

Acts 16:16-34; Ps 97; Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; Jn 17:20-26

Whenever you share your faith as a Christian, funny things can happen. Like you may actually get into a conversation about Jesus. In a really good way. But you never know what it will bring, which is probably a good thing. Several years ago, when I had taken the preliminary steps towards the priesthood, I let my co-workers at Radio Romantica and Radio Tricolor know that I was headed to seminary. Now this inspired several different reactions. Some were helpful, others not, but one of the most interesting was with the woman who was the business manager, Maria.

Maria and I had spoken more than a couple of times about Christianity, but more about our lives

rather than the institutions that we were a part of. Yet if there is one thing that is fundamental about becoming a priest, it is the institution. And so, when the news passed around the office that I was going to seminary, one day in the lunchroom, Maria asked me which church I was going to be a priest in. So I tried, in the least painful way possible to talk about Henry the Eighth, Rome, the Bible in English, the American War of Independence, the Constitutional Congress, the Bishops from Scotland, the Founding Fathers and some other incredibly critical pieces of history. Ahhhhh.

Then I asked her what kind of church she was a member of. She replied, "Christian." Yeah, but what *kind* of Christian. "Christian." She insisted. Now to

this day, I don't know what stripe of Christianity Maria belongs to. Is she charismatic? Does she speak in tongues, wave her hands in church? Is she Roman Catholic? Does she reverently gaze at the Blessed Sacrament as it is processed by? Or somewhere in between? I don't know. And to this day, I wonder if it matters. Why do I need to know *where* it is she attends. I know, I know, I can think of a thousand reasons why this could be important. But, when it gets right down to it, the foundation of Maria's life is that that God was and is one of us, that Christ had risen from the dead, that we are helping to break in this kingdom to come. Maria is a Christian. In a world of complexity, for her, it is as simple as that.

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Now, true confession time...how many people here today know Christians who aren't Episcopalian? Remember, this could be you. One of the strengths of the Episcopal Church is that we have other Christians among us. Now, of those that have other Christians as friends, how many of you have talked about Jesus the Christ with them? Broken the bread with them, shared your story of faith, found out why it is that they profess a faith in this God made human? Good.

One of the more sobering charts I've encountered shows the different breaks that the Christian Church has withstood since the ascension of Christ. It is simply stunning. Looking at it stretches the meaning of, "one holy, catholic and apostolic church" from our Nicene Creed. In the first few

centuries, the membership was fairly unified, but in the fourth century, the breaks begin. Now before our brothers in Rome get too high on their horse, we need to remember that the first organized church was the Syrian Orthodox, we all split from them, I'm sure over when to light the candles in the evening or some such pressing issue.

On this chart, with the splits, at first the number of Churches isn't too overwhelming, maybe about 15 or 20. But then there is the Great Schism of East and West and by the time you reach the Reformation forget about it. What once was a group of followers of the Way has splintered into myriad churches and communions and conventions.

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To this I wonder if our Triune God says, "Are you kidding me?" I mean even when you or I say Episcopalian or Anglican do we mean, now, wait for a bit...Anglican Catholic Church, Anglican Church in America, Anglican Communion Network, American Episcopal Church, Anglican Mission in America, Anglican Orthodox Church, Anglican Province of America, Anglican Province of Christ the King, The Episcopal Missionary Church, Continuing Anglican Movement, Forward in Faith, North America, Reformed Episcopal Church, Traditional Anglican Communion, or United Episcopal Church of North America. To name a few.

Friends, even that list if is a bit humorous, it is also depressing, for what is at stake here is incredibly

important. Some would say essential, of the *essence* of who we are as a body. The words from our Gospel today are Christ's last words at the end of the Last Supper, directed to his disciples, AND to us. This prayer from John's Gospel looks forward to the future, down the line to RIGHT NOW. "I ask not only on the behalf of these (meaning his disciples), but also on behalf of those who *will believe in me through their word, that all may be one.*" (Jn. 17:20-21) Now, did you shudder a bit when you heard those words from thousands of years ago? Because they were said for US. The wish of Christ, his last words for those who loved him were that we, the believers, may all be one. And we've got some work to do.

This is why baptism is always done in the name of the Trinity, the Three-in-One, not the Episcopal or Orthodox or Baptist Church. Why Paul had to remind people that he didn't baptize in the name of Cephas any more than Apollo baptized in the name of Apollo. Because we are, first and foremost, *Christians*, something that is all too often forgotten as we make declarations and distinctions, focusing on dogma and difference. We are followers of God made known in Christ, and as this Gospel today declares, and our being *one* is of great importance to the One who lived and died for us.

Still, it must be said that this unity can and does allow for diversity. In *koinonia*, the Greek word for partnership or fellowship, used often in the New

Testament, there is separateness in the unity. Even as there is completeness in the oneness, there is distinction within it. When we sing a hymn, for instance, we don't need to sing in monotone to sing together. No, some of the most beautiful music in the world is sung together, in harmony. In fact to harmonize means that we must sing in different tones. Together, but differently, much like the Father and the Son are One, yet distinct from one another. But singing the same song.

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So that we don't spend too much time reveling in our own oneness, a closer look at the text is required. Because as many times as Christ talks of unity, of this oneness, each time it is followed up by

the phrase *so that*. Six times in this passage alone, Jesus uses the Greek word, *hina*, which means "so that", enough that you could call this "So that" Christianity." I ask for this, *so that* this happens. "May they be one in us, *so that* the world may believe 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." It a phrase that sends us into action, one that demands that the other shoe drops.

With this understanding of oneness, we don't just come here every Sunday morning just to feel good, or to be in our club, or to check this off of our list; this shared belief leads us right back out those doors. If we are serious about this oneness it is

because it makes a difference to those outside our walls, and really it is *for those outside our walls* that we are really here. In John's Gospel, the believers are to be brought to completion as one in this life, because *this completion is to have an effect on the world*. We are called to be one as a body *so that* the world will believe in Christ. But how can we tell the world of this oneness of Christ when we cannot know it amongst ourselves?

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So again, I ask, have you ever experienced ecumenism? Found fellowship with someone that wasn't a part of your slice of the Christian pie? And by experiencing ecumenism, I do not mean any institution, but have you shared an experience of the

Divine with another follower of the Way regardless of the name on the outside of their church door? If you have and *especially* if you have not, I have a sincere request of you this week. Find a friend that is not Episcopalian. Re-connect in your faith with them. Pray with them. Ask them to pray to God for you. Read the Bible with them. Do works of mercy with them. Just be one with them. *So that*, this important phrase today, *so that* the world may know of Christ.

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