

Worship Service “ *One For All* ”

Easter 7, Year A

21st May 2023

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 NRSV / John 17:1-11 NIV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video) [*Spirit of Unity*](#) written by Paul Gioia,

posted to YouTube by Micah and Kelsi Bergen, used for non-commercial purposes

Welcoming/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *Come, let us all unite to sing* 12

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: Praise God, who reigns over all.

All: **Praise the One who made heaven and earth, the whole universe.**

One: Praise God, whose reign is not of this world.

All: **Praise the One who commanded us to love one another and laid down his life for us.**

One: Praise God, who will never fail us as worldly politicians do.

All: **Praise the One who became last of all and servant of all.**

One: Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

All: **Praise the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**

(Rev-o-lution Resources by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell <http://rev-o-lution.org>, (c) 2020. Used by permission.)

Invocation

Mysterious God, You reveal yourself in Jesus, your Beloved Child who gives us a glimpse your glory and invites us to share in the unity of all that is Holy: the holiness that is You, your creation, your people, united in the Spirit that breaks through all boundaries of fear and injustice.

Meet us here today, O Unity, and teach us to be one: One in love for each other
One in understanding with all who find in Jesus the Way to You. One in peace with all who find other paths to your Truth. We ask all this in the name of Jesus, whose fervent prayer was ever:

“May they all be one.” Amen

Epistle Reading 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 NRSV

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.

Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

A Time of Prayer Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, who on the eve of your Passion prayed that all your disciples might be one, as you are in the Father, and the Father in you, grant that we may suffer keenly on account of the unfaithfulness of our disunity. Grant us the loyalty to recognize and the courage to reject all our hidden indifference and mistrust, and our mutual hostility.

Grant that we may find each other in you, so that from our hearts and from our lips may ceaselessly arise your prayer for the Unity of Christians, such as you willed and by the means that you willed. Grant that in you, who are perfect love, we may find the way that leads to Unity, in obedience to your love and to your truth.

Jesus, just as you prayed for your disciples so long ago. Pray for us, Pray for our wellbeing, Pray for our protection. Pray for your joy to be made complete in us. Pray for our spiritual growth. Pray for your truth to be made complete in us.

Jesus, we often do not know how to pray, So pray for us, Pray with us, That we may be one with you, One with each other, and One in ministry to the world.

Jesus, Pray for your weak ones, Your strong ones, You ones who are have illnesses, Your ones near death, Your ones who breeze through life, Your ones who struggle in life.

Jesus, Pray for those who have lost loved ones in these troubled times, Those who still grieve the loss of loved ones in past times. And those whose loved ones currently struggle, with illness, with restrictions, with loneliness.

Jesus, We join you in these prayers for all your people, Amen.

Hymn *Healer of Our Every ill* 377

Gospel Reading John 17:1-11 NIV

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.

For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of [b] your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

Message – *One For All*

All for one and one for all. When we hear that expression, what springs to our minds? For many, it might bring memories of its source, *The Three Musketeers*, images of the valiant struggle of a band of heroes working together against injustice. For others, especially as Memorial Day approaches, they may be reminded of a similar motto, “united we stand,

divided we fall," as they remember the accomplishments, and the sacrifices, that were made to fight against injustice and evil in the world. I think we would be hard-pressed to find someone who isn't uplifted and enlivened by these kind of sentiments. What is it about these kind of expressions that we find so positive and motivating? Maybe it's the sense of glory and triumph we experience or remember of great accomplishments from the past, the "good old days." But I suspect it might be a little deeper than that. Most of us probably relish that sense of comradeship, that sense that we're not in this alone. We relish the sense of power we have when we have a common purpose and the sense of accomplishment that we feel when we defeat a common enemy.

Yet all too often we only see those achievements and that shared work in hindsight, as a part of our history together. We often don't have that same sense of unity in the present. Quite the contrary, our current experience often seems to be one of division and disunity. Often it feels like we are so divided that we struggle to get anything done. When we look back on the glories of yesteryear, when we worked together to emerge victorious, are those just wistful memories of days gone by? Are they just optimistic dreams that are unrealistic now? Or maybe our memories are a little selective about those bygone days. Certainly our successes together are real and verifiable. We did defeat the fascist powers in World War II. We did prevail against the desperation of the Great Depression. But we certainly were not of one mind and unified at the beginning of either struggle. In both World Wars, there were significant divides among us, with many supporting isolation and neutrality.

In the Great Depression, many sought to let the economy run its course and didn't support government intervention. Yet when things got desperate, when we felt directly threatened, we did pull together, and worked to accomplish great things. But that is the age-old conflict isn't it, the struggle between self-interest and what's best for the whole; between sticking to our guns, and compromising to the benefit of all? And more importantly for us, as a community of faith, what should our perspective be?

