

“One in the Spirit”

Acts 2:1-8, 12-18, 21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:12-14

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All three of today’s passages on this Pentecost Sunday relate to our **identity** as Christians. Our identity as the Spirit-filled body of Christ known as His Church. That common hope that we are to have, for ourselves and those who will come to believe through us that **“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** That as baptized believers, we know ourselves to be beloved children of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As those words from the Scriptures swirled around in this gray matter of mine... words like ‘Lord,’ ‘God,’ and ‘Father’... a ‘body’ ‘called’ by the ‘Spirit’... yet another verse came to mind. One from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, that you are likely familiar with:

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph 4:4-6)

These words to the church in Ephesus... but in truth, words to EVERY church... beautifully express the UNITY that we are intended to have as believers in Jesus Christ. And I found that, at least in this one solitary mind, that each of these three passages speak to one of that ‘trinity’ of thought in Paul’s declaration. That as we trust in the **“one God and Father of (us) all,”** we live out the **“one hope to which we were called.”** As you and I believe in **“one Lord... one faith... one baptism,”** we WILL be made **“One in the Spirit.”**

SO, in the words of Julie Andrews in “The Sound of Music,” *“Let’s start at the very beginning, A very good place to start.”* **One BAPTISM.** Which is, in truth, the ‘very beginning’ of our spiritual journey in Christ. A ‘very good place to start.’ I think I’d be safe to say that most of us in this room were baptized as infants. But whether or not it was as a young child or later in life, in **baptism** we are not only declared to be a part of the *church* family, but of the greater family of *God*. As CHILDREN of God. Sound familiar?

You may recall the very first verse of Romans that Mary/Willie read. **“For ALL who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” (Rom 8:14)** As we seek to be led by the Spirit of God, we are one with the Father as His very own son or daughter. Which means he loves us in

the most perfect way a Parent can love a child. No matter how that child messes up, ignores what the parent says, says or does any measure of evil against them. Loves them unconditionally.

And because of that perfect love that God has for us, His children, we in turn must love one another in the same way. Remember that verse from a few weeks back? ***“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** (John 13:35)

Since we last spoke on this subject of ‘loving one another,’ just how has that worked for you? How easy has it been to love those who are different than you are... in skin color... in political party ‘color’... in personality type... in nationality type? It’s easy to care about the person sitting next to you in the pew... how about one who is *physically far away*, like a Russian dictator... or *psychologically far out*, like a racist murderer. And, as I have said before, it can also be hard to love even someone as close as your own biological family...

Which is why we must never forget who our TRUE parent is. The same one our brother Jesus cried out to: ***“Abba, Father.”*** Because “God so loved the world”... US... we have a legacy of love to live up to. As we pray every day to our Heavenly Father... praying by the power of the Spirit and the person of Jesus... we prove who we are. WHOSE we are. In Paul’s words, ***“When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”*** (Ro 8:15)

If we truly want ‘peace’ between God’s children who are ‘different,’ it must start with US. In the words of a favorite song of mine that I learned at a youth retreat: “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me... With God as our Father, Brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother (and sister) in perfect harmony.” ‘In perfect harmony?’ Impossible, you say? I believe that our brother Jesus once said that ***“with God all things are possible.”*** (Mt. 19:26) YOU take it up with your brother..

Which brings us to the second ‘one,’ **ONE FAITH**. As I said, that baptismal identity refers to both being a ‘beautiful, wonderful child of God,’ and being a part of the church... a community of FAITH. As we celebrate the ‘birthday’ of the church at Pentecost, just what is it that makes this event so significant...so singular? Well of course, silly pastor, that the Spirit of God allowed each individual believer, no matter what country they came from, to understand what others were saying in their own language. The Holy Spirit broke down any barrier of understanding

between different people groups to bring about unity, oneness. Hmm... you think we need a little bit of that 'Holy Spirit power' right now in 'breaking down barriers,' fostering 'understanding' between those who are very 'different?' Hmm... may ALL of God's children say... 'AMEN!?'

But we should note that the story does NOT stop there. It wasn't just that the Spirit enabled them to understand one another. But also to understand GOD. To actively be given glimpses of God's PLAN for His people. Yes, the Spirit draws us together as the Church... but it is also a Church given the FAITH to believe in God's providence and to look with confidence to the FUTURE.

