



though it has been going on for over a century with our Roman Catholic siblings in Christ, and eventually we Protestants supposedly joined the party for the last 60 years or so. And yet, no idea at all. We haven't exactly promoted these seven days all that much over our recent history, because, well, evidently, unity isn't always the most captivating thing.

Instead, humanity seems to appreciate winning, and not only winning, but dominating, and not only that, but ensuring that those on the other side, feel it, perhaps even with anguish and dismay in the midst of their wrenching defeat. Unity doesn't exactly grab the headlines for us who seemingly thrive on conflict and chaos. And it's not just out there, but the church has done its fair share of pitting us against them, even for the past century when, supposedly, we were supposed to be taking, at least this third week in January to appear as if we like each other across denomination lines and perhaps even work together for the greater good of humanity.

So, it was that third week in January last year, in a relatively small sanctuary, where bishops of local synods in the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian and Episcopalian and United Methodist and our ELCA and even one from the United Church of Christ thrown in there good measure; they all gathered together to lead a worship: to make it appear as if we might just like each other and just might be able to come together for the greater good of each other and the humanity that supposedly this God still believes in and loves. But it wasn't just that those bishops came together to do the worship-leading thing that they were all professionals at doing; it was that when they first saw each other, and greeted each other right inside the main entrance doors, they extended a whole-hearted embrace, almost with a sigh of relief, because in each other, they could truly empathize with a struggle they were and are all facing: a church that isn't always captivated with unity; a church that wants to win over as many people out there as it can in order for their own church to survive; a church that hasn't always been interested in following this Messiah, the Son of the living God in all the ways that captivated Peter long ago. But in these local leaders of a most diverse church built on a rock meant to unify all of us in the Gospel of authentic love and compassion and mercy and grace and even a holy dose of everlasting life on this very earth, amidst all the disunity that seems to captivate the world and the church as well; those leaders seemed to boldly and happily defy it that night.

They all had their own speaking parts throughout the worship, of course. They knew how to project and make eye contact with the assembly and all: as if what they were all doing that night meant something. As if we might be able to worship together and embrace each other's gifts and love one another, and perhaps even help one another to better love this world that God, for some reason, still adores. And then, at the end, they all stood in a line in front of the altar, where, of course, they may never agree on who should take part in Communion and the frequency and what it all means. And yet, they stood side by side and joined the assembly in singing a hymn, that included the line: "Cure your children's warring madness...shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss your kingdom's goal, lest we miss your kingdom's goal" (ELW #705). A goal that might just have been shown in Peter, of all people, who, yes, proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, but also the same Peter who would question that Lord in numerous instances, and would even flat-out deny him when that Messiah was

about to show the world just how far love can go on a cross: a place that many of humanity did their absolute best to ensure that Jesus would feel the deadly defeat. And yet, God had this holy idea of attempting to unite humanity with a holy force of grace and mercy and a dose of everlasting life even on this earth.

Obviously, this Jesus Christ, the Son of the still-Living God, knows full well that plenty of hope-filled work remains, and that work is not just meant for the heavens, but for us in the church as well. So, yet again, this third week of January, this supposed Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, this Thursday, will be another attempt to celebrate unity. I doubt St. Christopher's in Rocky River will be packed Thursday, and not just because people have other life happenings going on during the week, but because unity isn't always so captivating. But amidst our humanity, for a time such as this, it might just be the most captivating story we have to share with each other. It might just be the most captivating proclamation we have to give to a world that may not be so sure there is anywhere else left to find it. It might just be the most captivating embodiment of a Messiah who insisted on twelve different, quirky, odd, questioning, denying, betraying disciples, who all turned out to be exactly what the world needed to begin sharing the Greatest Story ever told. So, for the moments of holy unity that can somehow, somehow still captivate us, thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!