

So do you believe in unity or diversity? Which one's more important? Is it more important for us to be united or is it more important to have diverse viewpoints and diversity? That's often a question that we're asked and if Jesus is weighing in this week this is one of His last prayers with the disciples okay. And He's saying to them "the thing that I really want to pray for you is unity; the way that I am with the father I want you to be united with one another." And he says that "this will be for the church that follows as well, people, not even here with me now I want them to be united. So how are we doing in just the Christian Church as far as Unity? This is the lectionary text so it's the assigned text this week and it was a perfect week for me for this text because I was at something called the Christian Unity Gathering. So it was pretty perfect right? The National Council of churches which is about 36 of the main line, mainstream denominations, have a gathering a couple times a year and this tiny little denomination is part of it and I represent us at this table with all these large, large denominations and I'm sort of like, in politics, I think I'm the senator from Rhode Island you know who has a vote but I'm from a little tiny district. So I'm at this table with all these other denominations and it's absolutely fascinating to hear what they're wrestling with and how we're trying as Christians to be more united. But diversity is also everywhere there. One woman started and said "I represent the, you know, Baptist National." She said and it's important for me to say which one because there's twenty eight Baptist Churches. So that's just the Baptist and then the rest of Christendom is really quite divided and quite split. The National Council meets and that's probably more [00:02:10] *sounds like 'senator left'*. There's also an Evangelical Council that meets and interesting enough,

they don't meet together; the Evangelical Council and the National Council. The Roman Catholic Church does have representation at the National Council; they had a visitor and the Orthodox churches are part of the National Council of Churches *[00:02:28] sounds like 'India' ]* Greek, Russian.

So it's interesting to be at the Christian and unity gathering. But boy are we diverse. So did Jesus' prayer go unanswered? We are in a period it seems, of real division and disunity right now. In our political life we can't miss it we're in a historic time. This last week with Donald Trump becoming a Nominee for the Republican party, whatever your view point on him is, the reality is that there's disunion in the republican party with leading members of the party and former presidents and presidential candidates not being united with the candidate. I've never seen anything like it in my life. And on the democratic side we have the presumptive winner and Hilary Clinton but still Bernie Saunders keeps winning races and so the unity doesn't seem as clear there. So we're in a period of upheaval and disunity in our political life, in our spiritual life and the question is do we like that diversity; is that better or is the unity better? And I think I've asked sort of a fake question maybe, in asking you to choose between the two because I think we confuse unity with uniformity; and those are completely different things.

If you look at any of the societies around the world where they've had uniformity, everybody believes the same thing, everybody dresses the same way, everybody drives the same car, if they drive a car right? Those societies, when you're not in the unity, when you disagree, you can also often face imprisonment or death. So

when we see uniformity around the world, I don't think that's what we're seeking; we're seeking unity. And one of the great spiritual paradoxes is, I would argue, that you really can't have Unity without diversity; these go together. But how do they fit together? How do these different groups come together?

In my own life I've experienced within the church, I'm sort of an ecumenical mutt of an upbringing. I've got a mix of everything. Many of you knew I grew up with my grandfather being a Swedenborgian Minister so this denomination. But I was raised in an Evangelical Baptist Church; that's where I grew up. When I went to college I attended a Presbyterian church but in the summers I volunteered for the Lutheran's campus ministry program and when I got to campus and college I checked out the Protestant group and the Catholic Group. And the Protestant group, which would have been the group I would have sort of thought I would get involved with, they would sort of kind of judge everybody else on campus. It wasn't a very fun group. Then the Newman Center which was the Catholic group, they were doing canned food drives for the poor, adopt a grandparent, adopt a little brother so I threw myself in with the Newman Center and the Catholics, much to my parents, [00:05:22] at the time now would be irrelevant, but they were a little concerned that I was getting so into the Newman Center. And eventually, after many years of college I became the first Protestant head of the Newman Center. I ended up running the Newman Center to East Stroudsburg State College with Father Jack Benedict who's now [00:05:38]. This pattern continued. I was still loving Swedenborg so when I went to divinity school I studied at the Swedenborg School of Religion but I went to Harvard Divinity school; eventually got a gig at the chapel at