After answering those naysayers who scoffed that they were under the influence of an alcoholic-type of 'spirit,' Peter utters one of my favorite lines: ***"they are not drunk... for it is only nine o'clock."*** Peter had obviously never been to Louisiana...). Anyway, he goes on to say ***"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."*** (2:17)

The Spirit's power was much more than simply a 1st century precursor to linguistic aids like Rosetta Stone or Duolingo (or my personal favorite, Babbel). Quoting the prophet Joel (who declared these to be God's words hundreds of years prior), Peter is saying that ***"in the last days"*** the Holy Spirit would enable young people to ***"see visions"*** and ***"prophesy,"*** and old folks to ***"dream dreams."*** Young and old, male and female, God followers would be given abilities to discern the future. To be a forward-looking people of VISION.

Are WE in 'the last days?' Of our world? Of our CHURCH? We do recall Jesus saying that ***"No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen... Only the Father knows."*** (Matt. 24:36) What I DO know is that the only 'expiration date' on the gifts of the Spirit that each one of us has been given is our own 'expiration date.' WHENEVER that will be. And SO, 'young and old,' 'male and female,' it is up to YOU to 'see visions' and 'dream dreams' in these 'last days'. For YOU, the Church, has been given the FAITH to believe in God's **providence** and to look with **confidence to the FUTURE.** **One day at a time!**

So, are these just the words of your optimistic, enthusiastic half-glass-full minister? A 'pastor pep-talk?' Well, as we consider the Spirit's ability to use 'little ol' us'... in spite of ourselves... let's remember the words of our **ONE LORD**. Our brother Jesus who said to His disciples... US... ***"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."*** (John 14:12)

As a 'follower' of Christ, we can think of that role as being very passive. By virtue of that very word, 'follower,' it is easy to think of being a Christian as simply 'following' rules. Keeping our head down and walk submissively behind our Lord and Master. We should, instead, think of our role in terms of 'following His LEAD.'

Our Lord Jesus is pretty clear about our 'response-ability' ... our 'ability to respond' ... as Christians: 'VERY TRULY, I tell you... listen up, people... whoever believes in me WILL do the very things that I have done while on this earth. And, in fact, even GREATER things! WHY? Because I am out of here! I'm going back to be with my Father, so I am leaving this world in YOUR hands...'

It is this onerous, yet God-given responsibility that underscores the importance of Pentecost. We NEED the power of the Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Motivator, to be a people of VISION for God's purposes in the church, and in this world. We NEED the Spirit to give us FAITH to have hope in the face of despair. We NEED the Spirit to remind us, especially when we are weak and filled with doubt, that we ARE the children of God. That we have a loving Father who will NEVER leave us nor forsake us. From those earliest believers to us today, we are empowered to live out that faith expressed by Paul of ***"One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (Eph. 4:5-6)

In closing, in reflecting on the sermon title that I hope God led me to choose... "One in the Spirit"... a song came to mind. I know, shocker. *"They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."* It was a song I first came to know and love in a church singing group I have mentioned before, "ONE Way." For a message that is all about our 'oneness' in God's love and Spirit, I thought it most appropriate that we would be made 'one' in Song. So I would invite you to grab that little "Sing the Faith" songbook and stand (OR) stand to sing the lyrics on the screen, as we join our voices to proclaim, 'We are ONE' by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Would you please stand...

"We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord (repeat).

And we pray that our unity will one day be restored

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love (repeat)."

Having proclaimed our unity in Song, let us now join those same voices together as we affirm the FAITH that makes us one. Using the words of the Apostles' Creed, please join me as we affirm answers to the question, 'What do you believe?'...

**CHARGE: God of power, may the boldness of your Spirit transform us,
The gentleness of your Spirit lead us, the gifts of your Spirit equip us
To serve and worship you now and always.**

O God, who to an expectant and united ('untied') church granted at Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit, you have wonderfully brought into one fold those who now worship You here. Grant, we pray, the help of that same Spirit in all our life and worship, that we may expect great things from you, attempt great things for you, and being one in you, show to the world that you sent Jesus Christ, our Lord – to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory, world without end.