

religion. One of the great advancements in Christian unity in the past many years has been the work and ministry of Pope Francis. As we witnessed at his death and the funeral, Christians of all types came together to honor this man and the witness he had in the world. We can only hope that this spirit of fellowship continues. How can we, at the local level, aid in this? Perhaps we are doing a bit of that with our Presbyterian friends and, in the case of the men's breakfast, with members of other denominations. Can we seek out others?

To truly be one with Jesus, we must learn how to be one with those around us. It has often been said that there are no Baptists, or Presbyterians, or Lutherans, or Episcopalians in heaven - there are only people of God. How can we, the people of St. Matt's, make that same idea a reality here? One might say it takes two to make it happen. I would say it takes one to begin the process. How? By reaching out to our neighbors as Christ has reached out to us. If we believe that God and Jesus are in us as they are in each other, let's start acting like it and show that the love with which God loved Jesus might be reflecting in our love for our neighbors.