

Sermon – Yours and Mine
Sunday, May 28, 2017
Acts 1:6-14 and John 17:1-11
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Today's first Scripture reading is Acts 1:6-14. Luke gives an account of the Ascension of the risen Christ and the disciples' response. The Ascension of the Lord is observed 40 days after Easter and 10 days before Pentecost. According to Luke, the disciples accept the new call for a bold witness in the world and are sustained by a disciplined life of prayer.

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by God's own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. 13 When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. Amen.

Our second Scripture reading, John 17:1-11, is known as the "high priestly prayer." Jesus prays for the disciples before his death and asks God to protect them and empower them with God's presence in the Holy Spirit following his departure. Jesus' prayer for their unity gives us a glimpse into the unity of God in the Trinity. Listen for the word of God.

1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. 6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. Amen.

The title of the sermon: “Yours and Mine”

The text: *I am asking on their behalf...because they are yours. All mine are yours and yours are mine... John 17:9-10a*

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, for those who pray for us and with us and for the gift of your spirit in our lives, we give thanks. As we reflect together on your word, may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

On this Memorial Day weekend we honor those who have given their lives serving our country and we feel a sense of connectedness with the generations who have gone before us. We set aside a day to honor their lives and to remember their sacrifices which have sustained the democracy which unites us today.

Three weeks ago as Peter and I celebrated our son Paul’s graduation from Hope College we were reminded of our connection to family who have gone before us. Graduation day began with the Baccalaureate Service in Dimnent Memorial Chapel singing “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.” As we sang this noble hymn I remembered worshiping in that chapel thirty years earlier in anticipation of my graduation before I met Peter and before Paul was a twinkle in our eyes. Following Commencement that afternoon, Peter and I fortuitously reconnected with Paul at the entrance of the Pilgrim Home Cemetery next to Hope’s football field where the ceremony took place.

Our family spent time in this cemetery on a Lilly Grant Sabbatical in 2011 while researching my mother’s genealogy. We unexpectedly discovered a connection between the great, great uncle of my mother and the founder of Hope College. Jon Schaap traveled on a ship from the Netherlands to Holland, Michigan with the Reverend Albert Van Raalte in 1847. Nine of Jon Schaaps eleven brothers and sisters and both his parents came to Holland the next year and built a life as farmers in Michigan and Iowa. Many of these men and women are buried near the entrance of Pilgrim Home Cemetery. In honor of their lives and the sacrifices they made to make our lives possible, our family walked over to the cemetery plots for a silent prayer of gratitude and a photo.

Today’s Scripture readings invite us to reflect on what it means to belong...in particular, what it means to belong to God. Each one of us belongs to a family, a school, a community, a country. No doubt, much of our identity comes from the groups to which we belong or those to which we choose not to take part. Some belonging is by choice, some is by chance, and some is by necessity. We come from different places of belonging to worship together today. Our common bond in this community of faith is the affirmation that we belong to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. What does that mean?

In John 17 Jesus prays for the disciples—for their protection, their solidarity, and their resoluteness following Jesus’ departure. The prayer is addressed to God, yet disciples, both ancient and modern, are invited to listen and be comforted by the words Jesus speaks.

Before Jesus petitions on our behalf, Jesus holds God accountable to ensure God’s presence in the disciples’ lives following his death, resurrection and ascension. Jesus asks for God to be present in the lives of those who are both “yours and mine” and Jesus’ prayer is answered in the gift of the Holy Spirit which empowers believers to a new way of life. This new life requires

love and discipline, but it is also marked by a relentless buoyancy; a resilience that refuses the despair of the world and the seduction of the world.

Those who belong to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—yours and mine—are in the world but not of the world. We are not immune to the hardships, diseases and perils of this life, however we will not be defined by them and we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us.

As those around the world watch the images of yet another senseless act of terror and violence, this time targeting young women and girls at a concert in Manchester, England, we are reminded of that painful reality and we take heart in the solidarity and unity as this community came together and found strength in one another amidst an unspeakable loss.

“Unity is Strength” is the title of a sculpture by Sopic Hupkens found at the entrance to the North Church in the Jordaan neighborhood of Amsterdam on a trip with my mother to the Netherlands. It is a bronze of three young women bound together in unity created as a memorial to the Jordaan Riots in 1934. The economic crash following World War I meant the loss of meaningful work and the eruption of riots throughout Europe. It is an important reminder of how connected we are as a community. When one part of our life together suffers, we all suffer.

When I saw this sculpture in Amsterdam in the midst of a flea market on a Monday morning several years ago, I was struck by its ordinariness and at the same time by its symbolism for the Trinity. The three figures bound together represent the strength that is a part of unity.

When Jesus prays for the disciples to be one, to live in unity, Jesus is not asking for the sameness of thinking and acting. He has in mind the unity of the Trinity which the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines as three separate persons... and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Jesus encourages us to honor diversity of thought and ideas, to welcome those who differ but who share a common purpose and affection. When we work together for the purpose of healing amidst hatred and uplifting the underserved, we become a part of the depth and richness of God’s spirit at work in the world.

On this Memorial Day Weekend, may we find strength in the unity of our Holy Triune God, may we honor those who have sacrificed for us, and may we unite our voices for justice and peace. Amen.