

One

May 4, 2008

(Easter 7 - Year A)

John 17: 1-11

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In this past week, I have been interested in the continuing drama between Barack Obama and his former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

For those you who do not know about this story, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright was the pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago for 36 years.

Jeremiah Wright was Obama's pastor, who officiated at the marriage ceremony between Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, and baptized their two children.

Yet, several weeks ago, some clips from Jeremiah Wright's sermons began to appear on the internet.

These video clips from sermons contained some controversial messages.

In response to these sermon clips, Obama gave a speech several weeks ago on race relations in our country.

However, in this last week, Jeremiah Wright made some very public speeches addressing, among other things, his preaching style in the American black church tradition.

And the more that Jeremiah Wright has talked, the worse things have gotten for Obama.

Immediately, CNN and Fox News and all the news channels began to call on Barack Obama to distance himself from his pastor's comments.

And so, Barack Obama did just that.

Obama stated that Jeremiah Wright did not speak for him.

Obama explained how he did not agree with his pastor.

Obama backpedaled away from his pastor and his spiritual mentor.

And because I am a pastor, I was sad to watch this happen on national TV.

Because I began to think about how sad I would be to watch any one of you backpedal away from me and to drop me like a hot potato.

And my heart yearned for unity between Obama and his pastor.

I wanted to see the two of them, not distancing themselves through sound bites, but embracing in unity.

My Christian heart has desired to see Barack Obama and his pastor be one, as the Father and the Son of God are one.

In the Gospel of John, we hear today from the high priestly prayer of Jesus.

Jesus, the Son of God, prays this prayer on the night before he died for us on the Cross.

Jesus prays for all of his disciples, Jesus prays for all of us, pleading to the Father:

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, So that they may be one, as we are one.”

Jesus’ prayer for all of us is that we be one.

Jesus’ prayer for all of us is that we be in unity.

Yet, unity does not mean being the same.

Unity does not mean that we agree.

Unity means that we recognize that we are all children of God, that we are all brothers and sisters, with one Father.

When I have prayed for unity among Christians,

When I have prayed for Presbyterians and Roman Catholics and Baptists and Episcopalians to come together in a spirit of unity,

When I really dig down deep into how Jeff Fisher would like to see unity,

I realize that my idea of unity is that everyone would become an Episcopalian, just like me.

Yet Jesus' prayer, that we may be one, means that Jesus does *not* want everyone to be alike or in agreement.

Jesus' prayer asks us to change, to change how we see others who are different from us.

When the Rev. Jeremiah Wright preached at the NAACP dinner last Sunday night, he said these exact words:

“I believe that a change is going to come because many of us are committing to changing how we see others who are different. In the past, we were taught to see others who are different as somehow being deficient.

Christians saw Jews as being deficient.

Catholics saw Protestants as being deficient.

Presbyterians saw Pentecostals as being deficient.

Folks who like to holler in worship saw folk who like to be quiet as deficient.

And vice versa.

In the past, we were taught to see others who are different as being deficient.

We established arbitrary norms and then determined that anybody not like us was abnormal.

But a change is coming because we no longer see others who are different as being deficient.

We just see them as different.”¹

You see, my brothers and sisters, I refuse to demonize and to distance myself and to backpedal away from everything that the Rev. Jeremiah Wright is preaching, just because he is different.

Jeremiah Wright is different, but he is not deficient.

And when we can get that truth through our thick skulls, then we will begin to see the vision that Jesus intended for us in his prayer:

“Holy Father, protect [your children], so that they may be one, as we are one.”

¹ From www.cnn.com

As Anglicans, as Episcopalians, we should *know* this vision of unity.
As Clint Capers and I have been teaching the 12 people who are
currently in our confirmation classes,

The Anglican and Episcopal tradition is that we don't give a hill of
beans how different we are from each other.

The Anglican and Episcopal tradition is that you can be white, brown,
black, rich, poor, pro-choice, anti-gun control, faithful, doubtful,
conservative, liberal, Protestant, Catholic or agnostic -

And the doors of this church will be open to you, to worship God
together, around this one Table.

The Anglican tradition is that we *are* one - because we follow one Lord,
in one Faith, through one Baptism - because there is one God and
Father of us all.

And in our oneness, in our unity, we believe that our differences are not
deficiencies.

Instead, we believe, in God's Episcopal Church, that our differences are
gifts from God, differences which are celebrated each and every
Sunday around this one Table, by sharing in one bread and one
cup.

As a Christian, what I want to see on CNN or Fox News is *not* a picture
of Obama distancing himself from his pastor and his friend.

What I want to see on TV is a picture of Barack Obama and Jeremiah
Wright, kneeling side by side at the altar, receiving the one bread,
the one Body of Christ, in unity.

Yet, this unity comes at a price.

Unity with each other is not sweet and syrupy, where we all link arms
together and sing in perfect harmony.

Unity with each other, being one as the Father and the Son of God are
one,

Means that *I* have to change,

And unity means that *you* have to change.

We must begin to see each other as different, and not as deficient.

When Jesus prays that we all may be one, then this means that *we* must

change.

I must change how I see others.

I can no longer see women as the ones who do all the cooking and the cleaning.

I can no longer see the homeless and assume it is due to their own fault.

I can no longer see black people and immediately lock my car doors.

In order for you and me and all my brothers and sisters to be one, as the Father and the Son are one, then I am going to have to change.

I am going to have to see other people as different, and not as deficient.

For Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of the Father, still praying:

“Holy Father, may they be one, as we are one.”

Therefore, do not backpedal away from difference.

Do not distance yourself from people that you do not agree with.

For we are one Family:

One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.

One God and Father...of us *all*.

AMEN.

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