

**The Communion of Saints II
(that the world would know)**

John 17

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My friend Jim Dixon tells about a feature article in Life magazine years ago. It was about a tragedy in a Nebraska wheat field.

In the article, there were three pictures. The first picture showed a mother in the kitchen of her farmhouse. She was weeping as family and friends tried to consol her. Earlier in the day, she had turned around while her three-year-old boy wandered into the vast wheat field that surrounded the house. He wasn't as tall as the wheat, so he couldn't orient himself. And now he was lost.

Friends and neighbors arrived and helped search for the boy. They searched all day to no avail. Now it was nighttime, and they were waiting to resume the search in the morning.

The second picture showed dozens and dozens of people that next morning — people from town, people from farms, friends and family. They had all gathered together, locked arms, and were walking through the wheat field. But when they found the boy, he was dead.

The third picture showed the father, tears streaming down his face. He was holding the lifeless body of his three-year-old boy. The caption under the third picture quoted the father as he said, "If only we had held hands sooner."

My Grandpa Ralph was a Nebraska farmer. You may remember he's the one who damned all the central Nebraska irrigation

equipment to Hell. My grandpa could curse the paint off a barn. And I loved him . . . but I worried about him . . . that he was *lost*.

After breaking his hip, Grandpa Ralph lived with my family for a time. I must have been about sixteen when I mustered up the courage to go sit with Grandpa on the side of the bed in my sister's room, as he smoked White Owl New Yorkers in his old overalls and played Solitaire on his TV tray.

I fumbled through some casual conversation working my way to a Gospel presentation. I don't remember what I said, but I remember what he said to me: "Oh, Peter . . . hell. I don't know. They all say different things. The Methodists say one damn thing, the Baptists say another damn thing, the Presbyterians say some other thing . . . They all say different things, and then they fight about it."

That's what he said. And I didn't know what to say . . . or why that mattered to my argument . . . but I felt like I had been trumped. Game over. I imagine I said some good stuff: historical evidence, the teleological argument, the ontological argument, the moral argument . . . I was really into apologetics: reasoned explanations for God.

So I said something like, "Don't worry about them, Grandpa. That doesn't matter. Listen to *my* argument."

"Oh, Peter . . . hell. They all say a different damn thing and then fight about it."

And I really didn't know what to say.

It wasn't long after that, that Grandpa passed away.

In John 17, Jesus prays for you and for me; for the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Orthodox; and even for my grandpa. He prays for every lost boy in the wheat field.

John 17:20:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

“Perfect in one . . . that the world may know.” I used to think that made no sense.

Well, last week we began preaching on this prayer of Jesus’ for His small group and us—the Church. We preached that the Church is not *our* dream but *God’s* dream. And with His body broken and blood shed, Jesus builds His Church. So we must not destroy the real community God gives us with our own dreams of community.

Now in verse 22, Jesus prays that they may “be one just as we are one.” How are they one? Well, we can’t explain it. But the Church has guarded that mystery for 1700 years. The Church’s orthodox confession has been: “God in three persons and one substance” (or essence). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person bears witness to the others, so two bear witness to one. And each person of the Godhead continually gives glory and honor to the others. God is a community of self-giving. God is love.

In the community that is God, there is sameness and difference. If there was nothing but sameness with no difference, than I guess we'd all simply be God, and God is us . . . I am you, and you are me and we is God . . . Then there would be nothing left to love, just one, enormous, self-centered person.

And if there was nothing but difference with no connection, then we'd all just be a swarm of autonomous pleasure maximizers, devouring each other until there would only be one left, with nothing to love. That's called the "survival of the fittest." And, by the way, the fittest would not be living, for life itself is a community: oxygen, nitrogen, cells, hair, fingers . . . all in community. Scientists can't explain why. They can explain death, but not life.

Life is a unity of diversity.

- Diversity in unity is a body: different parts, one body, one blood.
- Diversity in unity is a marriage; different sexes, one covenant that bears life, male and female in God's image. I think that's why homosexuality grieves God so. It's a deep loathing of diversity . . . it's uniformity, a lust for more of the same.
- But diversity in unity is a marriage, a banquet, a party . . . different, strange people having one good time. Have you ever been to a party where everyone's just the same? What a drag!
- Diversity in unity is a city, a kingdom, an army; millions of different people and one Lord.

