

“Bound Together”
The Sixth Sunday of Easter
5 May 2024
Trinity+St. Peter’s Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California

Acts 10:44-48
Psalm 98
I John 5:1-5
St. John 15:9-17

INI

Yesterday, at Grace Cathedral, at the Ordination and Consecration of Bishop Austin K. Rios, among other things, we confessed the Nicene Creed. The theme of this sermon is being bound together, in the community of faith formed in Easter. At the confession of the Creed, which was printed in the bulletin in both English and Spanish, we began to speak the words of the Creed – in a confusion of languages: Spanish, English, Tagalog, Tongan, Chinese, and Japanese, and God knows what else. It was a total confusion of languages that were undiscernible, yet were bound together in the faith that all of us held in common. It was one of the most electric experiences I had during this liturgy. What is it that binds us together – truly?

Bound together in the Holy Spirit – In Baptism

The first reading is an account of the baptism of Cornelius. The reading is preceded by a story of Peter sitting on the rooftop of his house in Joppa, where he has a vision of a sheet filled with foods, and is invited to eat. He objects for many of the foods were forbidden in the Hebrew Scriptures. A voice enjoins him with the note that what has made clean you shall not consider as unclean. It is an introduction to the baptism of Cornelius, a Gentile.

What is interesting to us is first of all the baptism of Gentiles, but also the role of the Holy Spirit in this Baptism. Apparently, the Spirit anticipates the baptism by anointing them with power and with tongues before their actual washing with baptismal water. It makes for an argument that Peter makes clear with his words, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?” Peter’s powerful sermon, which precedes this event, is a convincing speech to the Gentiles, so much so that the Spirit enters the situation with her power and words.

The argument is not only convincing to the Gentiles, but the argument and example of the Spirit allows the believers who witness the scene are astounded (Luke’s code word for “believe”). Later on these gifts, tongues and prophecy will be seen by Paul as “gifts of the Spirit.” (See I Corinthians 12:4-11). From the rooftop vision in Joppa to the household of Cornelius, Peter has taken a remarkable

journey, and we are invited to journey with him as well. It's what I experienced at the confession of the creed yesterday at the Cathedral.

Bound together in song.

Just as in Psalm 96, we have the same simple introduction to a new composition, "Sing to the Lord a new song," which is assembled from elements from other psalms and writings. The sub text in this psalm is of a military nature, God has gotten the victory with the strength of God's right hand and holy arm. The verses that follow give us a clue as to the enemy that God has conquered. It is not a human enemy, for the wide sweep of the nations and earth indicate something more cosmic. It is perhaps God's victory over the void and chaos at creation. The wide spectrum of God's victory indicates the inclusion of many peoples in God's reign, but the chosen ones are mentioned and not forgotten. Earth itself becomes the instrument of this new song, "Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it." The rivers are mentioned as well, clapping their hands, and the hills singing their song. All the earth praises the God who rules over all. I am reminded of the quote from Saint Augustine, "Bis orat qui cantat," "Whoever sings, prays twice." We are bound together in the song that all of creation sings.

Bound together in love.

In the verses from the second reading - First John describes for us a new humanity modeled by Jesus the Christ. What we notice as well in this reading is the description of relationship, not only that of the Father and the Son, but among ourselves and with God as well. The love we have for God extends to all of the family. There is an interesting thought: "whatever is born of God conquers the world." In this day and age, and during this time of a still present pandemic, war in several nations of the world, in our political turmoil, the notion of conquering the world seems almost ludicrous. Perhaps however, if we could conquer the suffering and difficulties that our neighbors face, we would have brought God's love to bear in the lives of others.

The "one who came by water and blood" reminds me of Baptism and Eucharist, both connecting us to the God who loves us. Baptism is not an over-the-shoulder glance into our past, but is rather an on-going maturation in our relationship with self, God, and neighbor. The Eucharist feeds such progress. In the midst of all this the Spirit whispers in our ear - reminding us of the truth of the Story. We are bound together in the love that ought to be shared by all people.

Bound together with God.

The Gospel reading is from the second part of the Farewell Discourse ([15:1-16:4a](#)). Jesus talks about the community that is the church by revealing the relationship he has with the Father. It is an interesting follow-on of the second reading for this morning. Last week we saw the community of the church in the image of the vine and the branches. Today it is the relationship that is found and abides in mutual love. The example that Jesus gives about the love that he has for those who follow in his company is the love that the Father has toward him. This, then, ought to be the hallmark of the relationships that we have in the church - a love modeled by God and extended to others.

It is one thing to be in a community bound by love, but there is more. The challenge is to remain in that community, that love. The individualism of our culture influences our preaching to emphasize the personal relationship we have with Jesus in the Trinity. This, however, misses the mark. The goal is to see, and continue in that communal relationship (born in Baptism) that we have with God and with one another. The many voices of the Creed yesterday bore witness to me of the community that Jesus has chosen to be his own, the community that produces the good fruit that is a gift to the larger community. "I am giving you these commands, that you love one another." Let us be bound together in that love.

SDG