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## “One”

A sermon by Marilyn T, Hedgpeth

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year C)

June 2, 2019

John 17:20-26

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Jesus looked toward heaven, and he prayed on behalf of his believers – on our behalf.

On the cusp of his death, he prayed for himself, he prayed for his disciples,

and he prayed for us – his future disciples.

Jesus prayed long and hard, that we might be **one** –

just as he and the Father/God are **one**.

He prayed that God’s glory – which he has shared with believers as our spiritual DNA –

might be a double helix entwining us together as **one**.

And he prayed that we might realize our unity in the love of God –

which is always with us and always in us.

I love it that Jesus prayed for us then – that Jesus prays for us still!

I have been emotionally consumed lately with the serious illness of my first cousin –

someone less than two years younger than me –

who went in for rather ordinary back surgery in April and emerged

for the following month in a catatonic state in the Intensive Care Unit.

There are ten of us cousins on that side of the family, and all of us  
have been in a state of shock, pinching ourselves,  
over this sudden trauma to someone so vital and vibrant.

She was the cute one, the youngest of my girl cousins,  
the one with curls, the dimples and laughing brown eyes,  
always the last recipient of the long stream of hand-me-down dresses,  
the petite one, who never was oafish or had acne like the rest of us.

“How could this have happened to her?” we have wondered.

In our network of conversations over the phone and email we have had  
a virtual family reunion of sorts as we have tried to support our cousin  
and her children who have been constantly and faithfully by her side.

And in the course of those quotidian conversations, I have noticed the barest hints  
of disunity and disharmony trying to creep into our relationships:  
political comments that speak to the state of our economy or racial equity or  
gay ordination or gay marriage; a little family gossip here and a little there,  
peppered with religious comments about the nature of heaven or not.

I’ve waded into the water of snarkiness myself, to be sure,  
tempted to speak my mind in those discussions, but more often than not,  
tiptoeing around the edges, perhaps in a cowardly way. Why?

Because, I want us to “maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,”  
as Paul says in Ephesians 4, for there is “**one** body and **one** Spirit –  
just as we were called to **one** hope when we were called –  
**one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism; **one** God and Father of all  
who is over all and through all and in all”. (Ephesians 4:3-6)

And ultimately I don't think it would benefit our cousin's health if we began to quibble.

She is now out of that catatonic state and out of the ICU (Thanks be to God!),

but we don't know if she will emerge from this like Dorothy waking up

in the *Wizard of Oz* or like Dr. Eben Alexander,

who after his near-death experience wrote *Proof of Heaven:*

*A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife.*

We, the family, need to maintain our **oneness**.

And I tend to recall at times like this the Moravian motto or mantra:

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love!"

The trick, of course, is trying to ascertain just what *are* the essentials,

all the while trying to motivate all words and deeds by love.

We, the family, need to maintain our **oneness** now more than ever,

because we share genetic DNA, spiritual DNA, a common surname,

and a resurrection love, through Christ, that is stronger than death.

One of my listening favorites – *The Avett Brothers*, a folk-rock band from Concord, NC – has a ballad called "Murder in the City".

It's similar to Jesus' prayer before his death, in that it speaks heartfelt instruction

to those who, eventually, are going to be left behind in the wake of a death.

I'm changing some of the words for our more sensitive members, but you'll

get the gist of it:

*If I (go missing) get murdered in the city*

*Don't go revenging in my name*

*One person dead from such is plenty*

*No need to go get locked away....*

*I wonder which brother is better*

*Which one our parents loved the most*

*I sure did get in lots of trouble*

*They seem to let the other go....*

*If I (go missing) get murdered in the city*

*Go read the letter on my desk*

*Don't worry with all my belongings*

*Pay attention to the list*

And here is my favorite verse, the one that makes me think of Jesus;

the one that makes me think of Jesus' parting instructions to his community

that we might be **one**:

*Make sure my sister knows I loved her*

*Make sure my mother knows the same*

*Always remember, there is nothing worth sharing*

*Like the love that let us share our name.*

*Always remember, there is nothing worth sharing*

*Like the love that let us share our name.*

Friends, it is the season of family reunions.

Try to be civil; try not to quibble; try to maintain the unity of the Spirit

through the bond of peace.

And this day is like a family reunion for our church, I think, as we thank our teachers,

as we ordain and install new officers, and as we congratulate our graduates.

It's a high, holy day of celebration and transition in the life of our God-family.

It's also the last Sunday of Eastertide, as we lift high the cross

and proclaim the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ that let us

share not only his last name, as Christians,

but also the same mind and same nature, the same glory and the same Spirit,

that we share from the deep core of our spiritual DNA.

*Always remember, there is nothing worth sharing*

*Like the love that let us share our name.*

In the *name* of God, our Parent, Jesus Christ, our brother,

and the Holy Spirit, may we be **one**. Amen.

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