

Acts 1:6-14

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

There are very few things in life more satisfying to me than an intimate dinner party. There's something very special about sitting down to break bread with family or with friends and enjoying that camaraderie and conversation. Perhaps it's the intimacy of sharing a meal or the satisfaction of eating delicious food and then relaxing with a full belly that opens up the conversation to matters of real importance. We share ideas and points of view and we let others know who we are and in turn they let us know who they are. That's the definition of intimacy.....knowing another and being known by another and being in relationship with each other.

The gospel lesson we heard this morning is a snippet of what's known as Jesus' Farewell Discourse to his disciples and it happens after dinner....the dinner they shared together on Maundy Thursday, the night before Jesus was crucified. In the gospel of John, this conversation runs from Chapter 13-15. It's a long conversation and it's a very intimate one. After Judas Iscariot leaves the room, Jesus begins to speak about what is most pressing on his heart. And the conversation continues as he and the remaining disciples walk from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus tells them all the things he wants them to know and what he wants them to remember.

Jesus emphasizes his oneness.....his intimacy.....with God. He is about to complete the mission for which God sent him into the world: to make God known to the world and to defeat death itself so that humanity once again has clear access to God through Him. Jesus tells them many things during this conversation. He tells them that they will be scattered and they will leave Jesus alone...two facts that none of them want to believe. But he also tells them that they will not be abandoned when he returns to the Father. He will send an Advocate.....the Paraclete.....to walk alongside all of them and each of them. Jesus talks about being one with the Father.....that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. This reference to unity and to intimacy keeps coming up.

At the end of this conversation, Jesus prays aloud for them. He lets them eavesdrop on his intimate conversation with God concerning them. This prayer, known as the Priestly Prayer, is the only definition we have from Jesus about the nature of eternal life. He says quite simply in

reference to all believers then and now, "And this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Eternal life is to know God. It begins now. It's not something that happens only when we die. Jesus has revealed the nature of God to us. He is the incarnation of God. He has said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." The gospel of John is the only gospel that defines what eternal life is. The synoptic gospels allude to it as something that lies in our future, but in the gospel of John, eternal life is something that we experience in *this* life...in real time.

The most basic emotional craving that human beings have is to know others and to be known by them.....that's the definition of intimacy.....and the basis of all relationships both good and bad. All human beings search for intimacy in one way or another. The most profound intimacy we can ever find is in the relationship we have with God and with Jesus Christ. That's the ultimate. Each Sunday morning when we pray the Collect of Purity, we hear the words addressed to God....."to whom all hearts are open, all desires are known and from whom no secrets are hid." We have no privacy from God. Our hearts all well-known by God.....the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good news is that God loves all of it and all of us. God loves even those parts of us that we don't love or that we struggle with or that we are ashamed of. Our part of that relationship is to acknowledge that our hearts and minds are open books to God. And our part is also to seek to know God who has revealed himself in Scripture, in Jesus Christ, and in many of our encounters with other people. All that God asks of us is that we seek Him and seek an ongoing relationship with Him.

Intimate relationships between human beings can be found in many forms. They can be closeness between siblings; they can be best friends; they can be with parents and children, but perhaps the closest of human relationships that imitates the intimacy of the relationship with God is found in marriage. The Church has been described as the bride of Christ. It is one way of describing this particular kind of intimacy between the Creator and his creation. When two people marry, the wedding ceremony proclaims that the two shall become one. It's an interesting concept and one that can easily be misunderstood or confused. The two people do not become one person as one might think. In a healthy marriage, each person maintains a sense of their own identity, but both of them are part of a third identity.....the marriage partnership or couple itself. Neither one gives up their personal identity or gets swallowed up by the marriage. Each partner maintains their separate identity while creating this intimate relationship between them which alters each of them in some respects. Think of it like two people dancing. A solo dance is not the same as a couple dancing. And the partners in the dance do different steps and yet are dancing in unison, although not in lockstep. They are mirroring the movements of each other, but are not doing exactly the same movements. Just

take a look at Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Ginger Rogers did everything that Fred Astaire did;.... she just did it backwards in high heels. And each of them had some separate and distinct parts of the dance as they went along. The dancing couple was an entity and yet each of them remained a separate and distinct person within it.

This intimacy that Jesus describes is all important to his mission and he tells his disciples that in his absence he wants them to love one another as he has loved them.....and in doing so, people will know that they are his disciples. Through the years, we Christians have fallen far short of meeting the obligation of that command. When Jesus calls for them...and us...to be one...as he and the Father are one...he is not calling us to be in lock step with one another. He is not calling for us to abandon our separate identities or our personal experiences and knowledge of Him or of God. He is calling on them.....and on us.....to keep in mind the main purpose of our life in Him...to make known to the world God's love for each and every creature and God's desire for intimate relationship with each one of us. God wants to be known and He sent Jesus as a most profound way of revealing Himself to us.

Jesus is saying "Good-bye" to his disciples. We just marked the Feast of the Ascension last Thursday and have heard in our lesson this morning from the Book of Acts about the disciples' witness of Jesus' ascension. He is no longer in the world as a human being, but we are. We are in the world and it is our mission to continue in Jesus' mission to make God known to the world. In making God known to the world, we are not required to walk in lockstep with other believers. Each of us has our own gifts, our own experiences of God, and our own way of expressing our relationship with God and with Jesus. We learn from one another and are nourished by one another in our various experiences of God. Those experiences will be unique to each of us. What is the same is that we are believers...in God and in Jesus Christ. Jesus has said that he is one with the Father...that the Father is in him and he is in the Father...and yet each of them has a distinct identity as well. We know as his disciples that we are one with Christ. When we are baptized and then confirmed, we become part of the body of Christ which is known as the Church. We become part of Jesus Christ in this way. It is the outward expression of a spiritual and inward grace. It is a sacrament. It is divine unity with the Almighty. Once baptized, we are in him. And yet, we each retain our own individuality and our own experience of Him. It is a mystery.

In much the same way, we are reminded each time we come to the rail during the celebration of Holy Eucharist, that as we consume that bread and that wine we are reminded that not only are we in Him, but he is now in us. The consumption of Jesus' body and blood nourishes us spiritually in a way that is mystical...in a way that cannot be explained in human terms. It is a profound and outward expression of a spiritual and inward grace. It is a sacrament.

When Jesus calls for unity, he is not calling us to forget who we are or who God made us to be. He is calling us to accept all others who have accepted Him and are cultivating a relationship with God and with Him. We do not always agree, but we must always acknowledge that those who seek him are seeking him just as we are. In that respect, we are on the same page...we are pursuing the same thing.

Do you know the story of the six blind men who each had a part of an elephant and were arguing with each other about what an elephant is like. One had hold of the tail; another had hold of the trunk; still another had hold of one of the massive legs; another had hold of the floppy waving ears; and one had hold of the tusks; and still another had hold of the rough and baggy skin on the elephant's body. Each one of them insisted that they were right about the nature of this animal and they argued vehemently to get the others to agree. The truth of the matter was...they were all telling the truth...it was just that none of them had ALL the truth. Maybe that's the way it is with Jesus.

In our attempts to understand God, none of us have ALL the truth. But God has been wise and generous enough to send us Jesus to reveal Himself and God has sent the Holy Spirit to sustain and nourish us. And we have been commanded to love one another as He loved us. As we follow that command, We will continue to learn, to grow and to continue to be in relationship with God as Jesus taught us.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.