

Essential unity

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
Revd Linda Anchell
Sunday 20th May 2007, Easter 7, Ascension

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelations 21:10-14,21:22-22.5; John 14:23-29

Prayer of the Week:

O God, you withdraw from our sight that you may be known by our love: help us to enter the cloud where you are hidden, and to surrender all our certainty to the darkness of faith in Jesus Christ. Amen

This prayer is the prayer for the week during which we celebrated the Ascension(which was on Thursday).

Between Ascension and Pentecost we are in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and also today is the Candlelight Memorial day for AIDs victims.

So, as we examine our readings for today, we should be conscious of three issues: Church Unity, Reconciliation and Inclusion. All should involve memory and memorial.

And there are three ideas that I will be asking you to think about: Unity, Relationship and Love.

The passage from John's gospel is the third part of Jesus' "high priestly" prayer (at the end of the long discourse after the Last Supper); He prays first for himself (17:1 "...glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you"); then for his disciples (17:11 "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one"); and now, for those who will believe because of those disciples. (17:20 "I ask not only on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one.")

It is strong on unity, As you and I are one, may they be one....

This raises the question of the nature of unity. What is the unity between Jesus and God the Father?

Time to unpack the text a little.

In this passage from John we have numerous uses of the word for "*the world*"; in Greek, "*cosmos*". Not so unusual a word is it?

Jesus prays:

..."that the world [*cosmos*] may believe." ..."that the world [*cosmos*] may know."

he talks of the love his father had for him 17:24 "before the foundation of the world [*cosmos*]..."

It is a fascinating word, a huge word, that seems to hold all of the universe within it... In our day and age, as I read the *New Scientist*, this word is getting bigger every day as we learn more about the universe. Now someone is looking for evidence of other universes, probably in different dimensions from our own... I suspect there are no boundaries for this word and the cosmology which goes alongside it!

But it is a word which has changed and developed over the years.

It's underlying meaning is of "order" or "arrangement" or "regulate". It started out as "adornment" and became used of battle plans and orders, and then it was taken over by the philosophers until the whole created "order" was "cosmos". For the Greeks it gave them a vehicle to ask questions. Was the cosmos created, or did it always exist? (The Hebrews had no need for those questions, they had Genesis!)

If we restrict our vision to this earth though, what is our essential UNITY? Isn't it that this is ONE planet? we are all together with nowhere else to go!

There is an order or arrangement in nature that gives us a relationship to everything else. An order best described by ecology and the web of life, or the movement of energy around life...

If we look only at humanity, we see societies — ordered by laws and rules and regulations; powered and ordered by money (made round to go round?)

these things connect us together.

Ecology and economics describe some of the things which connect us and describe our unity.

This unity is not that we are the same but that we are connected — we are in relationship.

I don't want to be anthropocentric about this either.

[Let's not focus entirely on homo sapiens! I surprised myself once in New York writing back home about the squirrels in Central Park: "The squirrels humanised New York for me!" (not the people of this great metropolis, but the squirrels! We are more truly what we are when we have that connection with the whole cosmos or the whole created order.)]

Where does Jesus lead us as he talks about UNITY?

23 "...so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." and 26 "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."

Instead of money or laws and regulations, is it love which makes the connections, the unity, which makes the world go round? Is it love which orders the cosmos? Or is this the new world, the one to come, the one which is being proclaimed, which is redeemed...

[is this what keeps Paul and Silas in their cells after the earthquake?]

Is it love which gives us the last words in the bible? The final, finishing note: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all." (NASB) It has been changed to "all the saints" or with you all, but the reading in my greek text is simply "with all". with everything, everyone, the whole created order, the whole cosmos... [an idea developed at <http://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20070514JJ.shtml>]

There is something about love which is even bigger than the cosmos!

Two quotes:

Yet the eyes that are sometimes fresh to us, are the experienced eyes of Jesus Christ, who calls us to a unity greater than the sum of our selves.
It is a unity made both possible and perfect by the extravagant and

abundant love of God.

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/6087_37090_ENG_Print.html

"I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts then there is no more hurt, but only more love." Mother Theresa

The people of Umlazi township in South Africa prepared the worship for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. They identified the silence of those who were "suffering abuse, victims of rape, or infected with HIV/AIDS, from speaking openly about their problems. ... They sought to help people to "speak about that which was 'unspeakable' and to seek assistance, mindful that keeping silence can mean death."

Those who suffer in silence — who have lost their voice, or had it taken from them — have their refuge and hope in God, who is faithful to redeem them. Yet they rightfully look for help, not only to God but to God's servants, and not least to Christians and the churches. These are called to speak on behalf of those who cannot, or will not, lift their own voices; and to empower the powerless to speak for themselves: the Lord requires us to do justice first of all.

See more about [The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#).

p5: When leaders of the various Christian communities in Umlazi met recently to ask what they could do together to address the overwhelming challenges faced by their people, they realized that one factor which aggravated their present situation was the stigma which keeps people who are suffering abuse, victims of rape, or infected with HIV/AIDS, from speaking openly about their problems. There is a cultural norm which suggests that matters relating to sexuality are not to be spoken of. In Zulu the term ubunqunu, literally 'nakedness', indicates that these subjects are taboo. As a result, many people hesitate to seek the assistance available — often ecumenically funded through the local churches — in terms of counselling, pastoral care, home-based care-giving, communal support and health care centres. In light of the spoken and unspoken ways in which people, especially the youth, are encouraged to keep silent about their problems, the local church leaders in Umlazi designed an ecumenical service which had as its central theme 'breaking the silence'. The worship service invited the young people of Umlazi to find the courage to speak about that which was 'unspeakable' and to seek assistance, mindful that keeping silence can mean death.

p18 The Holy Spirit impels us to act. We must break the different forms of silence which get in our way and hold us back: chaotic situations, human division, all those things which offend the dignity of persons and of peoples. How can the word be freed? Where can we find the strength to sow a seed of life, of hope, of openness? How can we break away from all that closes us in and immobilises us?

22:17 "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."

"Come Lord Jesus, and be known to us in the breaking of the bread."