

Easter 7 A 2011

A common activity in the summer is family gatherings.

During my growing up years, I attended many family reunions.

On my mother's side, the clan would get together for an all-day picnic the first Saturday after the Fourth of July.

The reunions were usually held at a city park in Brady, Texas.

We would rent the pavilion for the day.

There was always Texas BBQ and German potato salad, lots of Big Red soda pop for the kids; and for the adults, gallons of ice tea and cans of Lone Star beer.

Most of the time was spent eating, talking, and playing the domino game called "42."

The three statements you heard over and over again were:

- It's too hot!
- My, how you've grown.
- I forget; who are you related to?

Even though I could only attend every few years, I always felt welcomed there.

I always felt at home.

Even though I often protested beforehand attending the family reunion, afterwards, I was always glad I did.

No matter who you were, when you were there, you were family.

You belonged.

Even though many of the people there were in-effect strangers, you always felt connected with them.

You had with them a common bond and oneness that transcended differences of age or accent or perspective.

I believe you learn a sense of community from your family.

Whether it be a clan reunion or just your immediate family, you learn about belonging from your family.

You learn to look past the differences that are always present between people and see the truth about our relationship with each other, our commonness and oneness.

The church is a family to which you belong.

We have a gathering point.

It's not our bloodlines.

It's not our worship services.
It's not even a common perspective.
We see things differently.
We come with different backgrounds.
We have different gifts.
What makes each one of us special is what makes us different from the other.
And yet, we have a commonness and a oneness that transcends our differences.
What brings us together is our common faith in Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel story comes to us from Jesus' Farewell Discourse.
For the third week in a row, we hear words that Jesus spoke to the disciples
in the process of saying goodbye to them.
In John's Gospel, these words were spoken at The Last Supper.
Jesus was leaving them as they knew him, in order to ascend to heaven and claim
his larger rule and glory.

The words you heard today form a prayer.
It is a prayer that Jesus spoke to the heavenly Father.
I've been living with that prayer this week.
I've noticed that the prayer is dominated by the word GIVE.
God gives.
In particular, God the Father gives to God the Son.
So listen again to all that God the Father gives Jesus.
In vs. 2, God the Father gives the Son ALL AUTHORITY.
In the same verse, God the Father gives the Son PEOPLE.
In vs. 4, God the Father gives the Son WORK TO DO.
In verse 6, God the Father gives the Son PEOPLE.
In verse 7, God the Father gives the Son EVERYTHING.
In verse 8, God has given the Son WORDS.
In verse 9, God has given the Son PEOPLE.
In verse 11, God has given the Son A NAME.
That's a lot of giving.
God the Father powerfully, intentionally, and generously gives to Jesus.
God gives Jesus sovereignty, because God gave him, power, work, words, a name,
everything.
Last month, in Bible Study, we looked at quite a few verses in Revelation.
Whenever I read Revelation, I'm drawn to the statements of praise.

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

You get the feeling that the list could go on forever.

It's like God gives Jesus everything.

God has given, and Jesus has received.

This action of God and Jesus, giving and receiving, points to a relationship, a communion, a closeness, a trust.

If you know one, you know the other.

All that is in God's power is entrusted in Jesus.

So in the prayer of our Gospel story, we get this wonderful picture of Jesus as the recipient of everything godly.

There is something else that is central in Jesus' prayer.

He doesn't pray for himself.

He prays for the Church.

In verse 11, we hear: Holy Father, protect them, so that they may be one, as we are one.

What does Jesus pray for?

Our oneness.

Interesting.

Does that mean we should all be united?

Does that mean we should not have different denominations?

Does that mean we should all look alike and act alike and do everything the same?

I don't think so.

Jesus has spent this prayer talking about how God the Father has given God the Son everything.

So much so, that there is a relationship, a connectedness.

When you see one, you see the other.

That connectedness, that relationship, Jesus wants for the Church.

That they may be one AS WE ARE ONE.

Jesus wants us in relationship with God.

Jesus wants us participating in that which is of God.

Jesus wants our connectedness with The Holy One to be so strong that, when people look at us, they see God.

Jesus has received everything from our heavenly Father.

You and me, the Church, have received everything from the heavenly Father.
Listen again to the list of things that the Father gave the Son earlier in the prayer.
As you do, listen to what Jesus wants the Father to give the Church:
Authority, people, work to do, people, everything, words, people, a name.

God gives, Jesus receives.

Jesus prays for the Church to be added to this union.

Jesus prays that the Church may be one with God, just as Jesus is one with God.

Jesus prays we be in a communion of trust in God embodied in giving and receiving.

That they may be one as we are one.

You cannot hear it now, but that prayer is being said for you.

It began in your Baptism.

It continues today.

Jesus wants you included, connected.

In my imagination, I hear Jesus whispering in the ear of the heavenly Father:

Holy God, bless them.

Holy God, draw them closer to you.

Holy God, give them s generous portion of your mercy and grace.

Holy God, receive them as your disciples.

Holy God, inspire every godly thing they do.

Holy God, work through their praying and their worshipping and their giving and their serving and their passing on of their faith, so that they may grow in their oneness with you.

Friends, that is Jesus' prayer for you.

That is the oneness that Jesus wants for you.

All that is of God is given to you.

Receive, and live.

Peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.