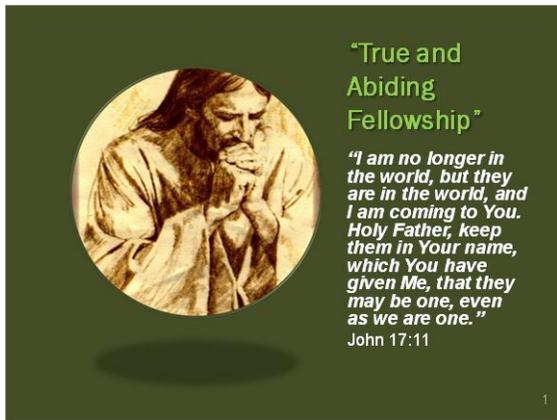


“True Abiding Fellowship”¹
John 17:11²
Easter 7th Sunday – June 4-5, 2011
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Introduction



As Jesus prayed He spoke to His Father, saying: ***I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even***

as we are one.

There is an ancient African proverb that says: ***“A well worn path must lead to a great king.”*** For more than 2,000 years, Christians have beat a path to Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Calvary, and finally, to the Mount of Ascension. This past Thursday was Ascension Day, in case you missed that.

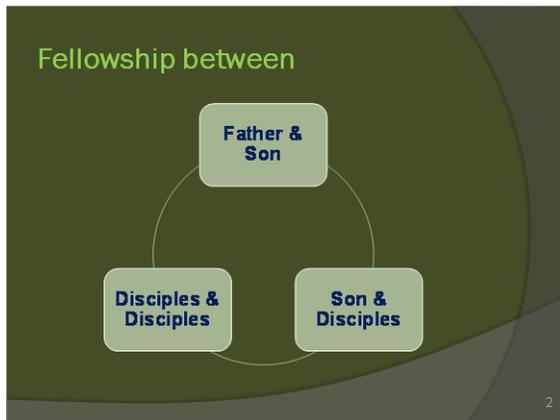
Across this well worn path have walked countless sinners, all knit together in a sacred, abiding fellowship. The fellowship of Christians knows no barriers of time or distance. For this fellowship is not created by man. This is a fellowship created by the triune God. It is centered in the

¹ PR: CP: 54:122

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second person of this Trinity, the one who prayed the words of our text, a portion of His High-Priestly Prayer. ***Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.***

Overall Theme: Fellowship



As we speak of this fellowship, we are going to define it in three parts: 1 – Fellowship between Christ and His Father; 2 – Fellowship between Christ and His Church; 3 – Fellowship between Christians.

1 – Father and Son

Describing the relationship which Jesus has with the heavenly Father, He simply says, ***“we are one.”***

Earlier in the evening of this prayer, Jesus had used a number of images to help the disciples understand that soon He would be returning to His Father in heaven. This led to the following conversation between Philip and Jesus: ***Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”*** ⁹***Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ”*** ¹⁰***Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?***

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”³

This was not empty words. This is true, authentic, correct theology! Yet, nearly all religions deny this truth. Even some who claim the name of Jesus deny that Jesus and the Father are both persons of the triune Godhead.

Some 55 years ago, Rev. Thomas Coates provided a very good summary of this truth when he wrote: ***“Christ says, “I and the Father are one.” He is not simply another religious teacher; He is a religion itself. Every moral reformer, every great philosopher, every preacher of ethics in the history of the world, has pointed to some ideal outside himself. Our Lord did not. He pointed to Himself.”***

One time Socrates, the great philosopher, was asked by one of his disciples, what he should ask of the gods. Socrates told the student to ***“wait for some greater teacher”*** to show him the way to god.

Buddha, was asked by his dying follower, Ananda, for help and consolation, to be prepared for death. Buddha’s answer was: ***“Be a lamp unto yourself.”***

³ John 14:8-11

But Jesus is not like other teachers. Jesus unequivocally says: ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”***⁴

Without Jesus, there is no spiritual life. Without Jesus, there is no promise of heaven. Without Jesus, you cannot approach the Father, for Jesus declares: ***“I and the Father are one.”***⁵

2 – Son and Disciples

This fellowship between Jesus and His Father is essential to our eternal welfare. Jesus said earlier in our Gospel for today: ***“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.”***⁶

In Holy Baptism God began this good work in us. He sent His Spirit to bring and keep us in this faith, faith which trusts in the salvation won for us by the Son, the Son, who came in obedience to His Father.

It is through the relationship, the fellowship, the obedience of Jesus that we have been made and declared to be, ***“at one with God.”***⁷ That’s why Jesus came to earth. He Himself said, ***“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”***⁸

⁴ John 14:6

⁵ Paraphrase of our text.

⁶ Verse 6

⁷ Paraphrase of v. 9b

⁸ John 10:10

The gods of this world, the philosophies of post-modernism, cannot provide an abundant life. All they can do is the same thing as every other philosophy has done, lead people away from the true God, provide despair and loss of hope, and ultimately a place in hell.

What a paradox our Lord presents. The grace and love of Christ, takes all our human thoughts and ideas, and turns them upside-down. God's divine Algebra makes every plus this world has to offer into a minus, and everything the world says is a minus He turns into a plus. Where are we reconciled to God? At the cross, shaped like a plus sign. Where do we learn that the way to greatness is through weakness? At the cross, the great plus sign. Where do we learn that the way to life, is through the death of Jesus our Lord?

The world says such a God is foolishness, a huge minus. Yet, at the cross, He made all the minuses into a divine positive, an eternal plus, for all of us. At the cross He opened the door for us to have fellowship with Him, and through Him with the Father.

3 – Disciples and Disciples

Belonging to Him, in fellowship with Jesus, we are given His love to share. As we share His love, we find ourselves in fellowship with one another.

The Apostles' Creed has a great name for this relationship, this fellowship, "the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." This fellowship is not something static. It is dynamic, alive, extending to the farthest corners of the earth.

As we pray for others, we extend that fellowship to and with them. As we worship, and share the peace of the Lord, the bonds of fellowship are drawn tighter. As we come to the Lord's Table, kneeling (or standing) alongside other believers, that fellowship is upheld once again. As we face the challenges of life, obstacles that seem insurmountable, days that seem anything but joyous, the fellowship we have with our Lord, and, the fellowship with other believers remains. It remains and it becomes one of the strongest bonds any person can have.

Everywhere, in every circumstance of life, as God's children we know, we are kept through the power of the Holy Spirit, as God's children, in fellowship with Him, in fellowship with fellow believers, in fellowship for life and ultimately for eternity.

I didn't understand until sometime later, when one prays these words, especially when life is difficult, they form a powerful, wonderful word of prayer. Perhaps among the best ever written.

**Blest be the tie that binds,
Our hearts in Christian love,
The unity of heart and mind
Is like to that above.**

**We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.⁹**

Indeed, the fellowship we have as brothers and sisters in Christ is fellowship created for us by Christ, it is the fellowship He has with His Father. There is nothing greater than this, that we abide in the fellowship of His grace, and someday, in the fellowship of His glory. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁹ LW 295 v. 1 and 3