

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“...that they may all be one.”

In our Gospel this morning

we hear a section of the great “High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus,
given to the disciples on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion.

In this prayer,

Jesus lays out his deepest desires for his disciples in the times ahead.

Jesus is very aware that he is going to his Father by way of the cross

and is preparing his disciple for what is to come.

What he desires for them more than anything else

is “that they may be one, as we are one.”

The relationship that Jesus has with the Father

has been a supreme comfort

and source of strength and confidence for Jesus

as he has faced the ever growing resistance to his message.

He desires that same strength, confidence and comfort for his followers,

all of his followers even to this day.

That is what Jesus desires for us...

that we are one as he and the Father are one.

It has become a difficult task for the church

to maintain this oneness over the years.

The history of the church is a long story of factions and cliques,

reformations and divisions.

I’m afraid we have not made a very good show of it.

There are times when I wish we could get it all back together,

and show the world the true power of God,

but I must admit that there are also times

when I am glad that there are so many different churches,
and it seems right to me that the church is different
in different places and for different people.

And I wonder if this might be part of God's plan after all.

As I read this passage today

I wondered if Jesus might not be one with the Father
in a different way than we now see oneness.

At the core of our faith is the great mystery of the Trinity –

One God in three persons,

or as we say, or used to say in the Creed of Athanasius

“... one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity,

neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father,

another of the Son,

and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,

is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co eternal.”

These words may be clear in their philosophical intent,

but they sure do seem to confound common sense.

Three persons separate, yet one substance, one majesty, one glory?

Might this mysterious Trinity be in some way the oneness that Jesus wants for us?

If so, how do we enter into this mystery?

I found an interesting quote in one of my sermon helps,

a quote from one of the great lights of the early church.

His name is Athanasius.

You may know him as the great defender of Nicean theology?

Well, Athanasius advised his flock to always breathe Christ.

I know that sounds a little weird and awfully simple,

but the more I thought about it the more I liked it.

I liked it for a lot of reasons

but the first one is that breath and spirit

are the same word in both Hebrew and Greek,

rûach in Hebrew

and pneuma in Greek,

so there is a deep poetry to his statement.

Inhale the spirit of Christ.

The second is the simplicity.

Always breathe Christ.

Anybody can do that.

Any time, any place.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

We may be too busy for church,

or bible study,

or even prayer,

but there is always time to breathe.

So what does all this have to do with unity,

with Jesus and the Father being one?

If that oneness is reflected in the Trinity,

and it is,

then that means that there must be a separateness that goes along with,

and indeed is essential to, the oneness.

As a society, we are struggling with this problem;

the problem of healthy separateness.

Whether it is politics,

or religion,

or any of the many groups to which we subscribe,

our differences seem to be tearing us apart.

The demand for same-ness,

the litmus test for purity of thought,
is tearing apart the abiding sense of community
that has always been the hallmark and strength of our society.

To be clear,

I'm sure this isn't something we have ever **not** struggled with,
but it seems to me that we have been giving in too easily of late
to the path of blaming and hating others.

Of trying to find unity by discarding our differences,
and shunning those different from us.

Jesus' prayer convicts us across the ages.

“Righteous Father,

the world does not know you, but I know you;
and these know that you have sent me.

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.”

Jesus said earlier,

“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.”

Are we who profess to be his followers, all of us,

being the answer to Jesus' prayer, as he intended?

Is that what we are doing?

Yes, we want to be one,

but is our one too small, too limited, too exclusive?

How can we change our exclusive one into an inclusive one?

How do we change our “everyone must think and look like me” one,
into a mysterious unity in Trinity one?

How do we get there from here?

There are some, sadly, who say we can't get there from here.

I am not one of those.

There is a way.

We must find it.

And when we do,

we in the church must share what we have found
and lead others into this new way of being one
without having to be the same.

A way of being one that not only allows for differences,
but celebrates and revels in them.

I think one way to start
is the way that Athanasius led his followers
to defend the Nicene theology.

Always breathe Christ.

When we breathe in the loving-kindness
that Jesus is extending to us right now,
whenever and wherever right now is,
and experience the forgiveness that he won for us on the cross,
the loving acceptance from the Father,
there is really only one way to breathe out,
with that same loving-kindness to all those around us.

Breathe in, breathe out.

Always breathe Christ.

It is through this breath
that we can find the means of grace and the hope of glory.

When you feel the urge to respond in anger,
breathe Christ.

When you feel the urge to dismiss or disparage the speech or thoughts of others,

breathe Christ.

When you feel the urge to abandon a friend,
because you cannot tolerate them any more,
breathe Christ.

Breathe in the loving-kindness of God,
and breathe out that loving-kindness to all those around us.

Always breathe Christ.

How about we try it once.

Lets prepare.

Think about what it would be like to breathe Christ.

Now take a deep breathe.

Hold it just the right length of time.

Now breathe out.

Well...I got you started,
now...breathe Christ always.

Amen.