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St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky
The Seventh Sunday of Easter ~ May 7th & 8th, 2016
John 17:20-26

There is a symbolic event that takes place once a year when Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all around the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services to recall Jesus' prayer for his disciples that we hear in today's gospel reading "that they may all be one..." (John 17.21). This meaningful, international event is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and it has been occurring around the globe since 1908, and with the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity became increasingly recognized by different churches throughout the world. The event typically takes place January 18 through Jan. 25th, but it is also commonly observed around Pentecost, due to its message of unity.

The word unity is defined as 'the state of being united or joined as a whole' (Merriam Webster)-and at the end of His farewell prayer, before His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus openly refers to the concept of unity as He includes later generations of Christians in this prayer – that means us! The first part of Jesus farewell prayer focuses upon unity, as Jesus prays 'that they all may be one'. Scholars note that this verse, and the verse before and after, demonstrates a complex and repetitive structure that emphasize the significant importance of the prayer. In order for this unity or oneness that Jesus speaks of to occur there must be relationship of mutual dependence upon one another, as our primary access to God is by way of one another, as we are created to live in community. Now of course we may have personal encounters with God, and quite often these encounters guide us back into community. In the words of Bishop Thomas Breidenthal "It is our capacity for community that is the glory that God has given us." Think

about it – when we worship together in community, as we participate in the liturgy or sing hymns together, there is such a strong feeling of the presence of God in the midst of us. Paul speaks of the importance of this unity in his letters to the Ephesians and Corinthians – as a result of the division that was occurring. The Christian life was never intended to be solitary, as this is simply incongruent with who Jesus is, and quite frankly, when we allow ourselves to be divided it destroys our witness to be the people God has called us to be.

Ecumenism is the principle of promoting unity among the world's Christian churches. Some of you may know that St' Luke's is actively involved in a local ecumenical movement with Anchorage Presbyterian and the Catholic Church of the Epiphany. The covenant was agreed upon by the clergy in 1987. (*Review the history of the Covenant*).

Although there may be numerous differences in theology and polity we refuse to allow these things to divide us. In fact, disagreement often proves to be a catalyst for deeper, shared engagement with Christ. John's gospel assumes throughout that unity that is grounded in mutual love lies at the heart of all reality. Therefore our well-being depends on our availability to one another as brothers and sisters, as we cannot truly experience fullness of life when we live in isolation.

The Episcopal Church as a whole is a proponent of ecumenism and all that it has to offer. Some might view the ecumenical movement as risky, but risk-taking is often the necessary route that we must take to be where Jesus is. As Bishop Breidenthal sates "When we cross that line, we join Jesus in His rejection of separation, and in doing this we draw close to Him in His death and in His resurrection."

"That we all may be one..." John 17:21

