

Sermon for 1/28/18 Christian Unity Celebration

I want to thank the planners and my brothers and sisters here with me today and to all of you who come from the churches in our area, to help us pray and celebrate our Christian Unity together.

We gather from Montgomery County and congregations in Washington DC, to celebrate our life together as the Body of Christ. We gather as many sisters and brothers to pray that we may witness to the power of God who rescued the Israelites from Egypt and raised Jairus daughter back to life, and celebrate the kind of faith that was willing to reach out and touch the hem of Jesus' robe as he walked by, as inspiration for us to love one another and work with one another to show the world around us the power of the unity and the kingdom of God in our midst.

Just last year, Pope Francis went to Sweden to celebrate in a 500th anniversary of the Reformation and to show we can love each other in spite of our differences. There are many examples of unity that will inspire and help us.

My parents were missionaries to the Congo in the late 50's and early 60's. The then Belgian Congo, in the heart of Africa, was an arbitrary line drawn around 106 different tribes. They were suddenly told they must get along, when 6 of those tribes were actually kill on sight tribes.

We lived in Kindu, 1500 miles from the Indian Ocean and 1500 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and 3 degrees or about 45 miles south of the equator, as close to the center or the heart of Africa as you can be. Kindu was a city built-up by the Belgians because the Congo river at that point had too many rapids to easily transport produce by boat. The cargo was transferred to trains. The boats and the trains were built in Kindu so there were many jobs available. And like cities worldwide, work brings people from many tribes together for the work opportunities. We found that the best way to help people was teaching them about the love of Jesus for us all. That faith brought much needed unity to the community. We are the body of Christ and God can do mighty things with his right arm.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Spoke in 1967 at rally in Atlanta, about the need for the body of Christ to be united so that we could work on liberating the oppressed, both racially and economically. That work is still needed 50 years after he was killed.

Churches have been trying to develop Christian Unity since 1857 in this country. There have been many ups and downs related to that, but we keep praying that we can work together.

So with the Holy Spirit's help, let us remember that we are a part of the body of Christ and that we need each other and we can do far more together, than we ever can apart. *Your right hand O Lord, Glorious in Power*

I know that the Pro Bowl game of the NFL is going on right now, I don't have a score to update you with, but I know that for either team to win they need many parts. They need good offense, good defense and good special teams to win. Some run, some catch, some block, some kick, some throw, but all the parts are necessary. We need to remember that as we pray for Christian Unity.

Our Key passage of scripture for today is the celebration of the deliverance from Egypt by crossing the Sea to totally escape the Egyptian army. We rejoice and give thanks to the mighty arm of God able to do all things.

When I think of this miracle I know of one my father experienced in the Congo. There is a dry season, where it rains every other week or so, and a rainy season, when it seems like it rains all the time, and when it rains most of the streams overflow their banks. One day my Dad was driving home from a gathering of other missionaries and came up to a 100 yard puddle covering the road. The missionary's rule of thumb was that you took off your shoes and sox, rolled up your pants and walked down one rut to the end and walked the other rut back to see how deep it was. My grandmother would never let my dad go barefoot growing up, so my dad is standing in the road trying to eye the puddle. All of a sudden there was an African standing next to him. Angel for sure my dad thought, there were no villages around for miles. He asked the African, do you think I can get through? The African said, are you out here doing the Lord's work? Well of course you will get through. So that is what my dad did, and sure enough he got through. And from the other side he turned to thank the man, and there was no one there. A parting of the Sea...

Think about your own rescues, your own answers to prayer, ways you have witnessed people's helping people, to bring hope, new life, rescue to others. Where have you seen triumph over depression, or anxiety and other forms of captivity.

Today with our offering for the people of Haiti, we can help answer some of their prayers.

We are blessed with an Interfaith Works in this county helping the homeless. As we gathered to prepare for this day our time of prayer for one another included praying for Bethesda Cares, a ministry for the homeless, that had just lost their leader and director, who had only been on the job 5 weeks.

Our own North Bethesda UMC and many other houses of worship, Muslim, Jewish and Christian are working together to help refugee families in our county (MCIRRN - Montgomery County Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Neighbors). Montgomery County is the most racially diverse county in the country. We have the opportunity as a united Christian community of helping people in significant ways to bring liberty and support from oppression right here in our own neighborhoods.

As a nation and as a county, we must remember we are all immigrants. John F Kennedy wrote a book in 1957 about Our Nation of Immigrants. We must remember some were first, crossing over the land bridge from Russia to Alaska. Some came for Faith, like the Pilgrims and the early Marylanders. Some are here for Freedom. Some are here out of fear from the oppression and deaths they have experienced in their home countries. Some are here because the Family has already begun to come here. We are all Immigrants.

May you find ways your church, your fellowship or your own family schedule, can connect to ministries that will bring rescue and hope to neighbors, just like Jesus raised Jairus' daughter. There are 733 houses of worship in this county, we should be able to make a big difference for those in need. *Your Right Hand O Lord, Glorious in Power*

Do you remember the last time you were in a long automobile ride? The seat belt ached, the kids were demanding every two minutes, Are we there yet? And then, you turned onto your street, pulled in front of your house, climbed the steps, felt the door handle of your own home in your hand, and walking in seeing your furniture, smelling what your house smells like and getting this overwhelming sense of peace, you have arrived! Let that sense of peace guide you.

I want to encourage us to keep going so that we can by working together and helping others, find that arrival on the other side, having witnessed the power hand of God in what we do. Are you out here doing the Lord's Work? Then you will get through.

60% of our county professes no faith connection. But most of the unchurched are impressed when they see faith communities doing something realistic to help neighbors. We will be able to reverse the negative feelings about faithful people, with a positive service to others. Let us work together to preach the good news to the poor, heal the broken hearted, provide freedom to the captives, pardon to the prisoners, comfort those who mourn, and be a messenger of joy instead of doom, by proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

As a member of the Methodist family here today, let me quote John Wesley who was very supportive of the ecumenical movement, and founder of our family of the church. He has good advice for us.

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

Let us as a witness to our Christian unity, be about the business of doing good all the time.

So that others will proclaim *"Your Right Hand, O Lord is Glorious in Power."*

Amen.