

Sermon for Easter 7 Year A 2020
Unity Out of Disunity

On this, the seventh Sunday of Easter,
Jesus is praying for his disciples.
We are back again where we have been for the past two Sundays—
with the disciples at the last supper.
Jesus has shared the Passover meal with them,
he has washed their feet,
given them a new commandment to love as he loves,
and told them of his leaving.
Now he prays.
In today's gospel we overhear a portion of his prayer.
He prays for us.
Three times he asks his Father and our Father
that we would all become one as he and the Father are one.

If Jesus is praying for our oneness then he is also
recognizing and rejecting the boundaries and differences that divide us.
There are divisions within ourselves,
our families,
our churches,
our nation.
We live in a world full of divisions—male or female,
rich or poor,
gay or straight,
Anglo or Hispanic,
Christian or Muslim or Jewish,
conservative or liberal,
educated or uneducated,
young or old,
heaven or earth,
divine or human,
sinner or saved,
orthodox or heretic . . .

We could go on and on listing the boundaries
that we encounter and all too often establish and promote.
More accurately, they are not just divisions
they have become oppositions.
These divisions exist not only out there in the world
but primarily and first in the human heart.
We project onto the world our fragmented lives.

Here is something important to consider:
for every boundary we establish there is a human being.
Ultimately, boundaries and differences are not about issues.
They are about real people, with names, lives, joys, sorrows,
concerns, and needs just like us.
Sometimes we forget or ignore this.
It is easier to deal with an issue than with a real, live person.

Whether or not we admit it or even recognize it,
the boundaries we establish and enforce
are usually done in such a way as to favor us;
to make us feel okay,
to reassure us that we are right and we are in control;
we are chosen, desired, seen and recognized,
approved of and accepted.
In order for me to win, someone has to lose;
in order for me to be included,
someone must be excluded—
otherwise, winning and being included mean nothing. Right?
In this way, the divisions of our lives become self-perpetuating.

We often deal with the boundaries and differences that divide us
by how we will get along with each other
and behave in the midst of our differences.
But that is not Jesus' prayer.

Jesus does not pay for our tolerance,
our getting along,
or just being nice to each other.
He does not even pray that our differences would be eliminated.
Instead he prays for our oneness.
He prays that we would be one
as he and the Father are one
so that our oneness would be
the revelation of God's presence to the world.
Oneness in the midst of difference
becomes a sacramental presence of God's life in the world.

That does not mean, however,
that we lose our identity or individuality.
Jesus does not stop being Jesus
and the Father does not stop being the Father
because they are One.
Oneness is less about numbers and quantity;
oneness—unity—is qualitative.
Jesus and the Father are one because they love
and give themselves to each other.
Oneness is a quality of life—God's life.
Jesus' prayer for oneness is ultimately
that we would be and live like God.
Jesus' prayer for our oneness, our unity,
is about *Shalom*—or peace.
The biblical understanding of *shalom*, peace
signifies completeness, wholeness,
and has ethical dimensions because
shalom denotes the overcoming of strife,
quarrel, enmity, and war—
Peace is a manifestation of divine grace.
For Jews, peace was the purpose of the entire Torah or
Hebrew bible.
Shalom (Peace) is even the name of the Holy One of Israel.

The unity, the oneness, the peace that Jesus is praying for
is not about eliminating differences.

It is about reconciled diversity.

It is, ultimately, about love.

Love is the only thing that can ever overcome division.

Love is the only thing that can bring about reconciliation
and honor diversity.

Over and over Jesus tells us that:

Love God.

Love your neighbor.

Love yourself.

Love your enemy.

Our love for God, neighbor, self and enemy is
meant to be about peace-making, not creating more division.

Our love for God, neighbor, self, and enemy reveals our oneness,
and the measure of our oneness, our Christ-likeness, is love.

In love there may be differences—diversity—but there is no division.

The love of God in Christ is unity—but not uniformity.

The love of God in Christ knows no boundaries.

God loves males and females, the rich and the poor,

the gay and straight,

the Hispanic and Anglo.

God loves Christians and Muslims,

conservatives and liberals,

the educated and the uneducated.

The love of God in Christ loves young and old,

heaven and earth, divine and human.

God loves sinner and saved,

orthodox and heretic.

All are loved fully, completely and uniquely.

God does not even draw boundaries between Jesus and us.
If we think God loves Jesus more than anyone else,
we have missed the point of the gospel.
God loves each of us the same as God loves Jesus.
God loves your neighbor the same as God loves Jesus.
God loves your enemy the same as God loves Jesus.
If that is how God loves,
how can we do anything less and still call ourselves Christians?
How can we do anything less than spend our days
praying for and then actively engage in the love that is peace-making,
the love that brings diversity together so that our broken world
is made whole in God's Shalom?

For far too long we have dealt with each other through our boundaries,
differences, and divisions.
You can see where that has gotten us.
Everywhere you look at the world—we see the devastation
of how dealing with others through the divisions we label
do violence to those who defend their positions as well as those
they are defending against.
There is no oneness, no peace-making in any of that.

The signs of our disunity are everywhere.
If we fail to reconcile and unify and engage in peace-making,
if we normalize divisiveness, separation, bitterness, and discord,
the world won't know what it needs to know about God,
and in the terrible absence of that knowing,
it will believe falsehoods that break God's heart.
The world will believe that the whole Jesus thing is a sham.
It will assume that there really is no transformative power
in the death and resurrection of Christ.
It will decide that God is a mean, angry, vindictive parent,
determined only to shame and punish his children.
It will believe that the universe is a cold, meaningless place,
ungoverned by love.

It will write off the Church as a false and hypocritical institution—
not Christ's living, breathing, healing body on earth.

Did you ever stop to consider that you and I
are meant to be the agents of the answer to Jesus' prayer?
Jesus prays, asking on our behalf,
that we will decide, we will choose to love over not loving.
Choose Shalom, wholeness, and oneness over being divided.

Are we numb to the aching desire at the heart of Jesus' prayer
for our oneness, our peace?
Are we apathetic, complacent, cynical in response to his hope for us?
Do we take Christian disunity so completely for granted,
that we barely notice it anymore?
God's heart is broken over our disunities, not our diversity.
God's heart longs for us to work toward a reconciled diversity,
the oneness and wholeness of Shalom which is the peace
that one Christ can give,
a peace that is given for everyone.

Though Jesus is praying to the Father,
you and I will be means through which Jesus' prayer will be answered.
We answer his prayer every time we choose how to love,
who to love, where to love.
We answer his prayer every time we choose the way of peace.
It is time we answer Jesus' prayer and deal with one another
in love and in peace-making.

So, I wonder, who are the boundaries that await love and peace today?
Will we choose this day and every day,
to realign our hearts and our minds to be as one with Christ's?