

Easter 7 C: May 29, 2022

All Saints', Littleton, NH

The Rev. Curtis Metzger

Acts 16: 16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21)

John 17: 20-26

That They All May be One

On Tuesday our country experienced another horrible mass shooting in a school in Uvalde, Texas. The tragedy of the loss of the individuals was quickly overcome with the debate in our country about guns, as has become typical, and necessary. With these events we experience a sense of despair and feeling impotent in the face of them. I hope that in considering the Feast of the Ascension this past Thursday and the scriptures this morning we will find strength and hope. The Spirit and the Bride say come!

Ascension Day remembers when Jesus finally departed his disciples after several appearances after the resurrection. Though the scriptural witness to what actually happened is rather sketchy, and has been depicted in art in various ways as physically ascending into the skies; I rather like to think of him stepping back behind the curtain that separates this world from the next—suddenly disappearing into that other dimension. The importance of the Ascension is that basically Jesus needed to kick the disciples out of the nest. As long as he kept appearing to them, they would be waiting around for him. And, as he said, they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit and do even greater things. And that is a foretaste of next week!

This Easter season we have been hearing readings from the book of Revelation. Much of it has been apocalyptic in nature, with the telling of the old world passing away, the new world and new Jerusalem coming, and Christ, the lamb and God being the everlasting light of this new city. In today's reading we hear this final promise for the blessed people of God and the invitation for all to 'come'. Scholars believe that the book of the Revelation of John was probably written close

to the time of the Roman Emperor Domitian (who ruled 81-96 A.D.), younger brother of Emperor Titus, who he succeeded, and their father, Emperor Vespasian. Domitian reinvigorated Roman worship of the Gods and the cult of the emperor, and therefore persecuted Jews and Christians because they did not yield to the demands of this religion.

It was in this historic situation that The Revelation was written and one can easily see how comforting it would have been to the persecuted Johanine community. The promise of the destruction of the old system and the promise of the new heaven would have been comforting. The repetition of the call to ‘come’ to God and Christ was probably much on their lips with hope and desperation. Though not persecuted as was the early church during this particular period, we and many Christians through the ages have read these words with hope in our hearts that Christ would come breaking into the world and into the hearts of people everywhere who accepted the invitation; and most especially now into the hearts of fellow Americans and our leaders to address gun violence. The invitation was for everyone.

And finally a word about our gospel—the call to unity that will be the witness of our faith. The 17th chapter of John is known as the ‘high priestly prayer’ of Jesus. He is in the garden of Gethsemane before his arrest and praying. Now presumably John, or whoever the author was, was not hiding in the bushes listening to every word he said. If you remember, Jesus had a hard time keeping the disciples awake with him! This chapter is probably a distillation of things the writer heard Jesus say or pray over the course of his ministry; and perhaps a corrective word to dissension in the Christian community. What comes through loud and clear is the unity that Jesus felt with God and the unity that he desired for us with him and with each other:

“The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

We echo this just before receiving Communion when we say: “We being many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.” Well, we have stumbled and fallen over the centuries on this call for unity, and we suffer still from disunity in our faith and in our nation. But part of the battle is holding on to the hope and living into the call as best we can.

Think about those times where you have felt unified with someone or a group:

- Celebrating times of unity in the family: Christmas, birthdays, weddings, funerals
- Long conversations with dear friends over good tea or coffee
- The opening and closing of the Olympics!
- The memory of our hard fought unity from the Civil War onwards on this Memorial Day weekend
- The unity felt when we all drop our labels and pull together for those who are suffering, survived natural disasters, etc.

Part of our call as Christians is to continually hold out that hope of unity and the bonds of fellowship. There are a lot of voices that divide us these days, but we are called to be the voices that call people together. It does not mean we will agree on everything, but that there is a way of living in the world where you don't give in to divisiveness as the paradigm to follow. It does mean a vision of the world where we are united in a cosmic understanding of God and Christ who created everything and everyone; and we reach out with the invitation, as in our reading this morning, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’. And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.”!

The Saturday morning Centering Prayer group has been reading a book about Julian of Norwich, who created the word ‘oneing’ to reflect the thing that is happening in our life with God when we are attentive to the gospel and prayer. In the Christian mystical understanding it is called ‘the unitive way’—the way to non-dualistic being, to the way of one. This unitive way is not only revealed in scripture and in our prayer, but when it becomes real for us, we find the healing for our hearts, our communities, and our nation. The Spirit and the Bride say come!

Prayer: Christ our brother, open our hearts to your invitation, and open our mouths to share it in the world around us. Soften our hearts over the next few minutes in silence so that we can say, “Amen, Come, Lord Jesus.”