

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Sermon Text: John 17:6-19
Date Preached: May 24, 2009
Note: 2 baptisms
Bishop Kusserow visits

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

It may be surprising that this is one of the few prayers we have from Jesus in the Gospels. One could argue that it is also the most detailed. Along with the Lord's Prayer, it is also the most encompassing prayer.

One of the requests Jesus makes in this prayer is that all his followers would be one as he is one with the Father. Such oneness is living in a very intimate relationship between God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So how does this happen? From where does our unity come, especially in a world not only marked by divisions but in various cases, those divisions are celebrated?

Our country faces divisions of political parties that get lived out in how we address important societal issues. Among issues where our countries divisions are magnified include immigration, foreign policy,

homeland security, addressing rising unemployment rates to name a few.

Around the world there are significant issues of division. Today in Sunday school we will hear our bishop address the divisions of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

Even our churches are not immune historically or currently to division. There are historical theological divisions that have led to the wide expression of the church through various denominational labels. Within our own denomination we've been divided on issues of race, the role of women in the church, and the color/content of our hymnals as well as the current debates about the role of gay and lesbian persons in the church.

These issues and other divisions have led to wars, violence, terrorism and various kinds of bloodshed. In this country we are invited to pause and remember those who have died serving in our countries military as a result of some of these issues.

So is it any wonder at times when we might become a little impatient with God and ask; where is the unity our Lord prayed for among his followers? In one of the planning guides I use for worship called Sundays

and seasons, this very question is addressed in this way.

“(The oneness for which our Lord prays) is not mere doctrinal agreement or institutional unity, but mutual abiding, interpenetrating life, mutual love and joy. This oneness is the work of the Spirit whom we have received but also wait.”

It is the Spirit’s work to bring this prayer into a full reality. Now before we think that perhaps God should fire the Holy Spirit for failing to do its job better, keep in mind that the Spirit is alive and doing this work in our midst, starting in our hearts.

By the grace of God, we are given a new life through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the new covenant promised by the prophet Jeremiah that is inscribed on our hearts. This covenant sealed in our baptism brings us to a new reality in which we consciously live this gift.

To do so is to look at those with whom we have deep disagreements as brothers and sisters in Christ. Furthermore, we look at those who are not a part of the body of Christ not as evil, but as individuals created in the image of God, just like us, even if they don’t agree with that position.

As an example of this work, the churches involved in Christians Uniting have said that we are not going to let our differences stand in the way of praying for oneness or working toward oneness. Thus we can commit to worshipping together in the seasons of Lent. We can and do commit to working together on programs such as Meals on Wheels. We can develop such unity through future ministries like St. Afterschool which we will be hearing about more in the coming weeks.

The day will come when this prayer is answered in its full desire. We continue to pray for the Spirit to come. Until then we continue to make this prayer our own. We continue to pray for the Spirit to develop this unity among us and that we would be a part of this work.

For in these small ways the Spirit is at work in us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, continue to strive for the oneness Christ desires until that day when by God's grace we live in perfect oneness of eternal life.