

Sunday, June 2, 2019

Acts 16:16-34

John 17:20-26

That All May Be One

Have you ever been in a situation where there is a difference in ideas and opinions about a way of action and further discussions don't seem to move either person to a mutual concession? This often happens when people serve and work together and generally there is usually a mutual acceptance of what each other is about. But what happens when neither person gives a little for the sake of the company, or program or even themselves? Sometimes one of the people in this situation might just say, "Let us agree to disagree."

This sounds very noble but what happens when you both walk away from the table? Is there a united front or agreement to be shared openly? Or is what was actually said meant to be interpreted as "let us agree to disagree until the Lord shows you that I am right."!

Psalm 133:1 states, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1) We cannot say too much to persuade people to live together in peace. It is good for us, for our honour and comfort; and brings constant delight to those who live in unity. The pleasantness of this is likened to the holy anointing oil. Unity- it is what we all crave as Christian brothers and sisters, isn't it? But what is it that calls us to be one with each other?

Pondering the question and reflecting on the diversity of our world's people, what one day of the year do people celebrate? New Year's Day that is the first day of January as we are all adhering to this day when the world begins a different 12 month cycle called a year. Yet the celebrations for New Year's Day take place at different times because of the mark of time.

Thinking about Canada with a similar question, what is the one day that truly unites us? July 1 Canada Day when we celebrate the country's birth as a nation. But even then the celebrations start at different times because of the size of our country yet the focus is the same- we all become a little patriotic that day and are glad to be Canadian.

When I think about the church today what is it that unites us? And just what was Jesus praying for as he prayed for his disciples while waiting for the group of people who would arrest him. Jesus is praying with what is known as a heavy heart to God the Father. He is praying and venting, releasing thoughts and emotions and he is watching what is happening to his closest friends. He is talking with

God the Father and he expresses the intimate relationship he has with God. 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. And then he states, "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they maybe 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." Jesus is asking God for the relationship that he shares with the Father to be granted for his disciples, those who believe in him and those who know that he is the Son of God. Jesus asks that all may be one.

From 21st century eyes we wonder how this might be possible on any level when most churches involve people who will agree to disagree or leave if their agenda is not fulfilled. But what was Jesus really praying for when he asked God that all may be one. Sometimes we might even question if Jesus really knew what he meant- trying to unite all his followers when of course we have many differences in doctrine, belief and governance.

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said, "The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth's winter eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness."

Are we like porcupines—needing to huddle with other Christians for warmth, but when it is time to really get to know each other- there is hurt and pain? As humans we have been created with the need for companionship. Remember Adam living alone within the Garden of Eden, was in close relationship with God yet he wanted one of his own kind (Gen. 2:20). Because of our human need for intimacy God created marriage and family and church to meet these needs for we need to belong and be in community.

Jesus knew what it meant to have human companionship, and He was also well aware of the challenges and "sharp quills" people face in the process. He knew what rejection was like, and in a short while he also would know what betrayal would involve. So in His final prayer to the Father, Jesus prayed for the unity of His followers. He wanted everyone who followed and believed in Him to be one. Second only to the concern for His glory he wanted the disciples and all who would come to believe in him to become one. He also knew how an ununified church would fail to bring Him the glory He so much desired then and now.

As Christians and as part of the United Church of Canada we have a unique history which shows that together we may be stronger. This was the rationale in the years leading up to the formation of the United Church of Canada before 1925. Our United Church crest reads in Latin, UT OMNES UNUM SIN.. that all may be one for it was the church leaders who knew that bringing together people under one system would enable the church to grow across the country. So this is why the Methodist church, the Congregationalist and 70% of the Presbyterian churches became one. But there are not two United churches which are alike for it is the people who gather together for worship and to serve Jesus in the church that makes each one unique.

Glenwood Church grew out of the need for a church in this part of the city when schools houses and community was expanding in the 1950's. And 64 years later, this church still is an active part of the community because we open our doors to those who are in need and who seek to be changed, challenged and choose Christ Jesus. Other groups who use our building also seek to do the same. People of all ages and stages in life are called to Christ through the Spirit. But it is God who changes lives through faith.

As we honour 66th Scouting for their outreach and service to the youth in the past, we pray that we as a church family will continue to call people together to be faithful people who live and love others as Jesus taught. We are the body of Christ and we are called to serve in Jesus name always. Jesus prayed that all may be one. We too take this prayer to heart because our quills may rise but what joins us together is the love and adoration for God who is here and the Spirit of God which speaks to our hearts to respond with hope.

As we care for one another within this circle of love we call our church family, we also strive to reach out and make our circle bigger by welcoming people of all ages, races, gender, and capabilities. We strive to work together so that our circle becomes wider and our dreams continue to expand to places where we never thought possible. This is having faith in the One who prays for us as He prepared to die on the cross for our sakes. This is why we may respond with joy that our lives may be complete and that we may be one in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Holy God we pray that we may share with our brothers and sisters in Christ within our churches and that we may do so in peace and harmony. We also pray that we might share our joy in Jesus with other churches who lift up the name of Christ and call upon him for strength similar to our way of praising Jesus. Hear our prayers O God which sound like Jesus' prayer too- We pray that we may be one in Christ and one with each other. In Jesus' name. Amen.