



## One Is NOT the Loneliest Number! ... TouchPoint for May 29, 2019

John 17:20-23 [NRSV] *"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

*The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

*Revelation 22:13... "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

### **Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

*"I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one."*

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

The essence of the Divine is Unity—Oneness. It is not separation and alienation. From beginning to end. Start to finish. Unity and Oneness is the essence of the source of Life. We all came from the One source. We will all return to the One source.

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

In a world filled with tribalism, where separation and division rule the day, this is what it means to be an alternative community. We are not a parallel community setting up our own tribe over and against others. That would simply be a parallel community. And we would end up not only being IN the world, but OF the world.

To be IN the world but NOT OF the world means to not live by the tribal ways of the world. It means to see the essence of life not as competition, but cooperation. Not as separation, but synthesis. Not as retribution, but restoration.

You see, if the Divine Mystery is simply a tribal ruler on eternal steroids, what good is that? If the only thing our God can do is help us win wars, and not end them, what good is that? If the only thing our God can do is exact revenge and retribution, what hope is there for restoration and healing? What good is it, if the only answer to anger and vengeance in our world is an all- powerful angry and vengeful God? How does that heal the world?

*"I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one."*

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

Somewhere in our depths, we must come to the realization of the radicalness of these passages. And the all-out attack they present to our tribal ways, our undying belief in individualism as the highest achievement and loftiest goal.

Richard Rohr writes: ***Oneness with God is not intended to be a private experience. Because all people live and move and have their being in God it is not just me and God that are one.*** (Acts 17:28)

***Because everything that exists is held in the unity that is Christ, everything that exists is one in Christ.*** (Colossians 1:15-17)

**The old joke about the mystic who walks up to the hotdog vendor and says, "Make me one with everything," misses the point. I am already one with everything. All that is absent is awareness.**

**To be one with everything is to ... overcome the fundamental optical illusion of our separateness. We establish boundaries to try to reinforce individuality, but what we get is isolation and alienation. We think we *have* bodies instead of *being* our bodies, and the result is alienation from our bodies. We distinguish between our self and the natural world, and we end up exploiting the environment from which we feel estranged. We think we are separate from other people, and the result is a breach in our knowing of our underlying shared humanity."**

Here is another quote that is one of my all-time favorites. Not because it makes me comfortable, but because it is so shocking to my American Christianity and its focus on individual salvation. It is from Katherine Schori, former presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church:

***“Individual salvation is the great Western heresy: that we can be saved as individuals, that any of us alone can be in a right relationship with God.”***

I guess that’s why the greatest commandment is really 2.

***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.***

***And your neighbor as yourself.”***

Apparently, God is serious about this oneness and unity thing. And it can’t just be a me and Jesus dance.

So if God is one with all, then whatever happens to all happens to God. If God is one with those suffering, then whenever those suffering, suffer, God suffers. This is what it means for the Christ to still bear the wounds in his hands and feet and side. It isn't just the risen Christ that is alive in this world. It is also the crucified Christ who is present. Present in the suffering. Present in the pain. Present in the oppressed. For the crucified and risen Christ are one and the same. This is why Jesus can say, *“I was hungry and you fed ME. I was thirsty and you gave ME drink.”* The crucified Christ has not left us but is still alive in the world.

Another quote from Rohr:

**It is important not to confuse divine union with human perfection. The choice for union is always from God’s side; our response is always and forever partial and feeble. Union is not a place we go to later...if we are good; union is the place from which we come, the place from which we’re called to live now. *We wasted centuries confusing union with personal perfection.* Union is God’s choice for us in our very imperfect world.**

**Divine Love has no trouble loving imperfect things! That is just our human problem. If God could only love perfect things, God would have nothing to do.**

Let me repeat that: ***Union is not a place we go to later...if we are good; union is the place from which we come, the place from which we’re called to live now.*** So it isn’t up to me to bring about unity. It is already there. It already exists. I am not outside of unity, trying to make it happen. I am inside of it. I am a part of it. For me to think I can bring about unity would be like a single blood cell in my body saying, “I gotta make this body into a cohesive unit. It’s all up to me.”

I start out with the fundamentally flawed assumption that I am separate, an individual, instead of part of a greater whole. This is the great tragedy of the emphasis on the ‘individual’ in our society. It starts with the fundamental flaw that I am separate from, apart from, disconnected from. That I am ONE.

When we speak of “ONE” in our society, we think of individualism. When Jesus speaks of “ONE” he is speaking of connectedness, relationship—All things. According to Three Dog Night, “One is the Loneliest Number.” According to Jesus, “ONE” is the place of greatest connection. Our “ONE” is too small, too limited. My oneness is not self-contained, but something that contains me. I am One by connecting with that which is outside of me, not by separating myself from it and others.

Which brings us back to this meal, and again another quote from Richard Rohr:

**“The bread and the wine together are stand-ins for the very elements of the universe, which also enjoy and communicate the incarnate presence...Christians should have been the first to recognize the corporate, universal, and physical nature of the “Christification” of matter. Unfortunately, too often the bread and the wine are largely understood as ‘an exclusive presence’, when in fact their full function is to communicate a truly inclusive—and always shocking presence.”**

As Luther once reportedly said, when being mocked for insisting on the “Real Presence” of Christ in the bread and wine, and those who mocked him said that if Christ was really present in the bread and wine, then Christ could be present in the cabbage soup down at the local beer hall. And Luther replied, *“I certainly hope so!”*

As we have said before, sacraments are simply the declaration of what actually is. The clear, unambiguous statement of a reality that already exists. While true in and of themselves, they also point to a greater truth, a bigger reality, a larger unity that goes beyond ourselves and our institutions. A truth, a reality, and a unity the church is often **UNwilling** to acknowledge. Because it undermines the church's claim to be the exclusive proprietor and arbiter of that truth.

And so the church and its sacraments become, rather than a sign post to a greater truth and larger unity beyond itself, the church and its sacraments become a dead end that says "Unity ends here, in and with us, in our religious rituals."

"Unity ends here..." That's a phrase with a frighteningly double meaning. You and I, and our institutions, religious, political, or otherwise, do not create or possess unity. We live inside of it as it is a gift that is given to us. And Jesus' prayer is for us to live it out. This is the greater truth that we need to remember and be re-membered to.

*"Eat this bread. Drink this cup. And we will be re-membered...re-united—we will be at-oned (atoned)."*

Sacraments are simply the declaration of what actually is. The clear, unambiguous statement of a reality that already exists.

The Book of Revelations sums it up well when Christ says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

Well that pretty much covers everything don't ya think?

And that is the Mystery in whom we **ALL** live and move and have our being—**AS ONE**.

Amen.