

“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.¹

This has been an important week and it’s not over yet!

Wednesday of this week we celebrated the Confession of Simon Peter, the apostle we are introduced to in today’s gospel, often called the “Rock” of the church. The Confession of Peter marks the beginning of the week of prayer for Christian Unity. It runs until next Wednesday when we celebrate the Confession of Paul. Churches around the world participate in this and 2017’s week was organized by churches in Germany. Five hundred years ago, this year, Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door at Wittenberg and a series of other events around Europe and the world sparked the Protestant Reformation. While the reformation renewed the church-- opening up grace and allowing worship in one’s own, the ramifications have not been free from suffering, persecution or the pain caused by division. The churches in Germany, Catholic and Protestant, that planned this event recognize that division cuts deep. This year’s theme is “Reconciliation—the love of Christ compels us.”

The worship proposed for this week involves building a wall, block by block with a sin of Christian division on each block—lack of love, hate, contempt, false accusation, broken communion, abuse of power, isolation and pride—those are some of the sins they have in mind and we might be able to add some of our own. But then the wall is dismantled and the stones placed one-by-one in the shape of a cross. They directly reference the Berlin wall’s fall in 1989 for this activity and proclaim that this wall dismantling be “a symbol of hope for any situation in which a division seems insurmountable.”²

Unity is not losing our identity or even a compromise of it. It is a living together though, peaceably, as one, under one God. Unity is not about worrying that the Episcopal Church of Good Shepherd merge into Tarrytown Methodist or vice versa, but it is that we exist as companions, that we

¹ Psalm 27:11, NRSV

² World Council of Churches, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Resources.
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/week-of-prayer>

recognize we stand together looking towards the same Christ. And, that we first recognize Christ joins each one of us—regardless of our denomination. Unity is in our DNA as Episcopalians, as members of a Global Communion that experiences disagreement and difference, we are part of a church that allows people of different opinions and views, backgrounds and cultures, into one body, one community. Unity is a part of who we are because we follow Christ. The God we follow is a God who is distinctly three persons yet miraculously fully and wholly one

And our psalm today says, *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.*

There are many things we can seek—right now especially—we can seek to make sure we are right and that our best intentions are heard and put into place, we can seek reasons to justify why my action is better than another’s. We can seek these things but that is not the work of reconciliation or moves towards unity. We seek the face of Christ and Christ’s face is not absent from anyone. When we seek Christ’s face we begin to see Christ’s face in more and more people around us, even those in whom it seems Christ has taken vacation. *“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.* We seek to see more like what God sees—love for all persons, a unity that God knows which is not limited to what we can construct or devise.

And if, as the line in the psalm follows we think God has hidden his face from us³ or someone else, we can pray for help to see or even to begin seeking God’s face, and we can recognize our place in community. God often reveals himself in people—others around us can be the channels through which we begin again to see God’s face. God’s face is not something we just see when our eyes are closed in prayer, it is the face we see when we open them to Christ.

It is a reality that division plagues so much of the world and our nation, and we, as followers of Christ, can be agents and ministers of unity, of reconciliation. We can work towards healing those

³ Psalm 27:12

divisions. To break a bone takes only a moment but for it to heal takes a much longer time. Healing, like reconciliation, also requires hoard work: we have to take care of wounds, treat them, be mindful of injuring them again. Our response is towards the healing, the reconciliation, not causing more breaks. However we pray for unity, to see the mystery of how we are one—like our God who is three yet always fully one—when we pray for unity, feeling the pain of division—we step towards healing, we choose a way of reconciliation, not a way that furthers division. To seek God’s face—to pray for unity *as Christ wills it*, we help change, we help God’s kingdom come into our world. Prayer is not intended just for ourselves, it is about God and our participation in God’s kingdom and right action grows out of prayer. Maybe it isn’t obvious, doesn’t jump out at us—fireworks may not go off, historic churches may not be brought back together all in one go or partisan politics be made wholly civil? at every interaction—but when we pray to seek God’s—we are changed and we help change.

And we are able to choose our response. Here, where we meet Christ at his table, where we worship together in praise and thanks, we take our first steps to respond the way God would have us respond. To seek the will of the One who made us, who’s face shows us love beyond what we can sometimes even believe, love for all that forms union and not division. We seek to respond according to the will and means of Christ. And there is plenty of temptation to fall into the ways of hatred, contempt, false accusation, isolation, pride, broken communion—those sins written on the blocks that build walls—but our hope in Christ puts us in the position to dismantle walls. To be “a symbol of hope for any situation in which a division seems insurmountable.”

I hope you will join me this week as we pray for the unity of Christians around the world and through the ages. That we see more and more Christ in those around us—who are similar and different. Maybe this will open prayers for unity in other parts of our world and nation as well, places where we can all be ministers of reconciliation, which is not the easier path-- but whenever we are troubled,

tempted to fall into perpetuating division, participating in that which breaks us apart, let us be reminded of the face we seek. It is, after all, through God's power we can accomplish anything.

To seek God first opens to see God's kingdom of unity and peace and we are workers for *that* cause, the one that breaks walls down. *"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.*

The God we love. The Christ we follow.

Unity is not a loss of identity or even a compromise of it. It is a living together, as one, as our one God, the one Christ we follow calls us. We need not worry that if we work for unity the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd needs to merge into Tarrytown Methodist or vice versa, but it is that we exist as companions, that we recognize we stand together looking towards Christ. And unity is part of who we are—in the Episcopal Church and as Christians.

The Episcopal or Anglican church around the world is recognized for its ability to recognize the context it is a part of yet retain certain core elements that identify it as Christian Anglican. It is an ability to unify, in sometimes very mysterious ways, the context with something outside of it that has given the Anglican church strength in its adaptation around the world and ability to form a global communion.

And, we as Christians worship one God who shows us about unity. Our God is three persons Father Son and Holy Spirit and miraculously is God. It is one being that is beyond comprehension and yet is complete and full and true.

I hope you will join me as we pray for the unity of Christians around the world and through the ages, especially this week.

Whenever we feel the pain of division and prayer for its unity, for its healing, something changes—maybe it does not look big or jump out at us, fireworks may not go off and historic churches are brought back together again, but we do help change.

And whenever, and I believe however, we pray for unity, we help change.

On Saturday of this week the Washington National Cathedral hosted its 58th inaugural prayer breakfast. The Episcopal Church has a place still in the inaugural events with a prayer service on the morning of and the prayer service ending the events on Saturday.

Washington prayer breakfast, National Cathedral, Women's March.

Here. We are. Good Shepherd. Praying for Unity. Stained glass window unity.

It is recognizing it is not difference that is our primary concern but what we hold in common. For Christians, Christ and the love we live following him.

The love of Christ compels us.