- Diversity in unity is a band, a symphony, a great dance; different instruments and dancers, but one piece of music.
- Diversity in unity is the Church; love and life.
- Diversity in unity is the Trinity—God (“three persons, one substance”). For the third time this year, I want to quote C. S. Lewis when he writes:

The words “God is love” have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love. . . . And that, by the way, is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions: that in Christianity God is not a static thing—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance. . . .

And now, what does it all matter? It matters more than anything else in the world. The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance.

Jesus prayed, “The glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one”

Well, Satan hates God and hates us and hates the Church. So he tries to turn unity into uniformity so we’re all the same, and that turns any diversity into division so we’re each totally alone. And then we’re just like everyone else and totally alone:

uniform and totally divided . . . *dead*. Have you ever been to a church like that?

No longer the body, the kingdom,
 the banquet, the city, the marriage . . .
 not loving and bearing life . . .
 he tempts our unity with
 uniformity, making us
 threatened by diversity.

Do other people's gifts, abilities, and experiences threaten you because you don't have them?

If you belong to this church, you see visions, and you exposit Scripture, and you evangelize the lost in Africa, and you provide clean water in the Dominican Republic, and you write books that minister to the world, and you comfort lonely men dying of AIDS, and you run multi-million dollar corporations, and you nurse the baby in your arms.

You are *one* body bound in the *one* covenant, *one* banquet, *one* party of grace, *one* New Jerusalem coming down, *one* Church. How sad if all the members were just the same! We wouldn't be a body but an *ooze*.

Well, Satan tempts the Church to uniformity without diversity, and he tempts us to diversity that is division. So we divide because people aren't just the same as us, or we divide because it hurts too much to forgive, or we divide (or were always divided) because we don't really believe in God—Trinity—community. We don't believe in love, so we can't believe in life. We won't believe in mystery, so we can't believe in the one substance.

The twentieth century is the century that declared God dead. And that only stands to reason, for it also declared all mystery dead, by definition. To grossly simplify and summarize, Modernism asserted that “man is the measure of all things.” That means all things that are anything are only things that submit to man’s measuring: that is, things less than us, like carbon and oxygen (biology), but not life, not love, not persons, certainly not God, and definitely not mystery; for mystery by definition is what man can’t measure or explain.

Now . . . Modernism is absurd, for man can’t even measure the statement “man is the measure of all things.” With what measure would he measure that statement, to *know* if it’s true? And what is truth? Modernism is *nuts*. And the twentieth century Church bought it.

Sociologists claim that now we’re leaving the Modern era and entering the Post-modern era. So folks are longing for stuff like: connectedness, community, diversity in unity . . . *holistic* stuff . . . encounter with mystery that’s bigger than the self.

In the Modern mind, there are no real mysteries, and nothing is bigger than self. So if a Modern man wants to know something, he reduces it. He subdues it, kills it, dissects it, and measures its pieces, for the only thing he can believe are things smaller than himself, because the only thing he can explain are things that fit in his head.

So, a truly Modern fish would have to deny the ocean. It won’t fit in his head. Like a modern bird would have to deny the wind; like a modern man denies that there is a God, because God’s not small enough. He can’t kill Him, dissect Him, and fit Him in his head.

Well, actually, once upon a time . . . a Christmas time . . . God did get as small as a baby in a manger. And He let us measure him; we measured Him with a cross (our knowledge of good and evil). He let us kill Him, but He wouldn't stay small. He busted out of the tomb—out of the laboratory! He's love and life . . . He's the *ocean!*

But He's still born into the tiniest spaces . . . like your brain or your heart. It's just that we can't really contain Him or explain Him.

When I sat on the bed with Grandpa, Christ was in me. But I was a Modern boy, and Grandpa was a Pre-modern man, and now we are becoming Post-modern people.

So maybe you can see why Grandpa said, "Hell. They all say a different damn thing and fight with each other."

And maybe you can see why I felt trumped by his statement, even though I didn't understand.

I think Jesus agreed with Grandpa. Listen to what He prayed: "That they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me . . ." That is, "Help them not to say different damned—cursed—things . . . evil things . . . and then fight with each other, slander, gossip, and condemn. Help them to say the one thing—one Word—so Grandpa Ralph would know you have sent me."

