

Family Ties that Bind  
John 17: 20-26  
Sermon by: Joanne Gallardo  
June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

*<sup>20</sup>“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup>that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,<sup>22</sup> so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. <sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

*<sup>25</sup>“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup>I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”*

Over Memorial Day weekend I spent some time with Mennonite friends at a cabin on Lake Michigan. After the full disclosure about the mice problem and apologizing for no WiFi, I was reminded that “we are all family here.” And so the weekend progressed. Our lives were shared, jokes were made, and we participated in the ritual of our usually individualistic living together. It became clear early on that we all lead very different lives. We have different views and ways of being in the world. But we knew this. On the surface, we have a background of Mennonite Church teaching and Mennonite higher education. But we lead very different lives. We make life choices that are different from one another. They exist in whole worlds different from my very Mennonite, very white, very rural one. This was a place to withhold judgement. I wanted to jump to conclusions, but since I try (sometimes very horribly) to walk with Jesus, I did my best to listen. And I learned. I came away with books to read. I came away with new perspectives. Am I going to change the way I am living, move to the city, and detach myself from the entrenchment of all things Mennonite? Probably not. But I do feel closer to these friends of mine now that I listened. I feel connected to them. Unified? Maybe not. But connected, like family.

Prayer is petition, and we see this the John 17 text. Jesus is making a petition to God concerning himself, his disciples, and future believers. You can tell the Gospel writer is doing their best to reflect the words of Jesus with sometimes Jesus being talked about in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, sometimes first. What we don't see, but what likely happened, is Jesus listening for God to speak. Jesus and his divine parent are having a two-way conversation, but for now we only see one side.

There should be a note here that the Greek word for "prayer" is not found here. The Greek word for "prayer" as it is used in the other Gospels is not found in John, rather, a more apt translation for "to pray" might be "to entreat" or "to ask." I say this because the word "prayer" can be bogged down with such religious overtones and baggage over "right language" and "right approach" that I think we would do well to remember that Jesus is literally having a conversation with God.

A lot of what Jesus talks about is the concept of "being one." I think we can confuse unity for uniformity. The way the Greek is written for this text is that God is "in" Jesus, and Jesus is in God, in that way they are "one." So the task of the disciples is to be "in" God and Jesus in the way that Jesus and God are a part of each other. Ecclesiology cannot be separated from incarnation.

Another curious word in this text is "glory." Jesus says, "Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." I have discussed "glory" in sermons before, and how maybe the meaning of the word isn't the common meaning we may attribute to it. In the Gospel of John, "glory" is used both in Jesus' first miracle and last miracle. "Glory" is used both when Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding in Cana, and also, when he raises Lazarus from the dead. One happens when Jesus' mother is upset and wants her son to "do something about it," the other happens when he is so full of grief he is moved to act. A reaction to the first miracle might be "neat." The reaction to the last? "Astounding." From this, we learn that glory can be both mundane and awe-inspiring. The glory of the Lord can be seen in something as ordinary as pouring water over Ellie's head and inviting her into fellowship, or in being raised from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day only to ascend into heaven. So who is this incarnation, this Jesus? As preacher Debbie Blue puts it, glory in this case doesn't shine. Glory bleeds. Glory is flesh and blood

doing the best it can to be faithful to God and faithful to his friends, his chosen family. Glory is entreating, beseeching God to take care of and to love his closest allies. Glory requests that those who come to know God and Christ through the word of the disciples (so, all of us) be one with one another.

Therefore, to be church with one another, we have several tasks. We need to see God in each other, as well as ourselves. We need to see one another as the bearers of the incarnation. In that way, we are one. There is no uniformity, rather, there are different manifestations of the incarnation. The way I am a bit of the incarnation of God is likely not the way you are a bit of the incarnation of God. I am not saying this to mean that there are multiple truths, rather, our expressions of living faithfully in Christ sometimes call us to different realities based on our life experiences, our context, our family of origin, and ways of being in the world. How do you need to change your posture in order to see the incarnation in others? How might knowing this change your prayer life?

I did some travel this week with some people that I don't know very well. I travel a lot for someone whose job doesn't require travel, and I usually do it alone. The people I traveled with don't travel a whole lot, so my orientation toward them was one that fit my worldview. I assumed these people travelled a lot, probably travelled to cities, and they had probably needed to do so independently at times. I couldn't have been more wrong. And I became incredibly frustrated. I felt like if I could figure things out, surely, they could. I kept thinking, "If they could just get it together..."

I do a big talk about needing to examine privilege, race, ability, and gender...but I certainly have a difficult time living it. As an adult, I am decidedly middle class. I have been afforded opportunities based on gatekeepers allowing me access. This has allowed me to travel, it's given me access to both gentrified and ungentrified urban areas, and it has given me life experiences that allow me to move in and out of many settings with relative ease. It's afforded me knowledge and given me survival skills that I don't even really need to think twice about.

If your life experience doesn't give you access, or put you in touch with the gatekeepers that can get you that access, the world looks very different. I know I learned these skills in early adulthood and that they had to be taught to me, as my family of origin lived below the poverty line. You would think

this might give me some empathy, but I just missed the mark completely and chose not to see where Christ was clearly in the people who needed a little extra time and patience. The need for this may come from places I least expect, but it's on ME to change my posture and acknowledge that my way is not always the best way, or the most sensitive way, or the most helpful way. We may be a part of the same family but we are adopted into this family together from many different settings. Even settings that may seem similar can vary from person to person. By acknowledging that we are family, and that Christ desires us to be one, we need to be the ones to acknowledge where OUR privilege and power lie and where can we give it up in order to make room for more people in our family.

