

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus the Christ. Amen

In the first letter of John, chapter one, verse 7 we hear these words, “ But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” The word fellowship in this verse in the Greek is koinonia, which gets translated as communion. Store that for a few minutes.

Something happens in this place that is powerful. And it’s because of the Holy Spirit. Look up above the altar to that stained glass window. It is a beautiful image of the Holy Spirit as a dove. Behind the dove are three circles that represent the Triune God. Behind them is a purple or blue background that appears to have waves in it. One meaning is that of the Spirit of God brooding or moving over the waters of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. The dove coming downward also reminds us that as Jesus came up from the water of baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. The dove coming down also reminds us of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples on Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection. Then the dove can remind us that when we were baptized, the Holy Spirit came to and into us. At our Confirmation or Affirmation of Baptism, we heard again the Spirit’s intent to be in our life.

The Spirit’s job is to bring the WORD of God to us and lead us into faith in Jesus. The Spirit job is to help us believe. We believe because of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther said in explaining the Third Article of the Creed, “I believe that I cannot by my own strength or understanding believe in Jesus Christ—but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with its gift and sanctified and preserved in the one true faith.”

I have been caught by the beauty and meaning of that stained glass window. When we confess the Apostles’ Creed and get to the Third Article, I lift my eyes to that image of the Holy Spirit and say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,” and the next phrase catches me, “the communion of saints.” I’ve come to treasure that phrase, “the communion of saints.” I’ve come to believe in the communion of saints. I’ve come to believe in the power of the communion of saints.

Let’s think about two words here. Communion means a community. A community is a gathering of people that work for the benefit of each other along with their own.

The word saint does not mean someone perfect, above sinning or holier than the rest. A saint is a forgiven sinner, one who has been forgiven by the blood of Jesus, through his death and resurrection. A saint is one who has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus as the writer of First John said.

So the communion of saints means a community of forgiven sinners. There is a power in this community of saints and it comes from the Holy Spirit who lives among us. The Holy Spirit gathers us together to support one another—we see that

power when a family loses someone in death, when there are bad illnesses or other tragedies. The saints show up with hot-dishes, with cards, with time spent with the hurting ones and prayers—that those in need often say, they felt the prayers and concerns. They felt like the saints were wrapping their arms around them

The community of forgiven sinners gathers together like this morning to be together, to see familiar faces, to talk and share joys or concerns, to share time. The community of saints gathers together to pass on the faith in Sunday School, Affirmation of faith time, Bible studies, in little bits of time listening to and caring for one another. There is something comforting and warming to belong to a church a community of forgiven sinners. The writer of the 122<sup>nd</sup> Psalm said what we may feel, “I was glad when they said to me, let us go up to the house of the Lord.” When they said, let us be part of the community of saints.

But it is not all fun and games. There are times when there are voices we need to acknowledge. There is a phrase that we hear from time to time, “There is an elephant in the room.” It refers to there being an issue that people may not want to acknowledge. That may not be the case here, but there are voices that represent feelings. Feelings are not right or wrong; they are reactions to what has happened or what we perceive has happened.

In the last months there have been lots of feelings and many are feelings of anger. Anger or being angry is not a sin. Anger is a reaction that we may have. Some have feelings of shock, not realizing there was anything brewing under the table. Some have angry feelings because Pastor Reggie was asked to resign. Some have angry feelings because of how it happened. Some have angry feelings because these issues should have been handled sooner. And some have feelings of relief. Lots of feelings.

It’s the angry feelings that are hard to deal with as humans, as Christians. Saint Paul said it’s okay to be angry but as he said, “in your anger, do not sin.” I saw a video this week of my niece’s daughter being pushed hard in a basketball game and she came back with a shove knocking the other girl to the floor. When we are angry, or at least when I am angry, I want to call the other person a name, to put them down. And then there is St. Paul saying, be angry but do not sin.

“I” statements are better than “you” statements: I think or I believe or I feel and sharing our thoughts. There is a Native American saying that says, “Do not judge your neighbor until you have walked a mile in their moccasins.” Which brings up sharing your thoughts or feelings and then listening. “Tell me your story, your side.” We may or may not agree, but we have listened—and we have not sinned.

The Holy Spirit is the power in the community of saints. The Spirit enables us to be a community of forgiven sinners, caring for and being for one another. We don’t always know how to pray in some situations, but in those times St. Paul said, the Holy Spirit prays for us with groans or sighs too soft to be heard. We are not alone. Amen.