You see, my grandpa was a pretty wise man. And I think he knew that if there was a true God—a real God, He was bigger than my head; bigger than my heart, my explanation, my logic, my analysis, my experiences, and my witness.

Scripture always requires at least two witnesses. My witness could help, but how would Grandpa know it wasn't all just in my heart or ego? (People witness to Christ for all kinds of selfish reasons.)

Grandpa surely knew that if there was a God, He was bigger than my head. In other words, the ocean is bigger than just one fish; the sky is bigger than just one bird; God is bigger than just one argument in one head.

- But what if Grandpa saw several fish swept along in one direction? That would be pretty good evidence for a current and an ocean. And what if Grandpa saw a bunch of different birds—weird birds—being blown the same way? That would be evidence for wind (spirit wind).
- And what if Grandpa saw a bunch of different Christians really worshipping the same Christ, not as an act but as a life . . . not because they were the same and programmed the same, so that they acted the same, but different men from different nations—different men with one spirit, worshipping one Lord, like at Pentecost?
- What if he saw the Church?
- What if (even though I couldn't explain God) Grandpa saw some folks living together in such a way that he couldn't explain them . . . without God?

Well, instead, Grandpa thought, “Oh, Peter . . . maybe the music is just playing in your own head.”

If you didn't follow all of that, I . . .

Hey! Do you hear that music? Wow! That's awesome music! [starts dancing] Do you hear the music? What do you mean, you don't hear the music? Of *course* there is music, because I'm *dancing!* What more proof do you need?

I know what you're all thinking: "If there is music, Peter, it's only in your head."

But now, what if we were at the amusement park . . . and everyone was doing their own thing, but then all at once you see . . . [movie clip of "Grease" with people dancing in unison, no sound] different people moving together as one body, as dancers.

All these different dancers are dancing as one. They are all coordinated as one, as if they're being swept along by the same current, as if they're being carried by the same wind, as if they're being animated and coordinated by the same music.

And what if I then said, "Hey! Do you hear the music?" That would be different. You'd worry. You'd think, "Maybe there *is* music, and I just can't hear it, or I'm not listening."

Maybe there is a God,
but you're not looking or listening.

Modernism—science—Rationalism can explain chemistry and biology, but it can't explain love and life, you and the great dance all around you. Maybe there is a God, but you just won't listen and won't see. It's too bad the Church doesn't make it easier.

In 1990, I got to travel through Romania a few months after the Revolution. Modernism, Scientism, Rationalism, and Humanism were big in the United States, but *nothing* like they were in the Soviet Block. For forty-five years in Romania, prayer had been illegal, and God was an outlaw.

Well, one October night, ten months after the Revolution, my Baptist pastor friend Peter Dugulescu took me to see the home

of his old, Lutheran friend, Pastor Laslo Tokes. As we stood in the dark, he told me the story of how the Revolution began.

On the morning of December 15, 1989, the communists were planning to come and take Pastor Tokes to prison for preaching the Gospel against the dictates of the state. However, the churches in the city of Timisoara got wind of it: underground churches and state sanctioned churches, Baptist and Lutheran, Pentecostal and Orthodox, churches that had never fellowshipped together as the Church. (If you think prejudice is bad here, you wouldn't believe Eastern Europe!)

All these different groups got wind of it and began to congregate outside the home of Laslo Tokes. When he looked out his window early on the morning of December 15, he couldn't believe his eyes. There were hundreds of believers: Baptist, Reformed, Orthodox — all joining hands and singing hymns in public in unison. They sang illegal Christmas carols about a baby born into a manger and also into our hearts. Tokes thought, "I don't know where I'll be tomorrow, but I know at this moment God is with us."

The singers blocked the police. And over the next few days, hundred of others joined in the singing. When the police finally stormed the house on December 17 and took Tokes away, the crowd moved to the central square. In a few days, thousands of singers would be gunned down by the authorities.

But they couldn't kill them fast enough. Thousands more joined the crowd, from homes and offices. On December 22, my friend Peter stood in front of 200,000 people in the central square. He said three, simple words over the public address system: "Let us pray." All 200,000 scientists, teachers, police . . . They all dropped to their knees and prayed, in union, the prayer that had been illegal for forty-five years: The Lord's Prayer.

