

One in the Spirit

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[Acts 16:16-34](#) • [Psalm 97](#) • [Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21](#) • [John 17:20-26](#)

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Here we are at the last Sunday of Easter, and once again we have heard a reading from the beautiful Gospel of John, as we have throughout the whole season. There is much that is challenging as well as thrilling about the Gospel of John. There are many profound and wonderful stories that occur in no other gospel: the miraculous wedding at Cana, the woman at the well, the forgiving of the adulterous woman, the raising of Lazarus, and the washing of the disciples' feet. I will always be grateful for the inclusion of these stories, many of them about women.

But there are many daunting elements in the Gospel of John as well – the seemingly anti-Semitic passages, for example, which have always bothered me. The constant references to “the Jews” seem to imply that Jesus and his disciples were, perhaps, Methodists? The nadir of this trend of exclusivity comes after Jesus' long verbal battle with the Pharisees, when Jesus calls them “children of the devil,” something that I don't think Jesus actually would have accused his fellow Jews of. But as I read more about the amazing, frustrating and beautiful Gospel of John, I learned that these insults to the Jewish brethren came from a broken intimacy, and therefore have all the toxicity of a brother's relationship gone sour, or the venom between estranged spouses. The Johanine community was very likely expelled from their synagogue by their fellow Jews, and was still in shock and reeling from the rejection when they wrote their vitriol about “the Jews.”

Also somewhat daunting are Jesus' numerous monologues during the last supper. He is amazingly long-winded – and in fact, he goes on for 4 chapters. And it gets to sounding all too much like that other gospel of John, “I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together...”

But then, in chapter 17, which is a chapter of pure prayer, everything takes flight – Jesus is no longer talking to his disciples, to “the Jews,” or to any one but God.

As we eavesdrop during this intimate prayer, Jesus models his disciples' church. For us, we hear what it is to put everything into the hands of God. Jesus has clearly said everything to the disciples that he can possibly say. He has just acted out in the washing of their feet the type of selfless love and service he wants them to show to each other. He knows that he is soon to die, and will go from the scene of the last supper to the garden to be arrested.

So, he puts it all in the hands of God. Jesus prays first for himself, that his death be more than a death – that it be a manifestation of the glory of God. And that that glory might bring eternal life to those whom God has given him. Then he defines eternal life for us: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Clearly this kind of eternal life can exist in the present moment. Then he prays for the disciples, that they be protected, and that they be as one, as Jesus and God are one. “I in them and you in me.”

In our gospel passage of today, Jesus prays for us – for all the believers yet to come. And his prayer for us is that which he prayed for the disciples – that we all be as one. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul tries to communicate this prayer of Jesus. He implores his unruly and apparently very hungry flock to take care of each other. He wants to be sure that those who are truly hungry have enough to eat. He writes, “When you come together to eat, wait for one another.” He tells them to always to preserve their unity – the well-being of the community – the body of Christ. He writes, “The body does not consist of one member, but of many.” In writing of this body when it comes together to share the Eucharist he says, “Unless you discern the body” – in other words, unless you understand that are all one – “you will eat and drink judgment upon yourselves.” In contrast to the earlier part of the Gospel of John, Paul tries to communicate Jesus' radical inclusively – there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free. We are all one.

Jesus has been trying, in all the gospels, to make us understand not only God's presence in him, but his presence in us, and even more startlingly, his presence in ALL people. Jesus foresees a time when the son of man will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.” When the righteous answered in confusion that they had never

seen their Lord in any of those dire straits, Jesus of course answers them, truly, just as you did it for any of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you have done it for me.” Jesus is telling us that all of those unfortunates who they helped were not only favored by Jesus, they WERE Jesus.

At the end of his grace-filled prayer, Jesus’ words seem to harken back to the glorious prologue of the Gospel of John. The prologue has assured us that the word was there in the very beginning, with God. We hear today that the Father loved Jesus before the foundation of the world. The hymn goes on to say, “No one has ever seen God, but it is God the only son who is close to the father’s heart, who has made him known. In Jesus’ prayer, he affirms that the world still does not know God, but that he knows God, and he has made the name of God known to those he was given. He then asks that the love of God which Jesus was so able to experience and radiate, would truly be in those disciples to come, and that Jesus himself would truly be in them.

On this last Sunday of Easter, we seem to be suspended, floating within this sacred prayer of Jesus’ in a place between resurrection and Pentecost – a place between triumph over death and bursting with the fire of the Spirit. In many churches in the world, today is the celebration of the Ascension of Jesus. Maybe this is our ascension. We have ascended with Jesus into this liminal time of pure prayer. And in this prayerful interlude, in this small quiet moment, we are reminded of what brings resurrection in our lives – what calls the Holy Spirit, what brings the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is OUR realization of that small prayer of Jesus’ – that we truly be one – that we see that that mass of suffering humanity, in all their vast diversity, those who thirst, who hunger, who are sick, who are in prison who are without clothing or friends, are the only form of Jesus still walking the earth. That we and those blessed multitudes are not only Jesus’ own – we are one – and we are him.

Amen