

Epworth Chapel on the Green
November 1, 2009
All Saints/Pentecost 22
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

2 Chronicles 6:18-22
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 5:1-12

I have always been intrigued by the collect for today, which uses the provocative image of God “knitting together” the elect into one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Christ.

I looked in the dictionary this week at the word “knit,” and here is what Webster has to say:

1. To tie together
2. To link firmly or closely
3. To cause to grow together
4. To become drawn together

So, I've been thinking this week about what it means that God has “knit us all together” in one communion and fellowship. What exactly does that mean? How do we get our minds and hearts around this reality?

First, this is a reminder to me that we -- the Church -- all of us, are ONE. We've been knit together as one holy, catholic, apostolic body in Christ. And the word “catholic” does not just mean “universal,” it also means “whole.” So there is a sense, then, in which you and I as individuals have been drawn up into the whole

of Christ's body. And the creed that we recite seems to always draw us back and put our focus on the *whole*, not the parts.

Still, this image of "knitting" intrigues me. My wife has been known to knit and crochet in the past, and there was something about that activity which could always be observed. Whatever Connie was knitting was always ONE entity. She could not knit two separate items at the same time. The individual strands of yarn or thread always were woven together into ONE entity.

So, then, the church is indeed ONE. One body, one faith, one Lord, one baptism. The body of Christ is one because we are living stones who've been built upon the same foundation. That foundation is Jesus Christ.

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, if you've trusted him for salvation, if you confess him as the Son of God and the Lord of your life, you are knit together, you share a special bond with every person who has ever done the same.

You are part of a family that transcends blood lines and relationships. You share in the communion of saints. You are related to Pope Benedict, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and Archbishop Rowan Williams. You are kin with Billy Graham and the President of Bob Jones University. You are related to Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, James Dobson, and to Amish folks in Lancaster county Pennsylvania.

You are family with those who worship with candles, incense, and vestments; with folks who speak in tongues, and with folks who sit quietly and wait for the Spirit's discernment in their worship.

You are bound together with people from Johannesburg, Moscow, Caracas, Belize City, Moose Jaw Saskatchewan, and Flin Flon Manitoba.

Your life has been shaped by Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Menno Simons, John Chrysostom, Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker. Your understanding of prayer has been influenced by the likes of Phoebe Palmer, Hannah Whitall-Smith, and Mary the mother of Jesus. Your understanding of perseverance is shaped by your brothers and sisters in China where the church has been forced underground.

The truth of the matter is that everything you are, everything that shapes your identity as a believer in Jesus Christ, is connected to all of those with whom you've been knitted together into this family we call the mystical body of Christ. You are not who you are without them. They are not who they are without you.

Today is a today when we are brought face to face with this reality in all of its fullness. We have been knit together. From various places, backgrounds, experiences and understandings the Father, Son, and Spirit have drawn us closely together, have knit us together as one body.

But the real issue is not just what we say and do and understand today. The question is: Are we committed to allowing this reality to shape and guide our lives throughout the other 364 days of the year?

As we come to the table of the Lord today, we do so (as Father Schmemmann says) by means of ascending up into the heavenly realms, where Christ and those who've gone before us dwell. We share with them in Christ's victory. And we receive grace, that we might continue to run with patience the race that is set before us.

So come with joy, and with thanksgiving in your hearts. And let that gratitude inspire and empower you as you show forth Christ's love to a broken and hurting world.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.