

Sermons at Christ Church

Love, Re-Imagined

Easter VII
The Rev. Emmanuel A. Mercer

The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, and one love. Amen.

Oneness with God. Oneness with all. Oneness with self. It is this unity that upholds all things divine and human. Paul describes this vision of oneness as God's hidden purpose. Call it the Christ Project. This same project sits at the core of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer "That all may be one as you, Father, are in me and I am in you." This mutual indwelling is sustained by the flow of love, we flow into God, God into us, and we into each other, through by the act of giving of ourselves. Oneness with God. Oneness with all. Oneness with self.

It wasn't surprising therefore that when they left home that morning, they had a sense of returning home after work. They bid their good-byes to family, friends and those with whom they lived. Some may have walked to work, drove to work, rode the bus or carpoled to work-just like the disciples left home that morning of the Ascension and took a walk with Jesus to the Mount of Olives.

The families of the injured and the twelve who were killed at Virginia Beach knew their loved ones will be back home after work. They may have made plans for the evening, the weekend or even for the summer. But this morning, as we gather here, families mourn beautiful lives that have been cut short by the bullet of someone they probably knew as a colleague, a friend or a neighbor.

I for one can never understand why some of us resort to violence to settle squabbles or disputes. From my point of view, there's never a dispute, discontent or disaffection which should warrant the death of another. For the sake of the Christ Project, we can yet maintain our oneness even in the midst of our deepest disagreement. It would be naïve on my part or yours to assume that we will never be disappointed with each other over actions or inactions, big or small, but whether here or elsewhere, that should never undermine our oneness. Our unity supersedes any divisions of discontent.

This past Thursday we celebrated the Ascension of the resurrected Jesus. The feast of the Ascension marks the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, and the beginning of a new ministry-my ministry and yours. Like

every transition, there is a beginning and an end, and the end is always the beginning of something new, something different. The something new, something different is the beginning of the Christ Project-oneness with God. Oneness with all. Oneness with self.

It used to be, I don't know if it still is, that movies ended with "The End". The End signified the conclusion of a movie, and especially when you are in a movie theater, that is when you see most people head towards the exit. Some also sit for a moment to soak it all in before they make their way to the exit. If it was a good movie, we reluctantly refuse to accept the reality that the movie is over. We may even desire a different outcome or ending to the movie, but whatever it is, we know that the questions and issues raised in the movie, doesn't end with the movie, we are often left with living the questions.

There may be times when a sequel may attempt to satisfy our curiosity by taking on some of the dominant questions in that particular movie, but yet, there are always unanswered questions with which we have to live. Whenever I see "The End" splashed on a screen, I really don't consider it to be the end, it is for me, the beginning of my questioning. Similarly, many other conclusions in our lives may not be conclusions at all; they are simply the beginning of something new, something different; the end is always a new beginning.

It is into this new beginning that both the disciples and us are being invited and the high priestly prayer that Jesus offers in today's gospel echoes the abiding hope for humanity, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. " The invitation to participate in the Christ Project wasn't earned by our own right or by virtue of who we are. The invitation comes as a gift and a gift alone. In the prayer, Christ recognizes human divisions, but the prayer is not in any way hampered by those divisions, rather, the prayer reaches towards the goal of oneness: not the kind of oneness that swallows up differences by pretense, nor the kind of oneness that minimizes differences or even rejects them because they find no value in them, but the kind that celebrates humanity in all its forms, and shapes and sizes and colors and beliefs-the oneness that appeals beyond categories. Some call it the complexification of Christ, which means accepting the diversity and differences of the other as integral to ourselves and thus integral to the meaning of Christ. More importantly, engaging the other is not about dissolving ourselves into the other but it is about being true to ourselves-our identity-by finding ourselves in God and God in the other.

The gift of this new beginning is the gift of awareness. That which sits deep within you and awakes you to the awareness that the separateness of one from the many is an illusion. This awareness helps us to see that both the one and the many are held together in the One-eternal Godhead.

Our ability to celebrate that oneness is how the glory of God can be made manifest in our lives. We yearn for the glory of God, but what we yearn for can only be made possible when differences are recognized as gifts, and because they are gifts, it is possible for all those who possess these gifts to share them by being equal participants in the life of the God who calls us to be one. If only we can allow the Spirit to really take hold of us and liberate us from our fears, anxieties, demands and the desire for power and control, then and only then can we live in the risen Christ who empowers us to build this new creation. The good news of Jesus Christ is not so much about what happens to us but what must be done by us. The choices we make for the future is what will create the future. Our task then is to reinvent ourselves in love-the Christ Project.

Jesus in the gospel, also uses the unity between him and God not only as a model for the hope he has for humanity but also as an example of how we can be different and yet participate in the life of God-to the extent that God's glory only becomes self-evident in that oneness. Our reality is one in which we share the same humanity with the resurrected and ascended Christ. His life is our life. And to live Christ is to live community; to bear Christ in one's life is to become a source of healing love for the sake of community.

Christ is the power of God among us and within us. You and I therefore have the potential to make Christ alive; that is what we are made for, not for violence, anger, divisiveness, pain, hurt and suffering. And so to live the mystery of Christ is not to speak about Christ but to live in the surrender of love.

Our task then is to orient ourselves towards new life and growth because the unity that we really are, the deep connectedness that underlies our oneness will not let us rest with separateness. We must choose to be whole, to be attentive to God's ongoing work in our lives. God will not create a new future for us, but God invites us to become more whole within ourselves so that we may become more whole among ourselves-this is the Christ Project. If the God that we seek to honor on a daily basis is so divisive and so petty that we have to harm others in order to defend Him, then that God does not deserve your time nor mine.

The phenomenal woman, Maya Angelou, once said, "While I know myself as a creation of God, I am also obligated to realize and remember that everyone else and everything else are also God's creation." The glory of God is made perfect when we come upon such awareness, and that alone marks the end, and the beginning of something new, something different, yes, the beginning of a new day and a new life in the oneness that is God-the Christ Project. Amen!