In our text from I Peter this morning, the writer discusses the challenges we face together. As a people committed to living often in opposition to the values and ways of the world, he recognizes the inherent struggle contained in that way of life. To lift Jesus as Lord rather than the worldly leader of the day, to acknowledge God's kingdom over the earthly government, to acknowledge the equal value of all, guarantees conflict with the powers that be, powers that relied on inequality and division. Peter recognizes this, and addresses the struggle, in part, by pointing out that we are not alone. Our struggles are shared not only by our savior, but by our brothers and sisters of the faith as well. Together we choose to follow God's path, yet are constantly assailed by our adversary, the one who seeks to divide us and pull us back into dissension and self-interest.

This conflict weighs heavily on Jesus' mind as well in our gospel reading this morning. In a pastoral prayer, Jesus is expressing his concern for the followers who will soon be on their own and facing the struggles of living in two worlds. He ends by praying that his followers

will be one, as he and the Father are one. He knew the importance of unity, of all for one and one for all. He knew very well the struggle, and the very real consequences of working against the system, of threatening the status quo that kept some in positions of power and prestige over others. The only support in the human world they could count on was each other. Unity was vitally important to lifting each other up in the struggles they would be facing.

Yet what does that unity look like? Unfortunately that has been a question that has also plagued us for as long as people of faith have stood in opposition to the world around us. Often unity has been interpreted to mean that we all have to be of the same mind, particularly concerning matters of faith. We often have the misconception that everybody in the early church was basically on the same page when it came to the details, to the doctrine of the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. There were many schools of thought about many of the doctrinal truths we take for granted, from the concept of the trinity to the nature of Christ's humanity. Yet in spite of this, the church exploded in growth in those early years. While they may have differed on the details, they agreed on the big ideas of what the gospel promised, and their commitment to a different life than the world had to offer. Yet as often happens, some insisted that their perspective was the only correct viewpoint, and devoted themselves to ensuring that other opinions were quashed and vilified, done in conjunction and at the behest of the worldly ruler of the day. One for all became one for some.

Many centuries have come and gone since then, with many changes. We live in a post-Reformation age where the church has again become many groups, with many different takes on doctrine. But how much has really changed? Is it really one for all, or is it still one for some? We face many of the same struggles as the early church. To stand for the least of these, the most vulnerable, to lift them up as equals, is still the same threat to the powers that be as it was in the first century. To seek a world that values all life equally still endangers a system of privilege that values some over others, that relies on disunity and divisiveness to maintain positions of power and authority.

Unfortunately, these conflicts and struggles are not just in the outside world, they continue to afflict the body of Christ as well. We still struggle and fight with each other over the details, still seeking to ensure our viewpoints are the ones that prevail and dominate. Is us versus them what we get out of Christ's prayer for us today? Maybe we need to relearn what all for one really means. Because we are always facing the opposition of the enemy. The adversary of I Peter is always there. The face and message changes from age to age and place to place. But the goal is always the same: to sow discord and disunity, to divide and conquer. By keeping us in conflict, we are kept from working together to realize God's kin-dom that draws near. When we scapegoat and blame each other, that kin-dom forever is out of our reach, and the adversary of the day rejoices. The unjust status quo continues. The outcasts take the blame and the divisiveness goes on and the elite keep their privilege and power.

This morning we are presented with a choice. Do we continue to take sides and fight amongst ourselves, within and without the church? Or do we focus on what is best for all, including the most vulnerable, “the least among us,” those who according to Christ are the most esteemed, and leave our differences on the details at the door? Are we ALL for one, the true one in whom we follow? Because he is one for all. ALL. All have equal value to him. Do all have equal value to us? Can we let go of us and them, and just be we? That doesn't mean we lose our values or opinions, it means our focus is on more than ourselves, or those who share our outlook. It means our focus is on the unified kin-dom work at hand, on living the gospel together and ensuring all have a place in that kin-dom, and see what that good news looks like in action. We are living in very trying times, and the temptation is great to focus on ourselves, and our own concerns, which makes the words of Peter so relevant. When times are tough, we are tempted like no other to forget the prayer of Jesus, to forget we are all part of one body. It is my hope and prayer this morning that we can be “all for one, as he has always been one for all.” Amen.

Call to Serve

Today we call upon you as Children of God to share in the love and work of Jesus. The author of the First Letter to Peter encourages us to humble ourselves before God so that we may be exalted by God on “the appointed day.”
Let us share in today’s offering with humble spirits and generous hearts.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Ever-present and loving God, Your Word tells us to cast our cares on you because you care for us. In faith and trust we present these gifts, and ourselves, to you. Bless and multiply them to meet the needs, both hidden and apparent, of your beloved ones. Inspire each of us to live as Christ’s witnesses, today and ever more.
By the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Hymn

For We Are Strangers No More

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Benediction

God is on the move. God is in our hearts. God is by our side. God is with us. Know that God’s love enfolds you, and covers you, and is with you always. You are God’s beloved child. You are forgiven and restored. Share the good news. Share God’s love and forgiveness. Amen.

Postlude