

Sermon for 8.5.16

Today is the 7th and the last Sunday in our Easter season.

For the past 7 Sundays we have focused on the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the new birth that this means in our lives.

During this past week the church celebrated the ascension of Jesus, which we understand as the final departure of Jesus from this earthly realm.

Next Sunday we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Fittingly, on this final Sunday of Easter tide, our gospel reading is all about prayer.

The reading is from chapter 17 of John's gospel, and this whole chapter is a prayer that Jesus prays at the completion of his mission.

Since early church tradition this prayer has been known as a "high priestly prayer" referring to the intercession the High Priest made before God for the whole people.

It is also known as a prayer of consecration in which Jesus consecrates himself, his disciples and the future church.

The entire prayer exudes a kind of triumphant expectation of what lay ahead in the future when his disciples begin their mission.

The section of the prayer that we hear today in the gospel reading is Jesus prayer for us, his future believers.

This is a most beautiful prayer which sanctifies us personally and also corporately as the church.

The strongest theme in the prayer is about the unity between the Father and the Son and that all expressions of our love between ourselves and each other and as a church community, are grounded solely and wholly in the love between Jesus and God in the Spirit.

It is the message of the gospels that it is the love between the Father and Son in the Spirit that challenges the world in terms of salvation and calls us into unity as church.

In this prayer Jesus prays that this unity will lead us all to be one in him and into a loving communion with the Father, for without this oneness in God, our unity is simply an expression of human solidarity, and our church community simply a creation of an institutional structure.

Our objective as Jesus present day disciples is therefore not so much to challenge the world with some program of communal reform that is relevant on the day, but rather with the gospel message about the relational oneness of the Father and Son in the Spirit.

This is the purpose for the continuing mission, and Jesus prays thus: “that the world may believe that you have sent me”.

The world, as we know, does not in the natural course of events think too much about the workings of the Trinity, but when it sees Christians living out their lives sharing in divine love, the world indeed sees something very different and is challenged to think again.

I believe the story in the reading from Acts this morning gives us a glimpse of the power of divine love.

I really like Walter Brueggemann’s understanding of the passage and would like to share it with you.

He writes that “Paul says to the possessing spirit in the slave girl, ‘I order you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth to come out of her.’ The destructive spirit obeyed Paul It came out! It came out ‘in that very hour.’”

Brueggemann continues, “Now we can get hung up on the exorcism that sounds weird to some people like us in main stream Christian faith. But take it another way.When we transpose that strange event to our own lives, each of us has a place, large or small, where we act against our true selves.

We are like the slave girl who attacks the one who can emancipate her. The good news given in this strange narrative is that the name and the person and the rule of Jesus lets us become our true selves, not possessed, not occupied, not driven, not anxious.

The good news is that the crucified/risen one through the love that he is in with the father, lets us be our true selves, without any of the fever or paralysis of the day that are everywhere.”¹

¹ Walter Brueggemann, “One Exorcism, One Earthquake, One Baptism...and Joy” in *The Collected Sermons of Walter Brueggemann*, Westminster John Know Press, Kentucky: 2011, p.181.

This story speaks about Jesus prayer being fulfilled through the Apostle Paul's sharing in the divine loving union.

We see what can happen in the liberation of the slave girl and the jailer and his family coming to belief.

Such a beautiful and powerful prayer today in our gospel reading on a day that we celebrate mothers and all those who mother.

As we celebrate today may we all give great thanks that the tender love and care of mothers flows into us from the love between God and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

The Lord be with you.