

7th Sunday of Easter  
"So That the World May Believe"  
John 17:20-26

There's a funny but true story from the Depression.

It's a story about a man living in rural Appalachia who traveled for the first time to the big city of Knoxville, Tennessee.

While there he saw something he had never seen before. He saw a freezer that made ice. Now since it was summertime, and he had never seen anything like this in Appalachia, he thought it was a miracle from God.

When he returned to his home town in the mountains, his church was in the middle of a revival service. And he arrived during the time when people were giving testimonies. So he went forward and told of the miracle of seeing ice made in the middle of the summer.

Well, immediately a dispute broke out and many claimed that there was impossible. Others wanted to believe him.

And eventually it resulted in a split within that congregation. Many left to form a new church ... and for years, its name was "No Ice in The Summer Southern Baptist Church."

In our gospel reading today, Jesus is in the Upper Room with his disciples. He's about to be arrested, tried, and crucified. And what's on his mind, and in his heart?

It was His prayer that you and I, and all who follow him, "May be one"  
...that his disciples then, and his disciples today...  
be as close to one another as he was to the Father.

Jesus prayed, "As you, Father", Jesus prayed, "As you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

So that the world may believe.

A seminary professor once told the story of how he ministered in a church that had a major fight over wood piles, of all things.

You see, this church had a wood stove in the center of the sanctuary that heated the building. Two groups that didn't get along with each other took turns stoking the fire and keeping it lit.

However, one group claimed that they were working harder than the other group to provide the wood. And as a result, both groups provided the wood, but in two separate piles.

One Sunday, a child from that congregation, was called upon to read the well known passage from Ephesians Chapter four. But surprised everyone when he read:

"We are the Church of "One faith, one Lord, one baptism, and two wood piles."

Which points us to the question that is raised in today's Gospel:  
Whose glory do we serve when we are divided over trivial matters?  
...the glory of our Father in Heaven... or our own?

If Jesus tells us our unity, is so that the world may believe, what happens when we are divided?

I don't even have to ask that question, do I?

In fact, I don't even need to dwell on this point.  
Because if you've been around the church long enough, or if you've been to an Annual Meeting or two, you've seen both what attracts...and what repels people from the church.

So let me ask a deeper question.  
What is unity?

What does Jesus mean when he prays that we may be one?  
Does it mean that we will always agree?  
Does it mean that we will never have different perspectives on issues?

I don't think so.  
Because if that's what unity means, then we would never get there would we?

How many you who are married always agree with your husband or wife?  
And if you did, would that be a good thing?

That's not what Jesus is talking about here.  
Jesus is talking about a deeper kind of unity.

Jesus prayed: "As you, Father, are in me", and I am in you,  
may they also be in us, so that world may believe you have sent me."

Jesus is talking about a deeper kind of unity, a unity that comes from  
being in union with God....being so focused on glorifying God...  
and drawing our life from God, that we don't give sin a foothold.

In our best moments, the church can be like that.  
Like when we are humble, and willing to admit when we might be wrong.  
When we are willing to put our own egos in check...  
so that God gets the glory instead of claiming it for ourselves.

When we don't let personality conflicts divide us from each other...  
and we don't let matters of preference  
like worship styles or worship times... or anything else become an idol  
...but instead focus on loving God, above all else.

When we have that deeper unity... rooted in our love for God  
trivial things won't divide us.

In fact, the most important things will be the things on which we spend all our time and energy.

Listen to the last part of Jesus' prayer, in verses 25 and 26.  
"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you;  
and these know that you have sent me.  
I made your name known to them, and I will make it known,  
so that the love with which you have loved me, may be in them, and I in them."

When the love of the Father, which is in Jesus,  
also lives in us...that's when we know, our unity is real.  
That's the kind of unity Jesus is praying for.

Not the kind of unity by the way... that is false or an inch deep.  
Not the kind of unity, that papers over real disagreements,  
and refuses to talk to one another.

That's not love... that's just pretending... or being "nice"

Love, the kind of love that comes from the Father, and from the Son  
will move people who disagree, to meet with each other face to face,  
and seek reconciliation.

They won't go fire off angry emails, or tell all their friends.  
They will follow Jesus' command in Matthew 18, and sit down together,  
and speak the truth to one another, in love.

That's the kind of unity, that builds the church, and makes it strong.  
That's the kind of unity makes it attractive to those who are outside looking in.

That's the kind of church that is freed up to spend all its time and energy on the most important thing... which is mission.

That's right, Christian unity always leads to mission.  
Doing God's work in this world

And the opposite is also true.

Think about the message it sends to a community when the buzz coming out of a church is about members who are upset and leaving...  
or about conflicts with the pastor... or conflicts over money.

Who wants to be a part of a church like that?

Imagine instead... a church where the buzz on the patio after worship  
or the buzz in the parking lot after a Church Council meeting...  
or even better, the buzz at the grocery store...

is about the unity everyone is feeling again...

or about the positive feelings people are having about worship  
or their small group Bible study... or the new Community Garden  
or mission projects like Joy Jars... or the OC Food Bank,  
or the progress that is being made fighting Malaria....

thanks, in part, to the Quarter of a Million dollars raised by Lutherans in Southern California.

What if people started talking about the 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders  
who just signed up for our High School Leadership Team...

...and what if that Leadership Team planned and organized  
food packaging events this year that fed 50,000 starving children?

What if you felt God calling you this morning...

to go out onto the patio or the parking lot or the grocery store...  
and share one of these positive things with a friend of yours.

And even better... what if you invited them to worship next Sunday?

Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday....right up there with Christmas and Easter as one of the big  
festivals of our church.

Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian church.

The day, God sent the Holy Spirit to breathe His life into each one of us.

So let us be filled with the Spirit, and let us be so filled with the love of God  
that Jesus' prayer for unity  
may be answered here at Community Lutheran Church.

May we be one, so that the world may believe. Amen