

“One Unity”

Seventh Sunday of Easter
Saturday & Sunday, June 1–2, 2019
All Services
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 16:16-34; John 17:20-26

One Unity



Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I have something I need to tell you all. It might be a little shocking, and for that I do apologize: I am a rather big Walt Disney World Resort fan. I really enjoy going there, to Florida, regardless of the time of year. I don't understand it, myself,

so please, don't you try to understand it. It's not just me; it's three quarters of my family. Just a couple of weeks ago, my son Evan, Flat Jesus and I took a few days and went to Walt Disney World.

This is what kinds of fans both Evan and I are (and the benefit of having an annual pass): Our plane landed a couple of minutes before 8:00, and between then and 9:30, we had: gotten off the plane; rented the car; drove the twenty-five minutes to Walt Disney World; parked the car at the Ticket and Transportation Center; and rode the monorail to the Magic Kingdom (watching the evening fireworks from our car). Then, since we had a Fast Pass for Big Thunder Mountain, which is about as far away from the front gate as you can get in Magic Kingdom, we had to walk *Against* all the outgoing traffic - because the evening firework program meant the park was soon closing (we were like salmon swimming upstream) - and we still managed to walk onto the Fast Pass Queue for Big Thunder Mountain by 9:32 p.m. .

Now, I will **gladly** speak with you, at great length, and probably **bore** you a great deal as well, about how much I *enjoy* Walt Disney World: the things I like to do there; the places to stay; the great food you to eat; and, of course, there's always the *rides* and the attractions. I *long ago* realized that I would rather talk to people about Walt Disney World than just about *anything*, let alone my *faith*. Or perhaps I should say, I find it *easier* to talk with strangers about Walt Disney World than about matters of faith. (As we waited in line to get into one of the parks one day, the woman in front of me was riding one of those scooters and wearing sandals. I noticed her toenails were painted with Hidden Mickeys and complemented her. She showed me her matching fingernail polish as well. I wouldn't to a woman in line at Giant about her toenail polish!)

Maybe you find a similar thing true in your own life. Faith is important to you. Faith helps to

fundamentally shape who you are. . . But you'd rather have a root canal without anesthesia than talk to *Anyone* about faith, let alone a stranger. But, if asked about, say, the Steelers, or the Philly's, or your garden, or the finale of *Game of Thrones*, or *Whatever* it is that excites you, talking about any of **That** to a stranger would **Not** be a difficulty.

Faith, believing in something, is a powerful thing. Faith can be used in positive ways to unite people. Faith, unfortunately, can *also* be used toward negative ends, or to force people apart. In our reading from Acts, talking about faith brought about unity.

The story, briefly: Paul & Silas are in Philippi (we heard Pastor Horner talk about Philippi a couple of weeks ago when he told us the story about Lydia). They end up getting tossed in prison, because they healed a slave girl. She was possessed, as our reading says, by

"a spirit of divination" and (therefore she) brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling." (V16)

The Greek says, literally, that she is possessed by the "spirit of the python," which was the symbol of the high priestess of Delphi, and implies that the slave girl's ability comes, **not** from the LORD God, but rather from the Oracle at Delphi in Greece. So, in other words, from a Christian believer's point of view, her divination does **not** correspond to *Christ*, therefore anything she says or predicts is suspect, regardless of how accurate some of it may be.

In healing this young woman of her ability to predict the future, Paul & Silas have caused a loss of a rather lucrative revenue source for her owners. Which in turn ticks off the owners, who then drum up some fake charges against Paul & Silas, and get them beaten, arrested, and jailed. While in prison, after a series of events, Paul & Silas end up converting the jailer and his entire household (it's actually a pretty cool story, I'd encourage you to go home and read Acts 16, it's short, and interesting).

In converting to Christianity, the jailer and his household suddenly find themselves part of a new system. They are now part of a *greater* family. They are united with folks who will help them, care for them, all of which they may or may not have had before. All we know for certain is that now that they are believers in Christ, there is a group in place to help them out (remember Lydia & her crew?). By the end of chapter 16, this is the last we hear about this jailer. We don't get any side plots, there are no spin offs. We don't know if there is any "happily ever after." But what we do know, is that people kept talking about Jesus. How do we know this? Because here we all sit, roughly two thousand years later, still talking about this story.

And on Saturday, we had fourteen young people who have spent the past nine months learning how to talk about faith, and what faith means to them. I told them that I am not expecting them all to go out start proclaiming the gospel story from a street corner, or their classroom, or on-line (I gave them a week off). But what I **do** expect of them, is to continue in faith. I **do** expect them to continue to gather together with other believers on a regular and frequent basis. Which means more than just Easter and Christmas. *Why?* Because that's what Jesus calls us to do: meet with other believers, in prayer and fellowship. Not only so that we won't feel alone. But because it is in meeting with, gathering with, other believers, that our own faith is strengthened, and we are reminded that we that we are joined together with Gd.

As a matter of fact, that's what Jesus prays for in our gospel reading. Jesus asks the Father to help us all know we are One in Christ.

One in Christ. Can you imagine? You know, growing up in the U.S., we were taught, pretty much from the womb onward, that “God helps those who help themselves.” And that we need to learn to “pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.” And we totally ignore that “God helps those who help themselves” does NOT come from the Bible, but rather comes from **Poor Richard’s Almanac**. We fail to realize that “pull ourselves up by our own boot straps” is not only *literally impossible* to do, but is *also* based on a tall tale about Baron Munchausen, a fictional 18th-century German nobleman, and is meant as a platitude to be *ridiculed* for its own absurdity.

We are taught to be “self-reliant,” which in itself is not a bad thing. But if we are only always “self-reliant” we forget that it is *working together* that makes us smarter, stronger, better able to stand up against those who would oppose us.

None of those platitudes are supportive of One Unity in Gd. When we listen to false teachings like those, it's like we are listening to the false prophecies of the Oracle of Delphi. We get caught up in the sparkliness, the distractions, the *things* of this world: making lots of money; wanting a fancy car, or the latest phone; we think we need a high powered job; or being a social media influencer; or even going to Walt Disney World. And we avoid the calling of our faith.

Did you hear what Jesus prayed in the gospel? Jesus had just finished his very last meal before his death, and he is praying right before he and the disciples leave the Upper Room to go to the Mount of Olives, where he knows he's going to be arrested.

Jesus prays, *first*, for himself, and reminds himself that God the Father is indeed with him. *Next*, he prays for his disciples. He asks that the disciples would know and feel God's presence in their lives as well. *Finally*, Jesus prays for the church as a whole, before the church as we know it even came into existence.

Jesus prays for us all to *work together*. Jesus prays for us to all *be one*: one in God the Father; to be one flock, to listen to one shepherd; that we might be united together.

Lots of different things unite us: football or baseball; things that we're interested in, like medicine, law, or the service industry. What we do for entertainment can bring us together - music or movies. What is the **most** important in bringing us together, I think, is that we believe in Christ, **and** Share that faith with others.

We share our faith, not only through *words*, but in *action* as well. We share our faith, in order that we may, indeed, be united together as one.

Amen.

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