

## “All Are One”

### Ephesians 4: 1-16

This Sunday begins our journey through Lent as a congregation. As you may know, our theme this year is “The Tree of Life: Source of Healing and Growth for a Renewed Creation”. As part of this theme, we are drawing on ancient Christian tradition by exploring the greening power which is manifested in all things. Church Mother, St. Hildegard of Bingen believed that there was a life force or living light flowing through all things, connecting everything together.

Very much like the understanding of root systems found in the forest, she understood our world as a cooperative system. Each part relying on each other for support and survival. She believed that this living light or greening power infused all creation with vitality. But when this living light was blocked or cut off from the whole, it not only affected that particular person or place within creation. It also affected the whole system. She argued that this separation from the whole lead to infection or drought within Creation, and taking it one step farther, lead to brokenness within the larger Body of Christ.

Hildegard stated time and time again that our calling as people of faith was to constantly recognize the places in our lives, in our bodies, in our communities, in our world which had been cut off from this greening power, which had been

separated from this living light. She challenged that we as people of God are called to remove these blockages so that this living light, so that this greening power could flow once more, restoring all to the wholeness which God intended all along when God first saw God's handiwork and called it good.

To me this is absolutely fascinating. Yes, I'm sure that there are those who are saying we are heretics, that we have crossed the line over into some new age hippy dippy stuff. But in reality, this wisdom shared with us through Hildegard's writings is our faith tradition. Hildegard lived in the 1100s and by no means was she new age. She was more like the Middle Ages. Think about it...It absolutely boggles my mind that she was writing and sharing all this stuff about cooperative systems long before we humans had any real understanding of systems theory, a theory which wasn't developed until the 1950s!

But we know Hildegard wasn't the first people to come up with this idea of cooperative systems. This understanding of a living light flowing through all things is inherent in our sacred texts. From Genesis to Revelation, spelled out chapter after chapter, there is wisdom, there is knowledge which understands that all are created in the image of God, that all are part of the whole, that all are one.

The prophets, the New Testament writers, the Gospels, yes even the majority of the Old Testament, direct our calling as people of faith to work for healing and

wholeness, to address the issues which prevent reconciliation from happening, to address the concerns which prevent all from connecting to the living light which flows in all and through all. The prophets, the New Testament and Gospel writers, yes again even the majority of the Old Testament understood that our calling as the people of God was to show that God was still at work in this world, bringing healing and wholeness for all.

So as we begin our Lenten journey, I am inviting all of us to allow Hildegard's wisdom to lead us as we explore the seven sacred truths which are the framework for the Tree of Life. Please hear me say, these sacred truths are not unique to our Christian tradition. They are part of almost every single religious tradition, reminding us again that we are more alike than we are different.

The first sacred truth which is the base of the Tree of Life is All Are One. This is what grounds us as humankind. This is what nourishes everything which is alive. In faith terms, this is what makes up our identity as the people of God. We are all Beloved Children of God, made in the image of our Creator and loved more than we could ever imagine. This wisdom of All Are One shapes everything we do and say as people of faith. It is the foundation of our beliefs. It is an invitation given to all to come and experience new life, now connected in community with one another.

In our reading this Sunday, we hear the sentiment of “All are One” come through loud and clear. Paul tells us that we are one Body, together in one Spirit, One Lord, One Baptism, living out the one hope of our calling. In all, Paul uses the word “one” seven times in just two verses. This should be a signal for us to pay attention because what he is saying is important.

Paul is reminding the people of Ephesus, and in doing so, he is reminding us that we are one in community, connected to everything. We are one in community relying on each other for support and survival.

That being said, let me also say, while Paul is calling us to be united, he certainly not calling us to be uniform. He is asking for unity not uniformity. Just like he does in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul lifts up the varied gifts. He even states that these varied gifts were given to each of us by God for the building up of the Body of Christ here on Earth. Paul knows that a community, knows that a connected system is enhanced, not hindered by these diverse gifts.

Paul’s understanding of All are One is a call for us as the people of God to practice what we preach. We are called to live in unity with one another. Because as you have heard me say before...if we don’t practice it, if we don’t believe in it enough to change the way we relate to one another, then there is no way we should ever expect anyone else to either.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to show this world there is another way, a way of love, a way of grace, a way of unity which embraces our differences because we know our community is strengthened by our differences.

I'll admit this would be a really great time in the sermon process to offer up an amazing illustration on how we can do this as people of faith, to offer up an illustration which inspires us to leave this place and go and do likewise.

Unfortunately, when it comes to church life and church community, what I have experienced more is division rather than unity. I have heard of people who literally have worshipped together in the same sanctuary, sometimes even sitting on the same pew, sharing the same hymnal, I have heard of people who have worshipped together for years, berate each other in the grocery store all because of division in their church. For the most part, it seems that the narrative the wider church is putting about is one of separation and exclusion, telling people that they are not welcomed or invited into God's sacred space all because of their differences...differences in thought, differences in skin color, differences in sexual orientation, differences in class, differences in you can fill in the blank.

For us, as disciples of Christ, it would be so easy for this narrative of division to be the end of story, simply saying we tried working for unity but it didn't work out. And we could even blame Paul. After all, we already blame him for lots of other stuff any way, you know that whole women being silent in church

thing. That's just one thing Paul and I are going to discuss when we meet in the great by and by.

As modern day disciples, we could easily say all this division is Paul's fault because in this letter, he only speaks in generalities. He never really gets down into the nitty gritty of it all, which means his words allow us to create a surface artificial unity. What we know to be true is that problems always happen when we start putting his words into practice. Paul's words look great on paper but they are difficult to live out in our every day lives.

So yes, it would so easy for us to blame to Paul and simply say he wrote for a different time and place. But after spending time with this text this week, I think Paul would respond to our criticisms by pointing out that in so many ways, we live in a throw away world, that in fact, we throw away so much stuff that this everything is disposable type of mentality is spilling over into our relationships. I think after spending time with this text this past week, Paul would respond to our criticism of his naiveté and his generalities by simply pointing out that as people of faith, our starting point is always grace, messy difficult frustrating breath-takingly beautiful grace, grace that taught our hearts to sing, grace our fears relieved, grace that helped us to see. Paul would say that this messy, difficult, frustrating, breath-takingly beautiful grace changes everything for us as people of faith. This grace binds us together as one as the Body of Christ here on Earth. This grace means that

our ties to another are never optional. They are part of the larger whole. So I think it is safe to say that Paul would respond to our criticisms by borrowing a phrase from a modern day disciple, Tim Gunn, telling us to make it Work because as people created in the image of God, we are bound together...one body, one spirit, one Lord, one baptism, one hope of our calling.

And if we still were not getting it after all that, I think it is also safe to say that Paul would tell us that if we needed help putting this unity thing into practice, we could always turn to the words and actions of our Lord and Savior to show us the way. Or as someone who is way smarter than me once said...if you need help remembering what we are called to do as disciples of Christ, just remember these three things....In essentials, unity, in non-essentials, liberty and in all things....love. Amen.