

EASTER SEVEN, YEAR B, MAY 12, 2024

Happy Mother's Day! Mother's Day cards seem to fall into two basic categories: beautiful cards thanking mothers for their steadfast love and patience and humorous cards acknowledging the challenges of parenting – the sleepless nights, daily chores, and sibling arguments that drive moms crazy. My family falls into the latter category. We always send funny cards to each other. So, last year's Mother's Day card from my daughter, my now son-in-law and grand doggy said, "A good mom lets you lick the mixer. A great mom turns it off first." I hope all the women that are here today and those who have had an impact on your life will have a wonderful day.

However, what is interesting to note about mother's day cards, is no matter whether they are sentimental or humorous they highlight one important factor that is key to what happens in our homes, in churches and our communities and that is love is as complicated as it is important.

Now today's Gospel, which is known as Jesus' great high priestly prayer, addresses the challenges and the blessings of being a Christian. The greatest challenge that is presented are in the words that Jesus prays, "that they may be one, as we are one."

Jesus' prayer for unity is like parents leaving for the evening and warning the children: "Now don't you fight with each other. Be nice. Show the baby-sitter how nice you can be to one another." Or it's like moms who attempt to settle fights between siblings and urging them to love each other. It's all about unity.

Jesus did well to pray for unity because unity is not our strong suit. We bicker and fight over inane as well as critical issues. We're quick to find fault with each other and our track record even in the church is abysmal. We talk about wanting unity but when you come right down to it unity means wanting it our way. Unfortunately, unity, consensus and compromise are seen as extreme concepts that are denigrated and most be avoided.

The irony is the very thing that should make us one, the fact that we come into existence as members of one species, the human species, is actually the source of our isolation instead of unity. Our human species DNA says we are all the same. We make the mistake believing unity means sameness. It's not about thinking, acting and believing the same way. When Jesus talks about oneness with God he means being at one with all of God's creation which includes all its diversity of cultures, peoples, nations, every bit of our human and non human existence. To tear apart one bit of this is to put a tear in the beauty of oneness with God and oneness with each other.

This oneness that Jesus prays for us to achieve is a radical call. It's radical because it's an anathema to us. We'd rather look at what separates us then what join us in commonality.

A year ago on the show Britain's Got Talent a dance troupe called Unity performed. The group was formed by college friends that had been told that you can't or that you're not enough. Their motto is I will. The song they danced to is called The Village and during the dance several members spoke about what they had been told. A young woman said, "I am enough. I have Down Syndrome. People say I can't. I will." A young man said "I was bullied for my love of dance and was beaten up and called names all because a boy loved to dance. I will." Another said, "Labels don't define me. I

push the gender boundaries but don't allow discrimination to change who I am. People say I can't be who I am. I will" Another young lady said, "society has conditioned me to believe I'm never going to be good enough because of my size. That I will be unsuccessful if I don't change my shape. People say I can't make it. I will."

They finish the song by stating "It's not our differences that divide us it's our inability to recognize, accept and embrace those differences." The lyrics of the song that underscored their dance had a chorus that said, There's something wrong in the village, In the village, oh They stare in the village In the village, oh There's nothing wrong with you It's true, it's true There's something wrong with the village With the village There's something wrong with the village.

Jesus is echoing those same words. There is something wrong in our communities when we distance ourselves, exclude, scapegoat and diminish anyone who is different than us. Jesus is telling us we diminish ourselves when we don't open ourselves, our minds, our souls and our hearts to understand that we are all the same – we are one in our beautiful diversity.

Henry Cadbury a professor of Divinity at Harvard once said there are two kinds of people in the world. There are therefore people and there are however people. Therefore people say, "there are children going to bed hungry in our community. Therefore..... and they proceed to devise and define the ways in which they can meet the need in their community.

However people make the same beginning statement, "there are children going to bed hungry, but they follow it with "however....and they explain why nothing can be done about it."

Cadbury challenged his students to use this therefore, however exercise by continually coming up with need statements derived from their own communities and the wider community. He stated that the world needed fewer however people and more therefore people to do the work of God. It is the therefore people who are the real movers and shakers, the real radicals who follow Jesus' way of life.

Just think of the disciples for a moment. When Jesus left them they were alone with no maps to guide them and no historical precedent to consult. They could have taken the however route and decided it was a good time to fold up shop and to ease on back to Galilee and let bygones be bygones.

Or they had the choice to claim a therefore attitude. And that's what they did and that's why we are here today. You cannot do much with however people but therefore people put the radical nature of God's kingdom into action.

We forget God's blessing is constantly moving and changing like the current of a river. The trick is to be therefore people who are constantly trying to "go figure" what really serves the cause of Christ and then to do it – and at the same time, the trick is to constantly try to "go figure" what we're doing that is no longer serving the cause of Christ and then to stop it.

Five years ago the actress Alex Borstein who is best known for her role as Susie Myerson in the show the Marvelous Mrs. Maisel won the emmy for best supporting actress. In her acceptance speech she mentioned her grandmother who had been a holocaust survivor. She said, "my grandmother was in line to be shot into a pit and she turned to a guard and said, "What happens if I step out of line," and he said, "I don't

have the heart to shoot you, but somebody will," and she stepped out of line, and for that I am here, and my children are here, so step out of line, ladies. Step out of line.

To be a living church that is in a constant state of evaluating everything we do as it relates to God's desire for the world we have to step out of line. We as the Christian village can no longer afford to sit back in our own time and space and believe God's blessing alone is housed within our communities. To step out of line means to embrace Jesus' prayer of unity that is expressed perfectly in Christ's radical, reconciling message that we are all one – that we are brothers and sisters together where no one is excluded for who they are, who they love, who they worship. This takes constant attention to prayer and study to truly understand how the Church can strike a daily, ongoing, and effective ways in following Christ's will. When we do then we can say we are one, as Christ and God are one. It's then we can be true radical witnesses for Christ.

In the end we are part of the countercultural, confounding kingdom of God which calls us to be rowdy, radical and a whole lot more joyful. But we have a choice. We can be a weekend however Christian or the true radical, rowdy and joyful Christian who practices their beliefs everyday and who dare to embrace God's wonderful cacophony of diversity of oneness. Which are you and are you willing to step out of line? Amen.