

Squamish United Church  
Rev. Karen Millard

May 13, 2018

Scriptures:  
Psalm 1  
John 17:6-19

### **That We May Be One**

As I was preparing for this morning I came across this poem by Bruce Pewer on the John 17 text.

#### **TO DREAM THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?**

*John 17*

That they may be one?  
It seems  
an impossible dream  
a wish list  
for a perfect church;  
the Lord's A team.

That they may be one?  
Too soon;  
the severing soon came  
and multiplied;  
"I with Apollos, I with Paul",  
and sullied Christ's name.

That they may be one?  
But now  
we have become possessed,  
like Legion;  
a church of many voices,  
and our Lord finds no rest.

That they may be one?  
His words  
retain the laser-fierce light  
that may yet  
become our salvation  
and Christ's delight.

*Ó B D Prewer 1999*

I know I was drawn to this poem because it is dragon boat season as coach keeps yelling “Paddle as one.” We have a saying “20 paddlers one soul.” One of the reasons I love the sport so much is that team work is a must. I’m on a women’s team so it likely won’t surprise you that from time to time there is some drama. It may or may not surprise you that when the drama picks up our results go down. When we stop working as one, when we start focussing on individuals rather than team it effects everything we do.

Jesus prayed: “Once in heaven I will no longer be in the world, but my friends remain in the world. I have been your word on earth; now I give them your word and the world will not welcome your word in them any more than it did in me.” (John 17:11-14, adapted)

On earth as in heaven, God’s word is authoritative and transformative. On earth as in heaven, God’s testimony is life-giving and praise-bringing. On earth as in heaven, God’s majesty lifts us up and deepens our roots.

The message for today is that God desires the same of us on earth as it is in heaven:

God goes up with a shout even as God’s people root themselves by the stream.

God’s life fills all in all on earth as in heaven, and God’s testimony fills hearts on earth as in heaven.

Our witness is on earth while our fulfillment is in heaven; our belonging is in heaven while our sending is on earth.

On the night that Jesus prayed this prayer to his disciples That upper room was filled with pain and abandonment. With betrayal and loss. With unsettled hearts and fearful souls. And Jesus ends it all with a prayer for his disciples. The section before this portion of the prayer is Jesus’ prayer for himself. The verses after our pericope are prayers for those yet to come into the fold. But this segment is for his disciples. Jesus prays for his disciples and he prays for us. It might feel distant but there is a loving longing the holy creature has for us. You’ve heard me say before I believe eternal life begins now and it is verses like this that convince me of such. God does not long for us to suffer until we land in heaven God longs for us to be as one in community, fellowship and love so that none of us will go without.

I don’t often have the psalm read in the readings but this week verse 3 of Psalm 1 stood out for me it says "They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper." Isn’t that a beautiful image? An impossible dream like the one we began with and yet this is what my heart and soul will forever long for. As a deer pants for the water so my soul longs after this kind of love, abundance and connections.

This is the kind of sermon I preach in which people come to me after with a “there, there Karen”... seeing me as the young and hopeful waiting to be jaded. I’d love to say I’m not jaded and one day I will see the real truth but I don’t say this naivety I say this with hope.

Rev. Dr. Susannah Metz wrote “That they may be one.”

“Who are you kidding, Jesus? It didn’t happen in your time, did you imagine it would ever happen in ours?”

But Jesus told his followers that they should be one in this world, in their culture and their time. It goes along with Jesus always reminding them that the Kingdom of Heaven is here – not something that will come in the next world. So, this may be one of the most puzzling verses in the gospels, and Jesus says it several times, in several different ways. He says it always as a very positive statement, not as a question, “Wouldn’t it be nice if they became one as you and I are one?” He says it as if he expects this to happen. He says it as if he thinks we understand what he’s talking about.

Either Jesus is wrong, or we’re wrong... It’s pretty much a guarantee that Jesus knows what he’s talking about. It’s probably our misunderstanding of “unity” and “respect” that is at stake here. We may not even understand truly what it means to “be one as Jesus and the Father are one.” It’s hard enough to understand the vagaries of human nature, as evident in our lack of understanding of people and cultures who are different from us. How can we ever understand the theological implications of the unity within the Trinity? And we are supposed to emulate that?

In a 1997 edition of the magazine *Christian Century*, the Rev. Dean Lueking wrote an article that put this conundrum very well:

“Nevertheless, that they may be one still haunts as well as inspires. It is wearisome, deadly wearisome, to endure church battles that split not once but repeatedly. The blight of triumphalism, of power games, and the obsession with always being right still throw up huge, offensive roadblocks against Jesus’ prayer. Such sin drags us back to the Upper Room, to dull disciples among whom we now sit, to the grief of our Lord over our tearing apart the seamless robe of unifying love in which he would wrap us.”

Lueking is focusing on the tearing apart from our own church battles. Jesus included not only those, but also the tearing apart of cultures, peoples, nations, every bit of our human existence. Oneness with God means being at one with all God’s gifts: cultures, peoples, nations, every bit of our human existence. To tear apart one bit of our gift is to put a tear in the beauty of oneness with God and oneness with each other...

Being *the same* is not the basis of unity. *Love* is the basis of unity.

When St. Paul said there was no more male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free, he certainly didn’t mean that men and women morphed into some other form of human being or that Jews and Greeks would suddenly become one new nationality. He meant that each of us in our uniqueness would look with love on all the other precious creatures of God. He meant that we would see beauty in the gifts others have and join together to build the Kingdom of God...

This kind of love is hard ... *we add divisions* in many other places of our lives. Watch any news program today and we find ourselves immersed in the evils of war, poverty, fanaticism and greed. We’re becoming used to seeing horrific killings brought right into our living rooms from across the world. How do we feel when we see this? Are we horrified enough to go right to prayer, not only for those being killed, but for those doing the killing? Or do we immediately lump those doing evil with every other member of their tradition? Do we pray that those doing evil will somehow be guided toward repentance? Do we do pray enough for each other when much smaller aggravations happen in our church lives?

The love that exists among the Trinity is not a stagnant, complacent love. It's a love that not only draws the Trinity into one, but also burns outward to include all creation. Jesus offers this love to be our reservoir of strength and truth, that sacred place where we gain the words and guidance we need as we build God's kingdom here on earth.

If we take Jesus' words seriously, we'll hear that the same vibrant, outpouring love that is God, is there for us. All we need to do is believe it and then let it guide our words and actions...

We can do this if we are willing to be transformed by God's grace. Transformation also comes through the love of the Trinity for us. Next Sunday, Paul reminds the Romans that the Spirit prays for us in sighs too deep for words. There is a well of strength for us who work in the world that will never go dry. Imagine how we would live if we really believed and acted on the fact that God's Spirit prays for and through us even when we have no energy or understanding ourselves. There could be no greater gift."<sup>1</sup>

It's impossible, its hard to imagine but we can be one in heart and soul.

May we so live.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. Suzanna Metz <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2015/04/25/7-easter-b-2015/>