

Unity

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; I Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35; Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19 4-06-08

As I read over the scriptures for this week, I encountered very familiar territory. Following Easter our thoughts are focused on repeated reappearances of Jesus and the growth of the early church. We always need to remember as we read and listen that there was no religion formally known as “Christianity” at this time. The “Jesus movement” was seen as another branch of Judaism. So, as we read we need to remember that those who followed Jesus were of a Jewish mindset. Their eyes were just beginning to be opened to the radical new way of thinking about life he had shown them. They were just beginning to understand their roles in it.

It was radical—it followed the spirit of the law instead of the letter in considering life and people’s places in it. In Acts we read that three thousand people decided to follow Jesus through baptism. Baptism represented dying to an old way of life and rising to the new. Peter basically accused the people of crucifying Christ. Those who felt guilty enough, and who were “cut to the heart,” joined this new way of thinking. How many remained in the growing group we will never know. How many actually were baptized on that day remains a mystery.

In the First Letter of Peter, love is stressed. The author, in effect says, “Now that you have decided to follow Jesus, you need to learn to love one another. It is essential if we are to survive as the body of Christ.” This message has not changed down through the ages. It is the essence of Christianity. If churches are to survive as communities of faith, the members of those bodies are required to love one another. Former Bishop John Shelby Spong reminds us: “I engage God when I live fully and love wastefully and have the courage to be who I am. That’s the God I see in Jesus of Nazareth, and that’s the God I want to live out of so that all of the people of this world have a better opportunity to live fully and love wastefully and to be who they are in the infinite variety of humanity.” Those are beautiful words.

There are times we forget this. We are very good at seeing the flaws of others and pointing at them as reasons for not loving them. We are very human in this regard. What is required of us is, that, recognizing the humanness of those around us, we cut them some slack. We also need to pause a moment or two to understand that the flaws we see most clearly in others are those we dislike and fear the most in ourselves.

Jesus reminded us on the night of the last supper that we are to love one another. Period. No discussion, no argument. Do we realize how much better life can be when we operate from a basis of love? Too much time and life are spent on wondering what the other fellow’s move might be to make us look bad. This kind of thinking seeks to separate us instead of giving us any unity. It was a problem then as it is now.

The Last Supper, which we now call the “Sacrament of Communion,” is meant to be a “love feast.” It is meant to be a sacred moment when we rediscover the love God has for us in sending us his Son, a person who could show us the way to unconditional love. It was no accident that the disciples on that Emmaus road recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Walking along with him and conversing with him about all that had happened had not revealed to them who he was. In the simple act of sitting down at

a meal with him and watching him break the bread, all was revealed. They knew him and began to understand a little better what his message was all about.

This morning we celebrate that same sacrament. We take the bread and wine, the symbols of Jesus' body and blood, in the hope that we may become more like him in the way we live. We take these elements together as a sign of our unity as the body of Christ. This is one time when our hearts and our thoughts should be as one as we reflect on the way of life that is available to us if we choose to follow. It is a time to start anew. To turn our lives around, if need be, and along with the promise of spring, promise to become more fully the children of God.

The continuation of our faith needs all of us, in unity, moving forward to build a better world for us and those who will follow. The way is difficult, the rewards often small, but the blessings are beyond belief. Following Jesus in love and patience, understanding and forgiveness is all we need do. We begin again as we look for him and remember him in the breaking of the bread.

-- Amen