Harvard and that was the best because it was ecumenical. We had every faith preached there, including non-Christian faith so I loved it. And what I loved was the Minister there Peter Gomes would say to the preachers, these are all world class preachers; He would say "preach your message. Don't change a thing. We can handle whatever you say but we'll also keep our service the same way each week." And in that I said that "what a great recipe for diversity and unity and respect for differences." One funny story is that I volunteered, I couldn't get away from the Campus so I volunteered at St. Mary of the angels in Roxbury, Massachusetts on Saturdays and one week, [00:06:36] sounds like Carvel Laud) came to do a visit and he said "you look really familiar how would I possibly know you?" I said "well I introduced you to the Archbishop of Canterbury at Harvard;" So all these worlds coming together. So I am an ecumenical mutt and I'm so grateful for it. From the evangelicals I learned a great knowledge and respect for scripture and I love that I got that. From the Presbyterians I saw great preaching. The Lutheran, service. I've already talked about the Catholic service but the Catholics also have a great mystery in their theology and many people who've seen my apartment or if you see my office here in the church you'll see icons and the first question people ask "Are you Orthodox?" Because I love the mystical nature of the Orthodox too. I think everything, all these faiths each bring something beautiful to the body of Christ and to the greater Body of Christ. I've learned so much from my Jewish friends and my Muslim friends and my clients and I think that this is the unity that Jesus is talking about. It's not a uniformity where we all believe the same thing, I don't think he created us that way. I think it's a respect for diversity. And I think there's no greater time really, maybe in the history of the world where leaders, a new type of

leader has to come up that says "I really respect your difference. I don't tolerate it. That's different. I love you. I love your difference. It doesn't mean I'm going to be it; doesn't mean I have to abide by it; doesn't mean I have to believe in it but I love you in your difference. That's the new body. That's why our political system's breaking down right now. We need leaders that can say "that's not how I see the world but I love you for we're you're coming from." Now interestingly enough where do we learn this? I find that within ourselves, we have our own divisions. Now if you've ever had voices in your head, if you look that up on the Internet you'll probably be told to go see a psychologist right? If you have voices in your head that's an hallucination. In my coaching practice into my own Spiritual Development I have found I have many voices in my head; a lot of voices going on and they are in need of facilitation. They are in need of talking and it's a really interesting exercise. I encourage you to pursue this if this is something that you encounter, that I find with my clients there's the accountant voice that many people have. Do you ever hear that voice talking to you about finances? Have you heard the voice -the 'Critic Voice?' "You're such a failure. This is such a disaster. You fail at everything. Nothing Works." Then, interesting enough, on Mother's Day, many of my clients talk about their mother's voice right? "You really shouldn't be doing that should you?" Then there's the 'relax and enjoy' voice. These different voices are alive within us, our own community-they too need to be heard and I find that when we suppress voices that we disagree with, they tend to sabotage as opposed to listening and getting them out. Whether that happens within ourselves or within the body of Christ or within our political life, we need to find ways to give people a voice instead of a desire to suppress them. The Apostle Paul talked about it in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12, verse

14 and he said "the body of Christ is like the human body; the hand is no better than the eye, is no less important than the ear; they're all serving different parts.

So when we see people we don't agree with, we can look within and say "Wow they're serving a different role than me. It's not my thing. It's not what I like. They're not my tribe but, they're part of this great body of Christ and we can come to respect them and really come to admire them. One place I read this week that really hit home for me on this topic was one of my fellow Ministers Kathy Speas, Swedenborgian Minister in California and she is a hospice Minister. And she's such a good writer that I usually don't read but I want to read what she says about what she learned being a hospice Minister about working with Ministers of different faiths. She says "one of the greatest opportunities I've had to shake off the bed of my neat little opinions about Theology and Religion has been working with other clergy and other churches in my Ministry as a hospice. I've experienced the peace that passes all understanding with ministers whose ideas about heaven and hell would get me in a shouting match. It's been wonderful. It's taught me to be a better person, to share spiritual support at the end of a person's life alongside colleagues whose beliefs about Jesus are closer to Mel Gibson's than mine and then spending time with those people as we're all approaching death and they're changing into whatever comes next, I've moved into a world where the leak have faded but Love remains strong. Our thoughts, our opinions, our belief, our theologies and our doctrines, they change over our lifetime and eventually diminish. For some of us they vanish completely. What remains is love, connection; allowing ourselves to be open to receiving as well as giving. It's peace, hope, devotion. God is what endures." I

just love that- working together for a common cause and letting love be the guiding principle to overcome division and in realizing the importance of diversity, because that diversity within us and within the world is the body of Christ. Amen.