On Christmas day, the dictator was deposed, and Romania was free. And as we stood there in the dark outside Tokes' home, Peter leaned over and said to me, "Brother Peter, just think! This is where it all started! And it started when we all joined hands and sang."

The army—the body—the Church had always been there. She just hadn't joined hands and sung in unison.

That Nebraska father held the lifeless body of his son and said, "If only we had joined hands sooner." Actually, they never would have joined hands at *all* if it weren't for the life of his son.

You know, God the Father gave His only begotten Son so that we might have life, that we would join hands and be one. He entered our small, insane world and our small, insane minds and hearts, to show us the dance and give us the Dance: Himself.

I'm not talking about a program . . . one more city-wide, Christian rally to show unity; I'm talking about *love*.

I sat on the bed with my grandpa . . . "Oh, Peter . . . hell. They all say different things, and then they fight about it." And I didn't know what to say.

Now I do: "On behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ, Grandpa . . . I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

My mom believes Grandpa came to peace with God through Christ before he died. One thing I really believe is that Grandpa loved me. I saw it in his eyes, felt it in his hug, encountered it in his kisses. Sadly, I couldn't always receive it and return it. Grandpa was so different from me. But he loved me.

John wrote, “He who loves is born of God and knows God.”
Well, I think Grandpa saw love in my mom and dad and others.
I believe he saw Jesus in them. They just weren’t what he had
learned to call “church.” How sad.

We are the Church: many persons, one substance. “I in them
and thou in me,” prayed Jesus. The one substance is the
Godhead, and God is love, and God is mystery, and God is in
His people.

Commit to His people, not to explain them or fix them, but to
encounter Him.

Commit to His people, that the world would know Him.

Commit to His people, so you can hear the music and dance to
the same music.

It plays in even “the last and least of these my
brethren.”

It is the love of God poured out.

It is body broken and blood shed.

It is *Jesus*.

So on the night He prayed this prayer, He took bread, and
having given thanks he broke it, saying, “This is my body given
for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way,
after the supper He took the cup and said, “This is the cup of the
new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. As
often as you drink of it, do it in remembrance of me. I will not
drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it with you in my
Father’s kingdom.”

What a party!

If you want Jesus, come. Many persons and one substance.
Church . . . God's dream.

[Song: "The Church's One Foundation"]

So I sat with Grandpa on the side of the bed in my sister's room, as he smoked White Owl New Yorkers in his old overalls and played Solitaire on his TV tray. I gave my Gospel presentation, and then My grandpa said, "Oh, Peter . . . hell. They all say a different damn thing and fight about it."

You know, you don't always have to fight about it when you say a different thing, if you say the one thing . . .

On the count of three, yell your name. 1...2...3...
On the count of three, yell your Lord's name. 1...2...3...

You said a *different* thing, yet you said the *same* thing. You are the Church, and "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against you."

In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel.

Further Reading

In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Westminster Confession of Faith

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Nicene Creed 325 A.D.

In order for charity to be true, it demands a plurality of persons; in order for charity to be perfected, it requires a trinity of persons.

Richard of St. Victor, De trinitate

Aristotle has told us that a city is a unity of unlikes, and St. Paul that a body is a unity of different members. Heaven is a city, and a Body, because the blessed remain eternally different: a society, because each has something to tell all the others—fresh and ever fresh news of the “My God” whom each finds in Him whom all praise as “Our God.”

C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

According to Mrs. Besant this universal Church is simply the universal self. It is the doctrine that we are really all one person; that there are no real walls of individuality between man and man. If I may put it so, she does not tell us to love our neighbours; she tells us to be our neighbours. That is Mrs. Besant's thoughtful and suggestive description of the religion in which all men must find themselves in agreement. And I never heard of any suggestion in my life with which I more violently disagree. I want to love my neighbour not because he is I, but precisely because he is not I. I want to adore the world, not as one likes a looking-glass, because it is one's self, but as one loves a woman, because she is entirely different. If souls are separate love is possible. . . . A man may be said loosely to love himself, but he can hardly fall in love with himself, or, if he does, it must be a monotonous courtship. If the world is full of real selves, they can be really unselfish selves. But upon Mrs. Besant's principle the whole cosmos is only one enormously selfish person.

G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also

ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world.

I John 4:7-17

To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist.

Emmanuel, Cardinal Suhard

“A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

Deuteronomy 19:15b

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

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