



June 2, 2019 - Trusting Oneness

Given by Rev. Mattei

[John 17:20-26](#)

Martin Kaste is a Seattle NPR correspondent featured in the I'm a Lutheran section of the *Living Lutheran*. Sharing about how he lives his Christian faith in his profession he explains: "I pray for strength to tolerate opinions I don't like." He goes on to say that "Church is a place where we testify to each other about experiencing God in a world that denies his existence."¹

Managing differences in society is a skill that is profoundly lacking nowadays. Families split along party lines creating further hurt and alienation. The "one, catholic, apostolic Church" is divided by denominations on account of theological and ecclesiological issues. Even within the same denomination and down to members of the same church we have conflicts generated by different takes on social issues (reproductive rights, health coverage, gun control, gender identity, immigration...), and conflicts generated by personal sensitivities and operational dynamics. Even with well-meaning intentions, we encounter tensions and conflicts, which are an undeniable and unavoidable part of life together. It's not a matter of "if" conflicts arise but a matter of "when." Conflicts, however, may be opportunities for growth. Trying to avoid them or react to them is not the best preparation for conflicts. It's how we approach and deal with them that will make the difference. Jesus did tell us that conflicts will arise and the world (namely, those who ascribe to the ways of the world) will persecute those who live by the words of Jesus ([Jn 15:18-25](#)). He also told us that the world will recognize us, his disciples, by the way we love one another ([Jn 13:15](#)). The depth of love he expects of us is the same he has offered us: it's sacrificial love that does not count the cost ([Jn 15:12-13](#)). When he said that those who want to be his disciples (i.e. learners of his way) need to pick up

¹ Seattle NPR reporter, Martin Kaste, I'm a Lutheran, *Living Lutheran* magazine (April 2019), 12.

their cross, he meant for them to embrace the same radical commitment to the values of the Kingdom he modeled and apply them especially at most difficult of times. Jesus did not say “If you want to be educated in the Christian life, pick up a good book and have an academic understanding. True love is a lived and suffered experience.

Something like the experience reported in Father K, a multiple award winning 34 minute long documentary about Khader El-Yateem bringing together people of different ethnic groups and religions in post 9/11 NYC.²

Love covers a multitude of sins ([1 Pt 4:8](#)), but does it also cover differences, argumentation, and conflicts? Yes! It is love that propels us one towards the other and prepares the ground for conversations. Is anyone going to pick up on that exhortation and be an instrument for change? Hence, Jesus’ priestly prayer of John 17. He does not pray for uniformity but for unity. Just as Jesus is in the Father, he desires that we are also in him—and that we are all one with each other, with Jesus, and with God. He is not praying that we think the same thoughts, reach the same conclusions, and act and live as carbon copies of each other. Differences are not only OK but also necessary for us to live in faith: uniformity is not an expression of a life lived in faith but of regimented certainty, it involves not a personal commitment to the truth but an unchallenged devotion to a dogmatic argument. We don’t seek fanatical conformism but humble exploration.

“Being in Jesus” is John’s theological language to describe a state of communion essential for our faith, it’s what we call salvation—something that can happen throughout our lives, not just when we die. This state of intimate communion with the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit gives us an identity and shapes our lives. Our understanding and appreciation of our truest self will change. Our view of the world and our relationship with others will change. The depth of intimacy of our communion with God will define our faith. Conversely, our disconnect with God, self, and others, will declare our unbelief. If we become aware of our unity in God and see Jesus in one

² Jeff Favre, A bridge-builder in a polarized time, *Living Lutheran* magazine (April 2019), 30-31.

another, then this will be our greatest witness to the world that Christ's Spirit is alive and working among us ([Jn 13:35](#)). It is a matter of awareness: we cannot be not united to God. We are not simply made by God; we are made "of God." So we encounter the energy of God in our true depths. And we will know the One from whom we have come only to the extent that we know ourselves. God is the "ground" of life. So it is to the very essence of our being that we look for God.³ God is part of our being and our being is in God. There is no way of being separated from God: "separation is not possible. God does not know how to be absent." Therefore, even those who do not acknowledge God *are* in God. Those who do not pay attention to their spiritual side simply have a limited understanding of self: "If we are going to speak of what a human being is, we have not said enough until we speak of God." "The more we realize we are one with God, the more we become ourselves..." and "The more we journey towards [our] Center the closer we are both to God and to each other."⁴

Might the Western world's rejection of God (not just youth but mature adults as well)⁵ be simply a reaction to the Church's solely presentation of a God who is external and transcendent to us? Are people desiring a more meaningful approach, an encouragement to take the inner journey that allows for the encounter with the indwelling Spirit, a serious alternative to a culture so fixated on instant gratification, lured and distracted by perpetual entertainment, and preoccupied with the avoidance of pain? Our evangelical message is an invitation to a deeper spiritual experience where one is enabled to journey to the core and discover one's mysterious and not totally comprehensible True Self, encounter the immanent but not so totally graspable God and witness to the unity of all creation.

Jesus was familiar with conflict. He understood the powerful blessing of being in sync with those around us. Jesus prayed an ambitious prayer for unity on behalf not only of his current Galilean disciples but also on behalf of all disciples across generations and

³ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, and *Revelation of Divine Love*

⁴ Martin Laird, *Into The Silent Land* (Oxford University Press: 2006)

⁵ American involvement in organized religion continues to wane, *The Christin Century*, May 22, 2019.

space. He did not spend time talking about unity but encouraged it when he warned his disciples not to engage in competitive behavior ([Lk 9:47-48](#); [Mk 9:35](#)) but to be simple (i.e. naked, open, humble, poor), vulnerable (i.e. meek and displaying apparent weakness), and ready to show compassionate love. To be “one” means we are so firmly connected that we can even risk the challenging work of remaining engaged even during difficult conversations. The hand can expose the splinter in the heel of the foot (which will cause the foot great pain) without the foot lashing out – “We are no longer connected!” In faith, that unity becomes a profound conviction and is made evident by the way we listen to one another in openness of mind and humility of heart. If we can trust and listen to our inner divine image, we will act from our best, largest, kindest, most inclusive self and our most difficult conversations will be done by keeping in mind the sacredness of the Other. “It’s from this oneness that enduring love of God and neighbor is possible.”⁶ Jesus knew how hard it is to hold on to that awareness, and so his prayer is with us. May we trust as One.

⁶ Phileena Heurtz, *Mindful Silence: The Heart of Christian Contemplation* (InterVarsity Press: 2018).