

**Sunday, May 22, 2022 – Sixth Sunday of Easter/Baccalaureate & Staff Recognition
“Unity”**

John 17: 20-26

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Perhaps the oldest and undoubtedly the most successful tactic of war is – Divide and Conquer.

Only a military historian could begin to know how many times in the history of mankind it has been employed successfully on the battlefield. Russia is trying that very thing right now in Ukraine.

But of course the battlefield is not the only place it comes in handy. Everyone knows it and consciously or unconsciously it is employed at every level of our existence. Children learn it early – go ask mom first – when she says no – go find dad – and without letting on that you’ve already been denied, woo dad into saying yes. Then go and do whatever it is you wanted and when you get in trouble, just say, “Dad said it was OK.”

At work – whether on purpose to manipulate and get what you want - or just because there seems to be some sick pleasure we derive from getting co-workers to be for or against this person or that person, against this new project or idea or that one – cast a few seeds of doubt about a person’s real motives – whisper a couple mean thoughts across the office – and boom – human nature will take it from there. Let’s not even get started in the political world.

There is one place however, where divide and conquer has not worked and can never work. And that place is God Himself. No one and no thing can divide and conquer Him. Oh, they tried, remember. They spread the rumor and accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan himself. Jesus rebuffed such foolishness with an oft quoted verse – “But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.’”

God cannot be divided. He cannot be separated and pitted against himself. God’s perfect and complete unity, his oneness in purpose and resolve is absolute, and nothing, not even satan himself can

change that. And that my dear friends is our only hope and it is that which Jesus prays for in our Gospel this morning and it is there that I want to take you for a time of refreshing and comfort and strength.

It is a remarkable thing if you allow yourself to consider it, if you would open your heart and your mind for a moment and ponder the possibility of it – that 2000 years ago, on the night He was betrayed, God in human flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, gazed longingly into the future and saw your face sitting in this pew on this morning to hear these words!

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

There is nothing like this anywhere else in the universe. This is the secret to life, real life, the fullest, most satisfying life possible, the life you were created to experience. See it? God created human beings out of the very essence of His identity and nature. In His own image He created them. Male and female He created them. The picture of the Garden of Eden is the picture of heaven. God walking hand in hand with the most precious and dearest part of His whole creation – YOU.

What Satan could not accomplish with God – to divide and conquer His heavenly kingdom – He turned on us. He said to Eve – “Did God really say” - and with Adam standing right next to her Satan divided them from God and then from each other. So that when God came walking in the Garden that evening they were hiding in the bushes and when He said “what have you done?” they turned on each other and on Him. Adam said, this is all your fault God, “the woman you put here with me gave me the fruit and I ate it.”

But God was ready even before He had created the world to restore it, to bring us through this mess, to the perfect and complete unity with Him that alone can satisfy the thirst we have for life. It’s too big to even get your mind around – but this is what the Bible says – that from all eternity God longed to have you by His side and He is willing to do whatever it takes to get you there.

His love for you is completed when again this day you hear and believe that Jesus is God, conceived by the Holy Spirit into a human body through the Virgin Mary; that He and He alone lived out His days undivided from the Father in complete and perfect unity. And then, and then, willingly allowed Himself to be severed from the Father at cross when He cried out the most painful words ever spoken by a human being, "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachtani?" My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Divided from the Father in death, people, but oh glorious Easter morning, not conquered. Divided, willingly, and purposefully from the source of all life He laid dead in the tomb, but not conquered. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Now by the power of that resurrection you are united with the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent one and only true God of the universe. He is in you and you are in Him and there is nothing in all creation that can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, if only we would live that way! That's what Jesus is praying for and what Jesus prays for is happening in you: "I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

The oneness that we have with God in Christ is what brings us together in this place called the church. There is a bond between us, a connection so intense and powerful that we are called to look out for one another, to protect and defend and encourage and challenge and hold accountable. The world is going to get worse and worse – that's what the Bible says – and it is the people sitting in this room with you that will be there to support and strengthen and comfort. How much more awesome that we got to celebrate the inclusion of new members last week, if not into the one holy Christian church then certainly into this manifestation of the body of Christ that we call Mountain View Lutheran! Or to support and celebrate the staff members of our church and school, and the milestones of graduation leading to new modes of serving in God's kingdom for each of those individuals this morning.

It doesn't always seem like it though, does it? That's because we have this silly habit of letting go of our faith and going back to our old divide and conquer mentality. Growing in faith has some similarities to stages and changes children go through. I think God the Father must look at us some times and nudge Jesus sitting at his right hand say, "Look Son, they're in their terrible twos" – stomping their feet, throwing a fit, screaming, mine, mine, mine.

God lovingly seeks to help you grow up. Some of you have found the terrific threes stage of faith – trying to be sweet and cute and behaving in hopes God will like you better than the rest. I think a lot of us are stuck in spiritual puberty. Those wonderful adolescent years – uncertain about so many things, insecure about everything, we know what we should do – we even think about doing it – but it just doesn't seem to quite make it to the surface.

God lovingly seeks to help you grow up. He never stops loving you. His oneness remains perfect and unwavering. He smiles to see your faith taking hold of your heart and your mind as you start to think differently, more carefully, about your attitudes, about the way you treat others. And the smile breaks across His face each time He sees it happen – you put aside yourself for the sake of another person and the glory of Jesus Christ breaks forth for the world to see and believe there is no life better than this.

Jesus said, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." Folks, it does not mean we will get along perfectly. It does not mean that we will or that we should agree about everything – if all of you agreed with me 100% of time about everything then one of us is unnecessary.

Our unity is shaped and sustained by our constant return to the cross of Jesus Christ. "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Do you hear the words – “and I will continue to make you known.” Divide and conquer? Not here Satan. Get behind us! Jesus has set the table and we’re going to go and eat with Him. And we will forgive each other as we have been forgiven. And the bond between us will grow, even as “Divide and conquer seems to win in the world around us. Divide and conquer? Not here! In Jesus’ name, Amen.