



May 6, 2018 - Abiding in His Love

Given by Rev. Mattei

"The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles... 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'" (Acts 10:45.47)

I don't think it comes as a shocker to you if I announce that there is no perfect church! Those who have come to Nativity after a period of searching may have come to the conclusion, that this is where they feel more attuned, fed and affirmed. Those who have been part of this community for a while have noticed changes during the years. Some may appreciate changes as part of a spiritual process, while others may struggle to incorporate new ways of seeing and doing things. The struggle may stretch the individual, indeed the community beyond the ability of spiritual acceptance and elasticity. Once that point is reached the community faces a crisis, a critical fork in the road where identity choices need to be made with the well-intended purpose of strengthening the community with the hope that no one will break away. Of course, the choices seem to always oscillate between a new understanding of the life that brings us together or the affirmation of traditions that have sustained generations in the faith. Obviously, both ways seek to affirm the original tenets of the faith. Differences have unfortunately developed along party lines and have polarized society in different ideological camps recently. The issues have been varied and are resurfacing again: human and civil rights, human sexuality and gender identity, fair economic global development and safe environmental choices, unusual catastrophic weather events, civil strife and international wars, labor exploitation and human trafficking. Lately even the issues of global migration, safety and gun control have come to the fore.

Sometimes the issues that create stress and anxiety are quite difficult to navigate. Sometimes they seem to be a non-issue or silly to some but fundamental to others. A little over one hundred and fifty years ago the Nation and the Church struggled with slavery. Fifty years ago, the Nation and the Church struggled with racism. In the sixties

our Church body wrestled with the idea of women in the pulpit.¹ Some in the Church are still struggling with gay marriages and gay ordained leadership.

Of course, some are shaken by liturgical forms they are not familiar with and may even consider such rituals offensive and improper. Some examples of not so familiar rituals could be the marking oneself with the sign of the cross, chanting the liturgy, or lifting the Bible in procession. Sometimes we tend to pin our faith on tradition rather than on Christ.

Tensions and conflicts are not new to the Church. They came with the territory from the very beginning. The Church that was formed at the foot of the cross of Christ and imbued by the Spirit at Pentecost had to face and navigate external as well as internal conflict. The theological issues that stemmed from day one of the resurrection of Christ saw the Church struggle with contentious issues that for us today are a given: the resurrection itself, continuity with the Jewish cult and alienation from Judaism, the divinity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, the scope of the universal mission to the Gentiles, the Spirit's removal of boundaries, the significance and communion with the Holy Trinity and so on.

In his first letter, John makes clear that we can accept that Jesus is the Christ only if born and moved by God and show our love by obeying God's commandments (1 Jn 5:1.3; Jn 15:9-17) as given by the one who has shed water and blood from his side and given his spirit on the cross. God's commandments are spoken out of love and given as a sacrifice (Jn 19:30.34).

Jesus is the one we need to look up to when we encounter conflicts. He is the one who has given his life for the unity of the Church. Should our conflicts, our personal preferences and our differences in opinion make us forget what he has done for us? Should we not gather in his name, invoke his spirit, his wisdom and his blessing as we ponder and deliberate with charity and consideration of all, upholding people's dignity and striving to maintain the unity of the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ has suffered a mortal wound. But we believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Today, let us join together in lamenting the difficult life and unacceptable suffering of children worldwide, the loss of many young lives and the indifference of adults interested only in profit making and power grabbing. Let us recite together the litany for Rachel's Day.

¹ <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7798>

RACHEL'S DAY LITANY

A voice: I weep for our children who are no more.

All: We refuse to be consoled.

A voice: I weep for our boys who are no more.

All: We refuse to be consoled.

A voice: I weep for our girls who are no more.

All: We refuse to be consoled.

A voice: I weep for our parents who grieve.

All: We refuse to be consoled.

A voice: I weep for our families forced to grieve.

All: We refuse to be consoled.

A voice: I weep for our cities and towns torn by gun violence and terror.

All: We refuse to be consoled.

A voice: I weep.

All: We refuse to be consoled.

A voice: I cry out for justice for our children.

All: We refuse to be defeated.

A voice: I cry out for hope for our boys.

All: We refuse to be defeated.

A voice: I cry out for serenity for our girls.

All: We refuse to be defeated.

A voice: I cry out for tranquility for our parents.

All: We refuse to be defeated.

A voice: I cry out for peace in our cities and towns.

All: We refuse to be defeated.

A voice: I pray for hope!.

All: We pray for hope!

A voice: I pray for peace!.

All: We pray for peace!

A voice: I pray for justice!.

All: We pray for justice!

Let us pray.

Go of peace, God of justice, you weep with us for our children, our brothers and sisters, our parents, our families, our cities and towns torn apart by gun violence. **Give us courage, give us determination, give us strength, that we may work untiringly for the hope and peace of justice you desire for all the world. This we ask through your Son, the Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

