

Easter 7C

May 8, 2016

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 16:16-34 Paul & Silas experience beatings, imprisonment, earthquake, singing & witnessing, baptism.

Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20 Jesus said, Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

John 17:20-26 Jesus' High Priestly prayer for unity

Every Sunday we offer our prayers of blessing for anyone celebrating an anniversary of their marriage. The blessing we say together comes directly from the service for Blessing of a Marriage, in our Book of Common Prayer (BCP 431). It begins with the words, "O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unit between Christ and his church." This unity with 'church' is not the institutional church; it is the 'body of Christ' church; it is you and me; all of us who believe in Jesus Christ, and all of us who do the best we can, to the best we can understand, to follow Jesus Christ.

The 'spiritual unity' of Christ and his church is the central topic of the passage from John today. It is part of Jesus' High Priestly prayer, the prayer he said aloud at the Last Supper, for all of his disciples to hear, which has been recorded in this Gospel, so that we could have a record of this amazing statement about the relationship that Jesus asked of God. Listen to these words of our Lord:

I ask... that they may all be one.

As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.

... so that they may be one, as we are one.

I made your name known, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Jesus did not pray for this unity only for his disciples; but there were other followers who had not yet come to the Passover Feast in Jerusalem; and there would be others who would listen to the witness of his disciples, who by their words would commit themselves to Jesus; and so he prays for them.

And his prayer was not only for those who come to believe through the ministry of the twelve, or even for those across Asia Minor and Asia and Europe where Paul traveled. The witness of these disciples, and their disciples would be preserved and passed from generation to generation, and from continent to continent, from race to race, until its effect would reach you and me. Consider the enthusiasm of Paul and Silas, who underwent being beaten, imprisoned, and earthquake; but sang hymns from their prison cell, converted the jailer, and baptized his whole household!

Paul wrote in Romans 13:14, 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

He wrote in Galatians 3:27, 'all who have been united with Christ in baptism have

put on Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16, 'we have the mind of Christ'.

This level of unity that we are offered with God extends to the unity you and I have with each other. The three personalities of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different, just in the same way that you and I are different. But our differences give character to the body of Christ. And the common faith we hold in Jesus Christ gives us unity with each other that is stronger than any difference in opinion or position that we hold.

I have an example of this unity, from just two days ago. We have been conducting Open Classroom days at the preschool. On Thursday a father brought his child to see the school, and he sat in on a few minutes of the preschool chapel. After chapel, a teacher told me that he would be coming back to talk to me, because he wanted to be sure he agreed with our faith doctrine. He is an elder in his church, and he wants to know that what I would teach his child in chapel is consistent with their faith. He asked for our church's Statement of Faith (which is on our website).

My answer to the teacher was, 'Good for him! I would love to talk with him. And our conversation will go very well, as long as his objective is to have his child taught Orthodox Christianity.'

The unity Jesus prayed for the Father to grant, is based on our believing in him as the Son of God, and following him, the best that we know how, in the way we live our life. That means for me that the Christianity we teach, and I preach on, and we emulate as best we can, must be orthodox. There is no hidden agenda; there is no need or desire to find some new version of who Jesus is. There is no watering down of our faith to avoid offending someone.

The contract God entered into with humanity, through the sacrifice of his Son, says that by our believing in him, and showing that belief by the way we live, we are blessed by God, becoming one with God, taking on the mind of God, which transforms the way we see the world, and the way we see ourselves. That decision changes our friendships, how we manage conflict or adversity; it changes the world!

The vision of faith that we share here in this faith community is exciting (because we know we are part of God's BIG PICTURE); it is fun, always in motion, rewarding, and filled with spiritual growth. Each of us is an important piece of God's BIG PICTURE. May our works as members of this faith family help us grow as individuals, be a stronger church, and be models of unity in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.