

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter ~ Year C
Trinity Episcopal Church in Lawrence, Kansas
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue
May 16, 2010

Has it ever occurred to you that divisions among Christians hinder God's answer to Jesus' prayer for oneness among his followers? How arrogant it is of us to pray, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and then perpetuate the disunity which plagues not only the Church, but also the entire human family. Oneness among us is the believability factor because Jesus high priestly prayer for oneness was "so that the world might believe" that the Father sent his only begotten son into the world. If we are not united, how dare we speak of our commitment to evangelism? It is time for the Church of Jesus Christ to get serious about being involved in the answer to Jesus' prayer instead of being part of the problem!

Oneness does not mean uniformity. It does not mean homogeneity. It does not mean to erase all differences. Oneness is a matter of intention, the intention of the heart and mind to work with one another to find consensus. It is the motivation of the heart to collaborate with others to discover the new thing that God in Christ is trying to bring about through the body of believers. Oneness is the network of intentions which are the sinews holding the members of Christ's body in the world together. When we desire oneness, it opens up our ability to empathize and show compassion. It frees us to seek reconciliation and peace. The differences are not necessarily erased; they are transformed in a way that enhances our life together.

Oneness is part of God's plan for creation. When we seek oneness we are seeking the restoration of fallen creation brought about by the disobedience of God's children. I was interested to read a couple of years ago that a team of scientists from Harvard, Yale, and the U. of Chicago have genetic evidence that we are all descended from a common male ancestor who lived about 270,000 years ago. This research is coupled with research in the 1980's, which led to the conclusion that we also have a common female ancestor. While I do not believe it is necessary or even possible for the stories of our faith to be backed up by modern scientific research, it is always interesting when scientists reach conclusions similar to those of our ancient ancestors. All of this leads me to say that the Biblical witness is that we all have a common ancestry and, thus, we are related to one another. Our relatedness, our similarities are basic, while our differences are secondary. That does not negate or trivialize our differences. Differences seem to have developed in response to various real or perceived environmental influences. The vision of a creation restored to its original harmony and oneness compels us to embrace and work through the differences to find the essence of our relatedness, our kinship with our first parents and with one another. We are sisters and brothers. Oneness was part of God's plan in the beginning and we need to know that it is part of the divine plan for the new heaven and new earth God is bringing into being.

Oneness is a worthy goal. Jesus says that we must be perfect. St. Paul echoes his saying. But how can we be perfect? The "perfection" of which we speak is not the perfection of having completed something without error. It is the perfection of intention, the heart's deep desire to love God and neighbor with everything we have. Such love for God and neighbor is the essence of oneness. Going on to perfection is moving steadily toward it. We are sent into the world to love and serve God and our neighbor in all that we do. That is a reminder of the great goal of our

discipleship, the fulfillment of the first and second commandments, to love God with heart and soul and mind, and neighbor as ourselves.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, founder of Madonna House, has written a very interesting thing. She says: "I know the price of making a family out of human beings, both a blood family and a spiritual family. The price is high, but so was the price that Christ paid for us. We have to be like seeds in his hands, cast out to the four winds by the Spirit into the soil he has chosen. The harvest he desires is primarily unity among ourselves. Then strangers will come and cease to be strangers, because our family, your community of love, will encompass them and heal them after it has healed you."

In our relationships with one another we can and have experienced that for which our Lord prayed. It has healed us and, thus, has healed others. Oneness is a worthy goal.

Oneness is the antidote for alienation. We cannot continue to live in a world filled with individuals because such individualism as we have brought about has created a world of strangers living in isolation and alienation from one another. Entire systems have become infected, even the church and the state. Not long ago, Gay and I were in central Texas to attend the dedication of a state historical marker at a family cemetery in which several of my ancestors are buried. The speaker was retired Judge J.E. Chance from Georgetown. He made a very perceptive statement, "In the rootless mobile society that we live in now, one feels a faceless sense of anonymity, that restless feeling that we live in a society of strangers." It's true. A painful lack of oneness and sense of alienation is pervasive in our society.

But there is hope! The witness of our faith at its best is a witness in support of oneness. Jesus prayer for oneness among his followers and those who hear their witness may still be an answered prayer. You and I have the opportunity to be a part of the answer to it as we devote our hearts, souls, and minds to seeking the kind of oneness for which he prayed. We don't have to be a society of strangers. Wherever people go, the Church is there, and can be the one place where people can go and expect to find community and a place of belonging. We express that peace and family feeling before we present our gifts to Christ and before we accept his invitation to gather around the table Christ sets. Our communion here is not a private affair between Christ and the individual; it is a communion that includes our sisters and brothers. We are like the water that is mingled with the wine on the Altar. Once our lives are mingled with Christ's life, we are one with Christ and one with each other. This principle of oneness has to do with unity in relationships. And, it has its beginning and its ending in our relationship with Christ. As we practice eating and drinking from the oneness of God's very being we are drawn together in a reflecting oneness. And when others see and experience that kind of oneness, they may find our witness believable. Christian Unity, around the globe and around this Altar is the believability factor for the Gospel. It gives our witness credibility and leads all who hear it to hope for freedom from slavery to a bunch of strangers.