

Easter 7C

June 2, 2019

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Acts 16:16-34 Paul & Silas experience beatings, imprisonment, earthquake, singing & witnessing, baptism.

Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20 Jesus said, Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

John 17:20-26 Jesus' High Priestly prayer for unity

Every Sunday we offer a blessing for couples celebrating an anniversary of their marriage. The blessing we say come directly from our Book of Common Prayer (BCP 431). It begins with the words, "O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his church." This unity with the 'church' is not the institutional church; it is the 'body of Christ' church; it is you and me; all of us who believe in Jesus, and all of us who do the best we can, to the best we can understand, to follow Jesus.

The 'spiritual unity' of Jesus and his church is the central topic of this passage from John today. This is part of Jesus' High Priestly prayer; the prayer he said aloud at the Last Supper, for all of his disciples to hear, so that we could know this amazing statement about the relationship that Jesus asked for God to allow. Listen to these words:

I ask... that they may all be one.

As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.

... so that they may be one, as we are one.

Jesus was not only praying for this unity for his disciples; but for other followers who had not yet arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast; and there would be others who would hear the witness of his disciples; and he prays for them, too.

Jesus' prayer for 'being one with God' was not only for people who come to believe through the ministry of the twelve, or even for believers across Asia Minor and Asia and Europe where Paul traveled. The witness of these disciples, and followers of the disciples would be preserved and passed from generation to generation, from continent to continent, from race to race, until its effect would reach you and me. The very idea of this level of 'oneness' with God filled Paul and Silas with passion. The passage from Acts tells how they endured being beaten, imprisoned, and caught in an earthquake; but they sang hymns from their prison cell, converted the jailer, and baptized his whole household! Even in those circumstances they felt filled with all the fullness of God.

This level of unity with God is extended to the unity you and I have with each other. God created you and me to be different from each other – on purpose. Our differences give character to the body of Christ. At the same time, the common faith we hold in Jesus gives us unity that should be stronger than any difference in opinion or position that we hold.

I have an example of this unity, from an experience I had once as Head of School. We were conducting Open Classroom days. On one of those days a father brought his child to see the school, and he sat in on a few minutes of the preschool chapel.

After chapel, a teacher told me that he would be coming back to talk to me, because he wanted to be sure he agreed with our faith doctrine. He is an elder in his church, and he wanted to know that what we would teach his child in chapel is consistent with their faith. He asked for our church's Statement of Faith (which is on our website). "We proclaim God's Good News and share God's love through Jesus Christ with everyone in our diverse community."

My answer to the teacher was, 'Good for him! I would love to talk with him. And I know that our conversation will go very well, as long as his goal is to have his son taught Orthodox Christianity.' Our talk went well. Our shared faith outweighed what building we are in on Sundays.

The unity Jesus prayed for from the Father is based on our believing in him as the Son of God, and following him, the best that we know how, in the way we live our lives. That means for me that the Christianity we profess, and we emulate as best we can, must be orthodox. There is no hidden agenda; there is no need or desire to find some new version of who Jesus is. There is no watering down of our faith to avoid offending somebody.

We do NOT have to all be political conservatives or liberals; introverts or extroverts; or lovers of dogs versus cats. We honor each other's diversity while we celebrate our unity of faith in a God who deeply loves each of us just as we are. **THIS** is at the heart of us Episcopalians living the Via Media.

Through the contract God entered into with humanity, through the sacrifice of his Son, we become one with God; we take on the mind of God. That changes the way we see the world, and the way we see ourselves. That decision changes our friendships, how we manage conflict or adversity; it changes us from the inside out.

The faith we share in this faith community is exciting, fulfilling, always in motion, rewarding, and makes us one. Each of us is an important piece – and a different, unique piece - of God's BIG PICTURE. May our faith journey help us grow as individuals, be a stronger church, and be models of unity in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.