We here at Berkey are family. Today Ellie enters into covenant with us and continues to be a part of our family, but this time with an outward symbol of a personal journey. However, we would not be honest with ourselves if we say we haven't struggled. We've tackled some pretty big territory over the past year, and if we take the long view, over that past several years. Transitions, welcome statements, decisions...it's been a red-letter time in our church's history. And something wonderful and difficult happened with that. We found out we don't all agree!

Jesus' disciples were blessed (and I'm using that word intentionally) with division. Peter outright opposed Jesus being crucified. James and John argued about who should sit at Jesus' right and left hand, all the disciples argued over who is the greatest, and the disciples were upset about others casting out demons in Jesus' name. We may be tempted to think that the divisions in the church in our day in age are bigger and more problematic, but they really aren't. For instance, don't we argue all the time about who is the greatest? Who should be doing what and when?

We can get ourselves so entrenched in our own echo chambers that we hear our own voice, opinions, and ways of being and we start to think those must be right because we've allowed it to become the dominant narrative. We've created a new status quo for not only ourselves, but for others. Others who seek to challenge our ways of thinking and being are not only considered wrong, but not Christian, or at least, not the right kind of Christian.

We are all in danger of becoming the antithesis of Anabaptists in any given season of our lives. Anabaptists were part of the Radical Reformation,

subverting the paradigmatic religion of the state, baptizing people making a conscious decision to follow Christ, being open to radically different interpretations of the scriptures, becoming a movement of mostly young people who were seeking to be faithful followers of Christ. When we find our feelings, beliefs, and sacred cows unchangeable, we can squelch the movement and flow of the Holy Spirit that was (and is) alive and at work in the beginnings of our own faith tradition. Our challenge as today's Anabaptists is to not demonize those from whom we pulled away, but to honor one another as part of God's holy family while respectfully choosing to disagree and follow where we feel the Spirit leading.

Jesus prays that we all may be one. I don't think this is a call for us to all be theological carbon copies of one another, but rather, as commentator Barbara Lundblad states, this is Jesus as a divine mother praying that her adopted children can get along. Not only the disciples, but future believers, you and me, as well. I may not be a parent, but I do know that parents really, really, really want their children to get along. And that's sometimes difficult before reaching adulthood. Our Christian formation isn't all that different from our child and adolescent development. There can be delays and re-starts of both. We can get stuck in spiritual adolescence. And spiritual adolescence, much like developmental adolescence, can make us moody, stubborn, and myopic in our worldview. This is not to disparage adolescence. Adolescence in every sense of the word is good, necessary, and a milestone on the journey. The opportunity here is room for growth, learning, and adaptation to difference, all while being secure in one's self and one's beliefs. That is a tall order, but it's the gateway to adulthood both spiritually and developmentally.

The disciples are children of God, being taken care of by Jesus. There is some playing around with masculine and feminine roles with the use of the Greek. The Word made flesh is Logos, which is a Greek masculine word, but everything said about "The Word" as it is referred to in John, comes from Hebrew meanings for wisdom. It's wisdom that comes from the mouth of God. Wisdom dwells with us on the earth. Wisdom is God's co-creator from the beginning. That image in Greek is Sophia. In this Gospel setting, we have Logos breathing the words of Sophia. Divine fathering and mothering are at work in this scripture passage.

Jesus knows what is about to happen. Jesus knows he is going where his disciples cannot follow. Barbara Lundblad talks about the similarity with children leaving the house in the morning. Parents don't know what will come a child's way during the day. Will they be safe from harm? Will they come back? Will they be able to be who they are in the world? Jesus' prayer, or petition, is the petition of a divine parent asking that their children be looked after, cared for, and that they love one another.

As children of God we know that divisions are inevitable. I want to be clear, sometimes divisions (or what we perceive as divisions) are inevitable and necessary. For instance, I really can't see myself being one with people who deny the humanity and rights of others, such as white supremacists. This may seem counter to what I have been saying, but to claim to be Christian and to cause intentional harm and discrimination against the children of God causes me to put up a boundary. Not to in turn deny their humanity, or the capacity to be reconciled with them someday, but a boundary. Victims of violence of all types, be it physical, emotional, or epistemological know that boundaries are important in the work of reconciliation. Reconciliation is cheap and meaningless if we don't first recognize that our feelings towards evildoing are valid and should be considered when working with others who may have wronged us. Boundaries are different from division. Boundaries are not walls. Walls keep us from conversation, boundaries let us do the work of reconciliation while knowing where we end and where others begin.

The work of the church is the work of reconciliation. The work of being "one" together. Are we up to the task? Are we ready for what this means?

Today we open our doors to Ellie, who has decided to continue to be a part of the Berkey family. Today we are asking ourselves the question, "Can we be one? Are we ready to expand our family?" So in the words of my friends this previous weekend, we are all family here. We are broken, blessed, divided, gracious, loved, and with today's baptism, we are growing! We have heard the Good News, seen Jesus' love in action, and commit to caring for one another in the midst of whatever may divide us. May God grant us grace with one another and peace for the journey.