

Brothers and Sisters Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ...Amen. Over 60 years ago our country came together in unison during a time of great struggle in the world. As we entered into what came to be known as World War II, our country was united in a struggle against three powerful nations, Italy, Germany, and Japan. We as a country were called to fight a war on two different sides of the world, something no country had done before on a scale like this. And as a country, many of those living here at this time were united in this cause. Young men, and women, entered into military service answering the call their country had given them. Goods were rationed and those men and women not involved in military service, went into the factories so that our soldiers could be well supplied. Many sacrifices that were made brought our country together like never before which have been celebrated in books like *The Greatest Generation* by Tom Brokaw. Of course, unity was not necessarily the goal at that time, in fact it was more like a by-product of the situation people found themselves in and how they reacted to that situation...but none the less, we as a country were unified in a way we have not seen or experienced since.

Finding unity on anything at any time these days is not an easy thing to do. Everywhere we look we see divisions in so many aspects of our daily lives...and when people talk of unity as a goal its more like...you should live, act, and believe like they say you should so that unity can be achieved. And sometimes that strategy works for a short period of time...but before long the cracks in the levy start to appear and before you know it a flood of dis-unity begins to pour out. And so the lesson that seems to be learned here is that you can't necessarily go out and plan for unity, it just has to happen.

In our Gospel for today Christ is talking about unity amongst God's children as well when he talks of how "all may be one" in the first part of verse 21 and many consider this a great calling for Christian unity in all the Gospels. Unfortunately though, this verse is one of the most overused, if not abused, verses used to justify many programs or movements in the church who seek to have unity on certain issues as their endpoint. If an issue is known to be a divisive one, more oft than not, these words of Jesus from John's gospel are cited as a reason for us to remain united. And yet, if you look deeper into the text from today, as well as this whole section from John's gospel, you will find that there is something deeper going on here than just a call to unity.

You see, Jesus Christ who died for your sins and whose resurrection we celebrate during this Easter season never tells us that the goal of God's people is to find a way to unify them. Rarely in the church today are we ever unified on anything and unfortunately more oft than not, a small percentage of people who are usually in the leadership take a certain position on a divisive issue and then expect everyone to take that same position on the issue because, in their view, that's what Jesus wants us to do. And yet, if you look deeper into what Jesus is saying here in these words, what we are sometimes told that Jesus is saying...and what Jesus is actually saying many times do not match up.

As we look at what Jesus is saying here in this text, we'll see that unity is not necessarily what he is aiming at here. In verse 20 Jesus starts by identifying the source, looking to those who means to focus on when he states that he is speaking "on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word." Thus, Jesus starts with those who have confessed their beliefs in him through their words and, in this case it is the disciples. Then, he states his goal in verse 21 where he says "As you, Father, 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". Therefore, what Christ is saying here is that his presence will be amongst his disciples so that when they are sent out into the world to preach the Good news and Baptize the nations, the world will know that God has sent them. So then, unity does not seem to be the goal necessarily, but as we find in the opening lines of verse 21, it is something that just happens along the way.

We see this repeated again in verses 22-23 where Christ looks to his presence in and with the disciples so that they can go out and proclaim to the world of God's work through Christ Jesus. And again, unity is not necessarily the goal, but something that happens along the way.

So then, as we really read what Christ is proclaiming to us here, it really appears to show us that true Christian unity comes where faithful witness to Christ is given, and where human beings are serving one another. When these things are happening, then Christians are truly one in Christ Jesus. (Short Pasue) And thus, unity amongst our brothers and sisters in Christ is not a goal or endpoint, but a result in our faithful service to our neighbors and our faithful witness to Christ Jesus.

Sounds simple doesn't it. Isn't it amazing how, when we tear away at all the clutter in our lives in our congregations and in the world, we realize that the best solutions out there do not involve long drawn out mission and vision statements, or 10 point strategic plans...It all comes back to giving faithful witness and serving our neighbors.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us go out into this world to answer God's call to us through Christ Jesus who's blood set us free to be people of God. Let us give faithful witness to Christ through our words and our actions. Let us continue to reach out to our neighbors in service to them. All the time knowing that as baptized and loved children of God, despite our screw ups and short-comings, we are redeemed through Christ Jesus and called to witness and service. And let us trust that in these actions we take in response to the call, unity will happen along the way. Amen.