

The First Reading is Psalm 97:1-12

- ¹ The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
- ² Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
- ³ Fire goes before him,
and consumes his adversaries on every side.
- ⁴ His lightnings light up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.
- ⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.
- ⁶ The heavens proclaim his righteousness;
and all the peoples behold his glory.
- ⁷ All worshipers of images are put to shame,
those who make their boast in worthless idols;
all gods bow down before him.
- ⁸ Zion hears and is glad,
and the towns of Judah rejoice,
because of your judgments, O God.
- ⁹ For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.
- ¹⁰ The LORD loves those who hate evil;
he guards the lives of his faithful;
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.
- ¹¹ Light dawns for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.
- ¹² Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name!

The Second Reading is from the Gospel of John 17:20-26

[Jesus prays, saying,] ²⁰ "I ask not only on behalf of these [disciples], but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ 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 the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that **they may be one, as we are one**, ²³ I in them and you in me, that **they may become completely one**, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, **so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.**"

The Message is entitled, *May Be One*

Did you hear that? Did you hear what Jesus prayed for us? What Jesus prayed for those who would come to believe through the first apostles and then down through succeeding generations? We are gathered here today because generation after generation came to believe through the words of the first apostles. Listen again to the repetitive cadence of Jesus' prayer: ***"They may all be one. They may be one, as we are one. They may be completely one."***

One. One. Completely One.

How do you think we, the gathered church, are doing?

I would say we are failing pretty miserably! Of course, all we need to do is read through the Acts of the Apostles to know that being one with another, as Jesus and God are one, is not easy. It was tough for those first disciples, as they squabbled amongst themselves. And when Saul who became Paul joined the first disciples, things got even tougher. A Council had to be called in Jerusalem to settle differences over who was in and who was out, and missionary partners disagreed and went their separate ways. It was tough for the fledging house churches, for some said I belong to Paul or Apollos or Cephas. Being one with another, with all others is hard.

As a quick recap of church history, the one church birthed in the Acts of the Apostles, became two a thousand years later in 1054 when the East split from the West creating the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. Then the Martin Luther unknowingly ignited the Reformation of the 1500's, which birthed four new major streams from the Roman Catholics - the Lutherans, the Reformed, the Anglicans and the Anabaptists. And then from the Reformed tradition came the Presbyterians in all their successive variety starting in 1560 in Scotland. Did you know that there are close to 20 different Presbyterian denominations in America? Yes, almost 20, with the PC(USA) to which we belong being the largest of these Presbyterian denominations.

But, enough talk about our inability to be one.

What does Jesus' prayer really mean for us given the state of divisions that we find ourselves within the whole Christian church? What does it really mean to be one as Jesus prayed? One with each other? One as a particular church? One as the whole church in this age who has come to believe?

At this point I think it is important to note the being one as Jesus prayed does not mean uniformity. It doesn't mean we should all dress alike, look alike, think alike, behave alike, worship alike, or you fill in the blank alike. We know this because God loves diversity – from fragrant orange blossoms to towering California redwoods, from microscopic plankton to blue whales, from eagles to humming birds, from giraffes to lizards, from sheep to humans. With the endless diversity of creation, it is clear that God is not at all committed to uniformity. Yet, God is committed to unity. God is committed to everything becoming one with another, for that is the design of the universe. Our indigenous brothers and sisters of many lands know this and we are relearning their wisdom, for all of creation in its incredible diversity is in relationship, whether we realize it or not. Unity, the relational unity described by Jesus, is when our incredible diversity is embraced and protected by an infinitely generous love.

Jesus prayed, ***"They may be one, as we are one."*** Throughout the four gospels we witness Jesus aligning his heart and mind with the heart and mind of God. We read again and again that Jesus got up early or he departed from a crowd to nurture his oneness with God.

Jesus listens deeply as well as speaks his mind to God. Jesus and God are one – “you in me and I in you” – prayed Jesus. There is vulnerability and openness, deep knowing, intimacy. Jesus prays that we would have this quality of relationship with God as well. That each of us could pray with all honesty and vulnerability, “O God, you in me and I in you.”

Could it be that our inability to be one with each other and with all of creation is rooted in our disconnection from God? Are we disconnected from a deep and abiding relationship with the mystery we call God?

When I have been graced by those who are deeply connected with God, “you in me and I in you,” as Jesus prayed, there is always a deep reverence for all of life. There is also a peace within them that is palpable. There isn’t a need to defend God or argue for why God is God. There is simply a deep connection with all of life. Have you met someone like this? I know I have.

Father Elias Chacour comes to mind, in his work towards reconciliation in Israel among Christians, Jews, Muslims and Druids. In the 90 minutes I was privileged to be in his presence, God’s infinitely generous love was present among us. He shared story after story about choosing love and connection over division and disconnection. Even in the face of obstacles and roadblocks, Father Chacour continually chooses love. His deep connection to God fuels his ministry, for he shared that the fire that burned within him was love and this fire could not be contained, it had to be shared.

What about us? What fire burns within us? What is our relationship, our connection with God?

Our very theology of God is relational - three in one and one in three. “Our Triune God is a paradigm of three autonomous ‘Persons,’ [Father, Son, Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer] who are in perfect communion, given and surrendered to each other with an Infinite Love.” The God whom we worship is all about connection.

Yet, are we connected? I don’t mean with head knowledge though. Are we connected with heart knowledge? With that deep inner knowing that we are not separate and alone, but one with the infinite loving God who created us? Do we know in the core of our beings that we were created to be at-one-ment with God, “you in me and I in you?” We are to be infused with God’s love, with the heart and mind of Christ.

Can you see why our divisions are so rampant?

Jesus’ prayer is as important today as it was two thousand years ago, for humanity is disconnected from the God who so loved the world that was created in wonderful diversity. The God we worship, as we demonstrate often in All Church worship, is the God who can understand any language on earth without the need for a translation device!

Yet, the God whom we most often worship is a tribal God, a god of our own making that likes us better than the other. Let that sink in, for this is what fuels our divisions.

Jesus prays, **“so they may be one, as we are one... so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”** So that the generous infinite love poured into Jesus may be in us. Not for our sake alone, but for those who will come to believe through us.

Will our lives draw others to this deep well of generous infinite love or will our lives cause divisions? It’s apparent that we humans are much more skilled at divisions than unity, which means at best our connection to the mystery we call God is sporadic and superficial.

The psalmist said to us, "All worshipers of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him." What images or idols have we bowed down to – our political party, our wealth, our sexual orientation, our race or ethnicity, our denomination or religion, our country, our stand on social issues? What images or idols among us cause our divisions?

Jesus' prayer challenges us to unfurl our clenched fists and soften our hardened hearts through a deeper connection to this God of infinite generous love we have gathered to worship. This will not be easy, for it is far easier to hate than to love.

Let's choose connection fueled by the fire of God's love so that we may be one. Amen.

Some thoughts shared come from Richard Rohr's article entitled, *From Disconnection to Connection* dated Tuesday, May 7, 2019.