

[Acts 16:16-34](#)

[Psalm 97](#)

[Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21](#)

[John 17:20-26](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO, RECTOR OF ALL HALLOWS PARISH, SOUTH RIVER, IN DAVIDSONVILLE, MARYLAND, ON THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, ASCENSION SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2013, AT ALL HALLOWS CHAPEL AND THE BRICK CHURCH.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Consider this statement:

With God's help, to become a welcoming Christian home for all seeking to worship, grow in faith through scripture, tradition, and reason, and act on our beliefs.

Here is the background for this statement:

Recently, thanks to the work of the Vision Committee, our Vestry has been deliberating on what a vision statement that speaks to all of us will look like. There is a one sentence summary vision statement (listed above). There is also a more expanded version explaining our core values. We will be having more conversations and discuss this with our parishioners in small group settings in the coming months.

This has been both an enlightening and humbling process for all of us. We realize that there is still much to be done if we aspire to become a truly welcoming Christian home for all, because being welcoming is much more than just having a warm coffee hour and greeting each other.

In some quarters, this practice of being welcoming is sometimes called "radical hospitality." Here, "radical" does not mean being a rebel! Rather, radical means exactly what its origin indicates - the root, the basics, the source - that gives us the reason to be welcoming, an authentic desire to be hospitable.

In fact, becoming welcoming and hospitable is a spiritual practice that goes back to the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

In being welcoming, we are called to mirror the harmony, the oneness, and the glory that exists between God the Father and God the Son. Let us explore this further.

The selection from St John's Gospel today is a part of Jesus' parting discourse shared initially with his disciples.

Jesus said to the Father,

"The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one..."

“...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, having made God known to the disciples, now opens a new possibility for them and for us here: that we all share in the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son. Jesus asks the Father that the disciples be united as one. As the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, so also might it be among the disciples. But the unity among believers is not an end in and of itself; it is “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (Moloney, 473-4)

The oneness of the believers is to show that the world that Jesus Christ is the perfect manifestation of God Almighty in our midst. Our continuous endeavor to be more and more welcoming is a testament to the mission of Jesus.

In the Gospels, Jesus sends the disciples into the world to manifest this perfect oneness that exists between the Father and the Son. The missionary chain, however, runs on unendingly. A further group of disciples is to mirror in the human story the oneness between the Father and the Son that “the world” might be led to belief that Jesus is the Sent One of God. (Moloney, 474)

In other words, we are called to manifest the perfect harmony between the Father and the Son in our fellowship with one another. To do so, we must have peace in our hearts. To do so, we must have love in our hearts. We must have God in our hearts.

Now, if that’s the case, we’re truly in deep trouble. How good has the Church been over history in mirroring that Oneness between the Father and the Son? Indeed, the Church throughout history has been plagued “by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,” as one hymn aptly puts it, and continuing, “Yet saints their watch are keeping; their cry goes up ‘how long?’” The saints, who are the faithful in all times and places, are like real gold tested by fire. They persevere in the Church despite all the tribulations because they have seen and experienced the power of God despite the human failures that have infested the Church. How can we, beset by these failures and schisms, learn to be welcoming?

With God’s help, the saints have ensured the welcoming nature of the Church by various means throughout the ages, such as the ecumenical councils that determined the tenets of our faith in the Early Church, the Reformation that aimed to correct certain corrupt practices of the Church, and our own General Conventions that gather to decide on matter of great importance to make sure all are welcome.

To heed Jesus’ call, we must continue enhance our welcoming ministry, so that others new to us will be able to feel and see something about God in how we talk to each other, and how we treat each other, especially the least among us.

So, we have a very important task: We are the Church; the Church is the people. We are each called individually and together corporately to make this Church experience as welcoming as possible. We are each called individually to model after the Oneness between the Father and the Son.

St. Paul has said that he wanted to be all things to all people so that he might save some. What a good salesman for the Gospel! But in reality, it is possible for us to be all things to all people all the time. So how can we be welcoming to all? Jesus has given us the answer,

"...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."

We can disagree on matters of politics. We can even disagree on matters of doctrines and faith. But we cannot allow ourselves to be lacking in love. Wherever God is, there is love. The Church must be a haven of love and blessings. As God's people of the Church, we must learn to love and practice love in all circumstances.

Jesus has summarized all the Law and Prophets for us: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself. The Church constantly reminds us of that in our liturgy.

Catherine LaCugna, a prolific theologian and writer, called this "Living God's life with one another."

(LaCugna, *God For Us*)

Our living God's life with one another "ends" whenever we are tempted to find an excuse in making an exception to this simple Truth, this little Way, and this holy Life. Our society, and even our Church, has been very adept in making these exceptions, because institutionally, we are all too prone to erect barriers to Jesus' call for us to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Part of becoming more welcoming means striving to break down these barriers.

Brothers and sisters, I look forward to becoming more welcoming together. I look forward to becoming more like Christ together. I look forward to being One together, as the Father and the Son are one.

Amen.