

**21<sup>st</sup> April 2024,**  
**Easter 4, Eucharist**  
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Unity is hard.

There was a man named Seamus whose sailing boat capsized and he was washed up on a desert island. After years of living and adapting to island life all by himself, by chance some sailors arrived and rescued him. Before Seamus got on the rescue boat, they said

'Seamus, show us the house you lived in here'. So Seamus took them to a cleared area that had three buildings. He points to the fancy middle one and said

'that's my house there', and sailors agreed it was say lovely.

'What about the others' asked the sailors,

'Well' Seamus said 'the one on the left is my church'. The sailors said.

'Ok, what about the other one?' Seamus replied

'Well, that's the church I used to go to.

In our epistle reading first John - it is a summons to unity - a call to unity despite all the difference that are amongst this new community - social, cultural, and mainstream distinctions or challenges.

The Gospel of John and Johannine Epistles have been the source of much interest into the make-up of the communities who were first readings these writings. The Gospel was likely written circa 90-100 CE. The Letters then come from the following decade, circa 100-110 CE, in a community of churches that now finds it necessary to define itself against turmoil from within. Christian ideals are proving difficult to live out in the larger Greco-Roman world that maintains a variety of beliefs and standards. The heart of this central appeal: *"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action"* his ethic brings the Spirit of God into the fellowship of the community, and both empowers and emboldens to live out unity in a context that is very challenging.

As I said Unity is hard. Jesus prays for our unity - as he is one with God the Father and God the Spirit. In other words, we have to understand the unity that is the Godhead, before we can understand the unity that Jesus wants for his disciples. God is one and also three persons at one and the same time, there is a community at the heart of God with a constant exchange of love between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. That exchange is the very heartbeat of God and is the reason we are able to say that God is love. Everything that God is and does and says is the overflow of the exchange of love that is at the heart of the Godhead. This call to unity that amongst our challenges and difficulties that we should love one another as we have been loved by God. It is in the sharing of love with each other that we experience unity and experience God.

Unity, then, does not come from beliefs or propositions. It is not to do with statements or articles of faith. It does not involve us thinking or believing the same thing. Instead, unity is found in relationship, in the constant, continuing exchange of love with others within community; meaning that unity is found in diversity. We will have that experience firstly by coming into relationship with a relational God and secondly by allowing the love that is at the heart of the Godhead to fill us and overflow from us to others, whilst also receiving the overflow of that love from others.

Easy for you to say. It can seem that Christians are more defined by disunity than unity. The mood of our relations in our church are marked by exasperation and impatience. I am in the right, I have no issues and others behaviour is unfathomable. We fail to make eye contact, we avoid others we don't think are worth it, they are ridiculous, I'm so exasperated. I also don't time for this. I am fed up, this isn't getting us anywhere.

The primary reason for unity is unity, not really to get anywhere, the Kingdom is about good relationships. Community for the sake of community – hope that doesn't sound too simplistic – but essentially life is relational because God is relational. It's hard, it's why it is a priority to the community in first John and continues to pray for us.

It's why we are required to be immersed in God. Everything these days seems to be about immersion, immersive cinema experience, immersive break out room, immersive ice cream shops, immersive 360 art experience, well this morning we are in vogue. We should move from an understanding of God as being there for us – to an understanding that we are in God – that in him we live and move and have our being.

Because we are with God and in God and God in us, we can and will act in ways that are God-like and Godly. It's the only way we can achieve unity. That happens not because we hold a particular set of beliefs or follow a particular set of rules, instead it happens because we are so immersed in God and in his love that his love necessarily overflows from us in ways that we cannot always anticipate or control. We are immersed in his ways and his love.

We are to seek a continual and continuing immersion in relationship with Him so that we will:

experience unity by sharing love,  
protection by experiencing the essence of God and  
holiness through living in Him in unity of relationship with each other

Amen