

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY JUNE 2, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"All For One, and One For All"

Based on John 17:20-26

"All for One and One for all," Jesus claimed, like a biblical version of the swash-buckling heroes of Renaissance France, the three Musketeers, a historical adventure novel by Alexandre Dumas, popularized on the big screen since the days of silent film.

This reading from the Gospel of John captures the final prayer of Christ, moments before Judas signaled the scripted plan of betrayal and conviction into action. Evening had come, the Last Supper had been shared, and Jesus had gone to a quiet place to pray, shake off the lingering tension in the air, and growing apprehension.

- There was no audience in this moment.
- There was no one to teach.
- There was no one to heal.

This was just Jesus, praying. One might expect that at a tense time such as this, knowing that the plot thickened and was ready to take hold of the city, Jesus might have been in a state of panic, or pleading that the

coming course of events might be altered, or perhaps, preparing a list of things for the disciples: not so much a "To Do" list, but rather, a list of things to 'not forget.'

I PRAY ALSO
FOR THOSE WHO
WILL BELIEVE IN
ME THROUGH
THEIR MESSAGE,
THAT ALL OF THEM
MAY BE ONE,
FATHER, JUST AS
YOU ARE IN ME
AND I AM IN YOU.

~JOHN 17:20

But Jesus did none of these things. Instead, He prayed, "*That all of them may be one, Father.*" (v21) That all who believe, and all who will come to believe, will be one.

One?

All thinking the same, believing exactly the same things, having the same vision for the church and for the world, working together all

the time with exactly the same purpose and priorities?

Are you nuts?

Have you seen a church congregation try to pick out the colour of carpet for a new floor? I have, and it ain't pretty! The trail of scars left by such a momentous decision regarding blue carpet or grey carpet took years of careful pastoral care to repair.

You laugh!

But if a church can get itself this tied in knots over the colour of carpet, imagine how difficult it would be to get them to think deeply about important issues of faith and church growth. Now imagine General Assembly, our national gathering of ministers and elders, as they begin deliberations this evening in Waterloo. Do you think a room full of clergy could decide on the right colour of carpet?

Unanimously?

As one?

Then perhaps you have a sense of the monumental task our representatives have before them this week as they discuss matter far more important than the colour of carpet.

- Does that mean we have failed Christ?

- Does that mean that despite our best efforts and faithful discipleship and enduring witness to the world, that we have failed our Saviour because we can't get our act together and act with one voice?

No, we have not failed. We need to do some work, but we have not failed. Because unity and uniformity are not the same thing.

Unity means that we gather together as different people with different ideas. But we work together for the greater good for all (All for One and One for all!). It doesn't necessarily mean that we all agree on what we are going to do or say. It means that we can see there is something more important than just our opinion, so working together to move forward, is the best option.

Uniformity means that we must all look the same, act the same, want the same things, value the same things, and have the same ideas. Uniformity is a great *idea*, and a great *ideal* to strive for, but rarely encountered in real life.

Why?

Because God made us in His image, but He made us all different. And He made us different for a reason. So that the wonder and delight of His Creation and His Creations could be widely experienced; so that we could learn from

each other. We are not supposed to look the same, act the same, or want the same things!

So then, how in heaven's name are we supposed to be One?

Slipping into the original Greek of the Gospel gives us a clue. The nuance behind the word '*one*' is in contrast to '*many*.' Which lends itself to the idea that working as '*one*' implies a gathering of *many* people, *many* ideas, and *many* ideals, but working in together for the greater good: unity.

Christ, I believe, was praying for unity, not uniformity. Christ knew that His disciples came from different walks of life, with different ideas and priorities, but together, they had walked as disciples, His disciples. And in the time that would follow, Christ knew that there was the very real possibility that His believers would be scattered about, moving away from Jerusalem. They would not be together, as they had been, but their ministry and leadership would change shape to accommodate the places and circumstances they found themselves. But at a deeper level, these leaders of the new church would have to remain unified: diverse, yet One.

- Too often, we believers seek to find *uniformity* in our faith, when we

should be striving for *unity* instead.

- Too often, the world looks at our lack of uniformity, and mistakes that as evidence for our lack of unity. But they are wrong.

What is important is that we worship and work, as '*one*': many together, following "The One."

It's okay for us to disagree...

As long as we disagree, agreeably! (Thanks Bobbi Millin)

It's okay for to look different and worship differently...

Have you seen the number of church denominations out there these days?

In those final moments of freedom, as the world drew closer around Christ, brimming with hate and ambition and power, Christ finished His prayer to His Father,

"Though the world does not know you, I know you." (v25)

And the Father knows you.
And the Father knows me.
May others come to know Him, because of us, and because of our unity.

In the end, does it really matter what colour the carpet is?

Amen.