

Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the 'Eight Days'

5 June – 12 June 2011

Day 2 – Monday 6 June

THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

Readings

Isaiah 55:1-4

Psalms 85: 8-13

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

John 15:1-13

Come to the waters

Surely salvation is at hand

For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body

I am the true vine



Commentary

The Church of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles is the model of the unity we seek today. As such, it reminds us that prayer for Christian unity cannot be for uniformity, because unity from the beginning has been characterized by rich diversity. The Church of Jerusalem is the model of unity in diversity.

The narrative of Pentecost in the Book of Acts tells us that there were represented in Jerusalem on that day all the languages and cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world and beyond. People heard the gospel in their diverse languages, and who through the preaching of Peter were united to each other in repentance, in the waters of baptism, and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Or, as Paul would later write, “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” It is not a uniform community of the likeminded, culturally and linguistically united people who were one in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, but a richly diverse community, whose differences could easily erupt into controversy. Such was the case between the Hellenists and the Hebrew Christians over the neglect of the Greek widows, as Luke relates in Acts 6.1. And yet the Jerusalem church was at unity within itself, and one with the Risen Lord who says “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.”

Rich diversity characterizes the churches in Jerusalem to this day, as it does around the world. It can easily erupt into controversy in Jerusalem, accentuated by the current hostile political climate. But like the earliest Jerusalem church, Christians in Jerusalem today remind us that we are many members of one body, a unity in diversity. According to the portrayal of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21:22-27 diversity and unity will be found in the new creation. They remind us that difference and diversity are not the same as division and disunity, and that the Christian unity for which we pray always preserves authentic diversity.

For Reflection/Discussion

- In what ways is your congregation diverse? United?
- In what ways are your local churches diverse? United?
- How could both unity and diversity be further developed for growth, enrichment and outreach, locally, regionally, nationally?
- Why do we find it so hard to embrace difference within the church universal? Why is visible unity within the Christian church so important?

Prayer

God, from whom all life flows in its rich diversity, you call your Church as the body of Christ to be united in love. May we learn more deeply our unity in diversity, strive to work together to preach, and build up the Kingdom of your abundant love to all, accompanying each other in each place, and in all places. May we always be mindful of Christ as the source of our life together. We pray in the unity of the Spirit. Amen.



National Council of
Churches in Australia
Faith and Unity Commission