

SERMON FOR SUN. MAY 29, 2022

Easter 7C John 17:20-26 “One in Christ.”

Dear fellow redeemed of the Risen Christ, the *theme* running through the appointed Holy Gospel we heard today: and that is unity and oneness.

Jesus prays that all Christians be as unified as He is to the Father, true unity and oneness of heart, mind, and will; not merely an external unity, but one that permeates the core of our being.

And yet there is another, undeniable *reality* in our world today: and that is that we are not unified; we are not one. We are not even close.

In many congregations, in our synod, and in the Church at large, we hear about splits, disputes, and condemnations.

I've often said that it's a miracle that there's even a Christian Church at all! *Because if it were up to us . . .* Well, thankfully, it isn't.

The Christian Church isn't something we do. It is a miraculous work of God in the world. And *this* Sunday, perhaps like no other, can help us focus on that.

For today is the Sunday sandwiched in between the Ascension of our Lord and Pentecost (which we will celebrate next Sunday). And so, this morning's message can get lost in the shadow of those two great festivals.

But this Sunday unites the Ascension and Pentecost for both the Ascension of our Lord and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost are all about the continuing work of God in the world.

God is building His Church. God sees to it that the message of the cross is proclaimed to those who do not know Him, uniting them to Himself.

And that while God uses people like the 11 apostles, Matthias, and folks like us to spread the good news – it is really **His work**.

As we confess in the Catechism, ***I believe that by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.***

And that's a good thing, for, from the very beginning, sin caused Adam and Eve to turn against each other.

Then you had Cain killing Able, Isaac vs. Ishmael, Jacob against Esau. Absalom turned against his father, David. Not long after, Israel split in two following the death of Solomon.

And even after Jesus came and ministered on earth, it didn't take long for disunity to flower again.

As soon as Paul planted churches in Galatia and Corinth, factions developed.

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches split at the turn of the first millennium. Then came the divisions and condemnations at the time of the Reformation.

And today it's hard to even count the number of Christian denominations and sub-denominations!

So, ***if it were up to us*** . . . well, *that's* what we've done. Sin has divided husband against wife, brother against brother, children against parents, and Christian against Christian.

Sin broke Eden's perfect unity and harmony, and caused the disunity we see today. And sadly, you and I are not innocent bystanders in this.

So has Jesus' prayer for unity and oneness in His Church gone unanswered for all these years?

No! For while, at times, we may be tempted to think: *If only Jesus were here* . . . the truth is that He is here!

The Ascension of our Lord and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost testify that our Lord is still working in the world, and still building His Church.

For, our Lord ascends and sends His Spirit so that He can be in every pulpit, font, and altar at all times!

His Word, Baptism, and Supper bring the glory and work of His cross to every part of the world uniting people of every tribe, nation, and language to Himself.

God undoes the disunity and discord of sin through the forgiveness of our sins.

For that is the only way. Mere outward unity never lasts. Overlooking our differences only makes them reappear more violently later. And pretending that there are many versions of the truth only makes matters worse.

The only true unity is in Christ through the forgiveness of our sins. Only when we are united in Him can we be truly united to one another.

And so, Jesus prayed for ***“those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.”***

The apostles were appointed to preach the Law that shows us our sin and the Gospel that shows us our Savior.

The preaching of the Law that shows us the disunity we have caused by our selfishness, as we want others to serve me instead of me helping them; and as I seek to exert my power over others instead of humbling myself to them.

The Law shows us our willingness to give up God's truth for the sake of friendship, and that I do not love others enough to tell them of Jesus. In essence, we too often live by the devil's creed of "***live and let live.***"

Yes, that's the devil's creed, for it's the *exact opposite* of what Jesus did – who would not let us just live in our sin, but who came to save us.

And that is the preaching of the Gospel, that shows us the divine remedy to the disunity and discord of our selfishness – **the forgiveness that is found only in Christ.**

Jesus, the One who did not *live and let live*, because he knew if He just left us to our devices, we wouldn't live, but die in our sins. He loved His fallen creation too much to do that. Instead, He came and **died** so that we may live.

Our Lord paid the price for our life-stealing sin and then rose to restore the unity and oneness of Eden by uniting us to Himself.

And this He is doing, although it will never be perfect as long as we live in this sin-filled world.

But He is working one sinner at a time, uniting us to His life-restoring death and resurrection in Holy Baptism.

Bringing us daily to the life-restoring death and resurrection of Holy Absolution.

And implanting in us His life-restoring death and resurrection through His body and blood in Holy Communion.

And through these means, we are forgiven, restored, and united to Him, and we are united to one another *in Him*.

Any unity outside of Christ and His truth is not true unity. But *in Him*, we are united and joined to one another as closely as He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.

Living for one another and dying for one another. Praying for one another and serving one another. Forgiving one another and loving one another.

And we have His promise that this will be the case in this time between our Lord's first coming in the flesh and His second coming in glory. For in His prayer that we heard today, Jesus prays for those **who will believe in me through their word.**

Note Jesus didn't say those **who might** believe in Him, but **who will!** For *He* is doing it, not us. His Word, living and active, filled with His Spirit, will work exactly what He desires. And His earnest desire is that many would be joined to Him.

And though we will never see that glory, unity, perfect harmony and oneness here on earth, as we live under the cross, we will see it, when our Lord returns, and the picture given us in Revelation becomes a *visible* reality.

And I say *visible* reality, for that picture is already a reality for all who are in Christ!

Yes, as we gather around the Lamb with all the angels, and archangels, and all the company of Heaven! **We just can't see it yet.**

But this is what Christ is working and accomplishing already now through His Word and Spirit. With **the water of life** filling our font, **the light of His Word** lighting our way, and **the fruit of His tree of life** on our altar.

And so He bids us come and receive these gifts. And we come and are forgiven, restored, and united in Him.

And then we repeat back to Him what He has said to us: **The Spirit and the Bride say Come!** And behold, He is coming.

Coming to us now in His gifts, but later, on that great and glorious day when He returns, we will see Him as He is.

And we will see the Church as she really is, the Bride of Christ, in all her beauty and glory. United as one in Him.

United in the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**