

Intertwined

Acts 16:16-34; John 17:20-26; Psalm 97

Many of you know that I am a knitter. I have a daughter who is a spinner. She takes wool or bamboo or any number of fibers and creates strands of yarn from them on her spinning wheel. Then, most often, she will ply the fibers. Plying means that several single strands of yarn are twisted together to make a stronger, more durable product. I have knit with yarn that has three strands plied together and with some that has as many as twelve strands. The more intertwined the strands of yarn are, the more difficult it is to separate them back into their individual pieces and the stronger the one strand is.

When I read this morning's reading from the gospel of John, all I could think about were those strands of yarn and their strength and our strength when we allow ourselves to become intertwined with God and with others.

This reading takes the form of a prayer. Jesus is praying for the safety of his disciples. He asks for God's protection for them in a few verses before our reading begins. He expands his prayer to include those who will come to believe in him and his new way in the years to come. He asks that all may become one—intertwined with one another in a strong and everlasting bond of love.

God dwells in each of us. This does not mean that we are God, but that a strand of the spirit is present within us. Whether we decide to reveal this part of us to the world, or not, is up to us. If we become in tune with that aspect of God, which is within us, we begin to see the world in a different way. We are more able to consider those things in it that are lovely and worthwhile instead of focusing on all that is far from beautiful. We begin to see the good qualities other people possess and we might even be able to see God within them.

The strand that binds us together, and that enables us to see one another with the eyes of God, is, of course, love. Jesus told us over and over again that we are to love one another—that was the essence of his message. He knew that life is empty without love. He understood that when people look at one another with the eyes of love everything changes. We become more able to understand that others are different than we are and that is all right, it is simply a beautiful fact of life. Being different they are entitled to

their own thoughts, feelings and desires. Even though we may be different we are able to become one with each other and form strong communities of faith. Through the eyes of love and acceptance we recognize what it is that we have in common and set aside all that makes us seem so different.

There is a hymn in our hymnal that I don't think we have sung yet. It's title is: "Creator of the Intertwined" and the words are these:

Creator of the intertwined, You made each soul unique:
 Each one with ears to hear faith's call. Each one with voice to speak.
 Each worships where the call is heard In forest, temple, Dome,
 On mountaintop, in upper room—The soul must find its home.

The song of peace best sung by all, Strength born of Unity.
 In harmony we celebrate Your gift: diversity.
 Can we not sing each other's songs? Speak unfamiliar Prayer?
 Rejoicing in the bounty of The differences we share?

In evil's wake we all are hurt; When pricked, all humans Bleed.
 With common wounds and shared despair, We seek the balm we need.
 We do not ask before we reach To offer our embrace.
 We do not ask, "How do you pray?" We reach with arms of grace.

Teach us to cherish what is strange And so the richer be,
 To listen with our hearts and speak With loving honesty.
 From different sources comfort comes, Each seeks for the divine:
 Your voice speaks many languages, Just one of them is mine.

This hymn tells us that even in our diversity, we find strength, a way to be plied into one strong strand of faith. We all are of God.

Baptism was a symbol that tied people together in the early days of the church. Paul and Silas baptized those who came to them seeking a way to become a part of this new way of looking at their faith. They understood that new strands were essential for the renewal and strengthening of the body of Christ. Those coming to them wanted to discover a way that would help them become intertwined with the original followers, a way that would strengthen them and open the doors to a deeper faith and a sense of community.

The jailer was stunned when the doors of the prison stood open and the prisoners in his charge were without chains, yet did not run away. Had they done so they would have put his life in jeopardy. He was so surprised and grateful that he became a believer and asked that his family be received into the fellowship through baptism. Paul and Silas reached out with arms of grace and welcomed them.

It is our job to continue our tradition of seeking ways that will make us stronger through discovering, in our diversity, what it is we have in common. Our goal should be to lead more Christ-like lives of acceptance and love, which will help us ply together a community of grace and strength. As we work to accomplish this we will discover more and more how we all are intertwined one with another and how the strand of God is wound into our very beings creating a strength that is more than we can ever have on our own.

-- Amen