

SERMON ON SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2022      Pastor Doug Larson  
First Lutheran Church, Aitkin, Minnesota

“E Pluribus Unum” and Galatians 3:28 sound alike, they have much in common. “E Pluribus Unum” means one out of many. Galatians 3:28 is “There is no longer Jew nor Greek, no longer slave nor free, no longer male nor female; for you are all one in Christ.”

Sounds like we should all be the same. Yet Jesus didn't pick disciples that way. There was Peter who was brave and brash, fearless and scared. There were the two sons of Boanerges, James and John, Sons of thunder, they were called, who had the audacity to ask Jesus to sit on His right and left hand when He came into His power. There was Thomas, reflective and introspective who said I need to see and touch Jesus to believe He is alive. And there was Judas, the political radical.

Are we to be a country all looking, acting, and talking alike? If we did, we would miss the farmers, or the doctors and nurses, the teachers, the inventors, the housekeepers. Or likewise in the church, what if all wanted to be pianists, or Sunday School teachers, or preachers, or servers or office staff. Hmm, maybe that wouldn't be so bad, after all.

Paul's words were meant to remind us that as Christians we center around Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. That we are one in Christ, forgiven and renewed by God. It's said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross, none are better than others and none are worse. We are all one in Christ, forgiven sinners. We all love and worship our Lord Jesus Christ.

On this weekend, Memorial Day Weekend or as it was originally called, Decoration Day, we remember those men and women who went off to war. They went to defend and protect the four freedoms that FDR stated: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. They went to protect and defend the ideals of our nation; that we are free to choose how we live. There is a oneness in all this.

Not all came back. I've walked among the graves in the American Cemetery above the shores of Normandy. Some came back with physical wounds. Some came back with emotional, mental and spiritual wounds. And many continue to live with the effects of those wounds. Most went because they believed in the ideals of our country. Some went because they knew the freedoms and some went even though they did not know the freedoms, but believed in their value. They went so that the goodness of this country would continue.

We are a good nation in many ways. There is the opportunity to rise up and out of difficult situations. There is the opportunity to dream dreams and pursue them. As a nation we have moved to deal with difficult issues. In the early 1960's, I remember an older brother discussing with my mother that she should change the soaps she was using because the present ones were bad for the environment, the water systems. We have moved to reduce pollution from cars and factories; to stop dumping harmful chemicals into the soil and water; to become more energy efficient. We have tried to realize that with great power as a country, there also comes great responsibility.

We can stand and celebrate in many ways. But we are not a perfect nation. St. Paul talked about his continual drive to press on to become all that Christ wanted for him. Abraham Lincoln spoke of becoming a more perfect union. There are holes and gaps in what we want for all as a nation. As a nation we can pray as we do for ourselves, "We poor sinners confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean and we seek to be more like Christ."

Sometimes it is hard to hear about shortcomings as individuals and as a nation. And that is normal. I wonder if sometimes it is the Holy Spirit that is reminding me of my shortcomings? It is tough to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to me. But that is part of the work of the Holy Spirit; to work behind the scenes and bring me to a better understanding of what God wants for me.

We have become or allowed ourselves to become a polarized country: to believe that there are only two sides and that they are far apart. To believe this when in reality there is much middle ground. To believe there are only two groups of people when there are many, maybe the majority who live closer to the middle; closer to one another in our hopes and dreams and goals.

And when we sit down and begin to talk, we find that we are more alike than different. That we are more like a family than two opposing teams. And yes, I know how families can be. The differences at the breakfast table that go with them as they go out to the trucks and combines and swathers in the field to bring in the harvest. Not always agreeing but working for the good of the family, contributing to the good of all.

This sense of oneness, this sense of family, we need to remember this weekend. We are one out of many, we are no longer slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, nor male nor female—we are one for a reason. We worship one Lord and Savior. We believe in the ideals of America.

As I walked among the graves at the American Cemetery at Normandy, I didn't see the graves arranged by groups: Norwegians, Italians, Irish; or by Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Orthodox; or by rank of officers and enlisted personnel. They all lay side by side as Americans. Americans who believed in the good ideals of America.

We gather this morning as various kinds of people, with varying interests, goals, beliefs and hopes. Yet we come as followers of Jesus, all the same in Christ. We come as those who have been set free by Christ and will be set free again and again in our walk. We come as those who have been called to love one another as Christ loved us. To do unto others as we would have them do unto us—or in fact to do unto others as they would like it done to them in love and respect as we are all due.

We are to take time this weekend to remember those who went in service of our country, whether in wartime or not. We are to take time to thank them for being willing to defend and protect the ideals of our nation. We are called to honor and protect those ideals because that is what those who went would want us to do. It's what they would have wanted. Amen