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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter/Year C  
May 16, 2010  
Text: John 17: 20-26

“Jesus had US in mind”

It had only been a couple of months ago that my sister and I traveled down to Bay St. Louis, MS. We had gone then to attend the funeral of my Uncle Lionel. We cousins remember saying to one another, ‘Let’s get together during the summer for some fun.’ Little did we know that we would be gathered once again several weeks later at St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church for the funeral service of my Mom’s last remaining sibling, Aunt Nettie. This time amidst the tears, there was much laughter and fond remembrances of earlier summers when the Curry family and the Fenner family made the long 12-14 hour trek by car to the house on St. George Street. Memories of my uncle preparing nets with raw chicken necks or chicken backs to catch dozens of blue crabs on Sunny Bank’s pier, walks along the beach to find snowballs (snow cones they’re called most often here in St. Louis), and watching and listening to my mother and two aunts, Nettie and Clem’s laughter and conversations are forever etched in my mind. Meal time was quite the experience as my aunt and uncle (with a little help from the rest of us) prepared meals for the lot of us. The southern cuisine was oh, so good especially my aunt’s gumbo! Now all three, my mom, Aunt Nettie, and Aunt Clem had learned to make gumbo from their father. And no one’s gumbo was the same. You get the roux ready, add whatever meat you like, add your seafood, a little bit of file’ power and serve over rice. Separately those ingredients would be okay but united there is nothing like a big steaming pot of gumbo. Which brings us to today’s gospel.

On this seventh Sunday in Easter, we are taken back to the place where Jesus and his disciples were gathered for their last meal before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. The last thing Jesus does before his trial and execution is to pray for his friends. Only a few verses earlier Jesus prayed that those he loved would be protected from evil (those things that take away from good relationships with God); that they, his disciples, would remain unified even after his death; and that their lives would be lived distinctly different from the life of the world. What is revealed in his prayer

is his deep love for his disciples and his absolute deep trust in God. This morning he adds yet another component to his prayer as he prays, “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of *those who will believe in me* through their word, that *they all* may be one.” As we listen further his words seem a little odd: “...so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me”... and so on but what is unmistakable is the theme of oneness and of unity. Jesus may have been speaking to a small group gathered together that evening but his prayer also included the generations that would follow them, for all who will come to believe in him. That includes you and me. Jesus had US in mind that evening. We are included in that enormous gumbo of followers for which he prays.

Does it seem like a realistic prayer *that all may be one* in today’s world? It seems as if we have so much going on. Look around you. We are young and more mature in age, male and female. We are short and tall, slim and full figured. We are dark haired, silver haired, blond haired, thin haired and no hair. There are those of us who are healthy and those who can barely make it out of bed. Some are very well educated and some who are not. There are some who are automatically joyful in the morning and those of us who need a first and second cup of coffee just to be civil. Some of us have German or Irish heritages and some who have Nigerian or Italian heritages and everything else in between. How is it that all of us can come together as one?

Still, let’s look further at the greater community. Imagine all the Christian people of the world. Imagine the mixture of peoples, the gumbo of humankind who claims Christ as their Lord and Savior. These “pieces” speak a plethora of dialects and languages, live in a variety of cultures, worship in a myriad of ways. How is it that we might *all be one*?

And let’s talk plainly here. Our culture teaches us to value our individuality, to stand out from everybody else. Our differences are what make us who we are. And yet Jesus prayed, “*That they all may be one.*”

Each time Jesus speaks of being ‘one’, he is talking about the way he and God share a mutual love and how we are drawn into that same kind of relationship with our God because we know Christ. The file`, the ‘glue’ that keeps us bound together is the LOVE of God in Christ and our hope in Christ who does not leave us alone in our individual ‘stuff’ but helps

us to remember that we belong to God who wishes/desires that that same mutual love pour out in our relationship with others.

God's unity, the oneness that Jesus prayed for, comes by relationship and that takes a little work: affirming each individual's expression of God in them and God with them; by bringing our own unique gifts and talents to the table; by fully living out our baptismal vows with God's help; by living out as best we can our mission statement which says: *The mission of St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church, a parish for all people, is to extend God's gracious love and hospitality to each other and to the community by providing worship that inspires, opportunities for service and growth on life's journey, and a sacred place in the heart of Florissant where people can find wholeness and strength.*

If this is true, if this is who or what we strive to be then let us join our prayer to Christ's prayer and recommit ourselves to explore and find ways to make our mission, this quest for unity amidst diversity, a reality.

Jesus prayed, "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and they know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Jesus' prayer has great potential in our lives individually and collectively in the life of St. Barnabas and its membership. I invite us to spend a little more time with John's gospel this week and let us ask ourselves this- How can we better mirror the 'oneness' that Jesus speaks of? What can potentially keep us apart? What is your prayer for this community?

"Come Lord Jesus." Let our voice be your voice. Let our hands be your hands. Let our love be your love. Amen.