

We are one.
It is not our choice.
Our unity is not opinion
or willingness to get along.
It is God's doing, not ours.
There is only one thing,
one Creation, one humanity,
and we are all part of it.
We are all members of one body,
all fingers of the same hand,
like it or not.
Our choice is to honor or dishonor
people who are part of ourselves.
We needn't worship together,
vote alike, agree or strive in parallel;
we may oppose each other.
But we do so as equals, as one,
joined in the flesh of creation,
in the oneness of Spirit.
Even members of the Holy Trinity
may see things differently.
We are in Christ, by God's will,
and haven't the power to be otherwise.
We are One.
May we live as one.¹

This was Jesus' prayer in this scripture passage. According to John, this is Jesus' last prayer before he is arrested, and he prays for unity. Jesus has done his best at trying to prepare his disciples for what lies ahead. He has given them a new commandment to love. He has explained the importance in believing. And, now, he prays for them to be united, to be one as the Trinity is one.

In his prayer, Jesus explains the importance of unity. We are to unify because the Triune God is unified. We often describe the Trinity as three separate parts as God the Father, God the Son, and God the

Holy Spirit, but they are one unified entity. Richard Rohr defines the trinity as a "divine dance." They are so intertwined that we can't tell where one begins and one ends. This unity within the community of the Triune God, is at the heart of Jesus' prayer: "Just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me" (v.21).

We've all seen God in people. When someone loves and offers grace, we see a glimpse of God in that person. As Easter People, we are to allow God to be seen in us. When we are at peace with others, we reflect the peaceable Christ. When we are loving to others, we reflect the loving Christ. When we accept and affirm others, we show the accepting and affirming Christ. When we are unified, we reflect the unified God.

And, as you can guess, when we are not unified, we do not reflect God. When we withhold peace, it causes others to think that Jesus is not the peaceable Christ. When we limit love, others see a limited Christ. When we refuse to accept and affirm others, they refuse to see an accepting and affirming Christ.

Christ does not call us to unity for unity's sake, but as a witness to the world. As Easter People, Christ calls us to be Unifiers – people who bring others together. We are mediators who unify conflicting situations. We are bridge builders who dissolve divisions. We reach out to the isolated people on the margins and bring them into our circle. We pull together separate parts to make one, single entity.

¹ Garnaas-Holmes, Steve, "One,"
www.unfoldinglight.net

When we become Unifiers, we lead people to Christ.

Unfortunately, most people in the world don't associate Christians as being unifiers because of our tendency to make divisions. We have this intense desire to prove that we're right and "they" are wrong. There are two creation stories in Genesis, yet we want to know which one is right. There are four gospels, and we want to know which one is true. We define things, especially God, for ourselves and expect others to make those same definitions. When they don't, we feel threatened. We become hostile towards them. Humans make divisions to elevate ourselves, not to elevate Christ. Ultimately, "Where there is division, Christ is not."²

Not long after Jesus' prayer, the division between Jew and Gentile grew even wider. Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesians, who had become hostile toward the Jews, that taught the importance of unity. I'll read Ephesians 2:11-18: "11 Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. 12 In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. 13 But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

14 For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on

the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. 15 He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. 16 Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

17 He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. 18 Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us."

Paul and Barnabas did great work to bring the two groups together, but it was only partially solved by the first council in Jerusalem. Even today, we continue to see a gulf of division between the rich and the poor, the citizen and the immigrant, black and white, gay and straight. Within our own church, we are "united" by name only. The people within the United Methodist Church are so divided that it has fractured our core, and it has hurt our witness. This is what Jesus warned us about.

As we strive to be unifiers, with whom do you need to make peace, to accept and affirm? What walls of hostility separate you from others? Where do you need Christ's reconciliation to break down these walls, so that you can be unified with others in Christ? May we be the instruments of unity among God's people. Amen.

² Louw, Jaco, *Disciplines*, 185.