

Questions

In what ways is the 'gospel' you have received bound up with its cultural and historical transmission?

In what ways has that been both a vehicle and an obstacle to unity?

What other ways are there of "handing on" the gospel?

Think about/discuss the appropriateness of finding culturally relevant and contemporary presentations of the language, imagery and message of the gospel.

How would our fuller unity in Christ make us better witnesses to the gospel we have received?

Prayer

Gracious God, you sent your Son in the power of the Spirit to redeem your people. Unite us in our diversity, strengthen us in our weakness, and keep us in your way, that we might affirm and proclaim together the good news of the life, death and resurrection of Christ for a world in need of his gospel. Amen.

Prayer for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2014

God of wholeness

We recognize, with sorrow, our divisions with each other and with you. As we seek to recover our unity in Christ we recognize the diversity of gifts, talents, understandings and expressions of faith that abound in the life of your churches.

May we see this diversity as an encouragement and inspiration as together we witness and minister to the needs of your world.

May your Spirit continually guide and lead us as we grow in grace with each other and with you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

1 – 8 June, 2014

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE "EIGHT DAYS"

Has Christ been divided?

1 Cor (1:1-17)

DAY 1

Together... we are called to be saints

Exodus 19: 3-8 You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation
Psalm 95: 1-7 We are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand
1 Peter 2: 9-10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people
Matthew 12: 46-50 Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother

Three Points for Reflection

Together, we who call upon the name of the Lord are called to be saints "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:2). In Exodus, this gathering together of God's people is described as a treasured possession, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

In 1 Peter, our membership in this communion of saints is understood to come as a result of God calling us together as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's own people. With

this calling comes a shared mandate to proclaim the mighty acts of God that drew us out of darkness and into God's light.

Furthermore, we discover in Matthew that as a communion of saints, our oneness in Jesus is to extend beyond our family, clan, or class as together we pray for unity and seek to do the will of God.

Questions

What does the term "saint" mean to you?

What does the term "communion of saints" mean for you or for your church tradition?

This reflection reminds us that as Christians we are called to be a "holy nation". Can Australia still be regarded as a Christian country?

Do some of our social attitudes and government policies and (in) action make us more an 'unholy' than a 'holy; nation? e.g. on welfare of indigenous people; climate change; asylum seekers

In what ways does our calling to be a "holy nation" compel us to go beyond our local Christian setting?

Prayer

Merciful God, together with all those who call on the name of the Lord, in our brokenness we hear your call to be saints. Yet you have made us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. By the power of your Holy Spirit, draw us together in the communion of saints and strengthen us to do your will and to proclaim the mighty acts of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayer

We give you thanks, O God, that you bless each and every member of the body of Christ with the gifts of your Spirit. Help us, as those who call upon Jesus as Lord, to be supportive of one another, to be respectful of our differences, and to work together for the peace and unity of all throughout the world. Amen.

DAY 8 Together... we proclaim the gospel

Isaiah 61:1-4	The spirit of the Lord God has sent me to bring good news
Psalms 145:1-7	One generation shall laud your works to another
1 Corinthians 15:1-8	For I handed on to you what I in turn had received
Luke 4:14-21	Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing

Three points for reflection

Together we proclaim anew the good news prophesied in Isaiah, fulfilled in our Lord Jesus, preached by the Apostle Paul, and received by the Church. Facing honestly the differences we have and the labels of denomination we embrace, we must never lose sight of the common mandate we have in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul is sent "to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17). The path to unity is to be found in the power of the cross.

The Gospel we proclaim is made tangible and relevant to us as we bear witness to the work of Jesus Christ in our own lives and the life of the Christian community.

the day when we will worship together in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship.

We are blessed by the gifts of various church traditions. Recognising those gifts in each other impels us towards visible unity.

Our baptism unites us as one body in Christ. While we value our particular churches, Paul reminds us that all who call on the name of the Lord are with us in Christ for we all belong to the one body. There is no other to whom we can say, "I have no need of you" (1 Cor 12:21).

Questions

Does the idea that you "belong to Christ" comfort you? make you nervous?

What are the signs of "belonging to Christ"? In what ways can the phrase "I belong to Christ" be used to divide Christians rather than unite them?

"Christian unity belongs to the design of God for the unity of all humanity". Do you agree with this statement?

In what ways/through what channels are Christians in Australia working together for the good of all Australians? Humanity? What do the national issues on which churches unite say about who we are?

In what ways/through what channels are the countries and peoples of the world working together for the common good of humanity and the planet? What are the biggest barriers to human unity?

DAY 2 **Together... we give thanks for God's grace in one another**

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

The Lord brought us out of Egypt

Psalms 100

Give thanks to God, bless God's name

Philippians 1:3-11

I thank God every time I remember you

John 1:1-18

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ

Three points for reflection

Gratitude, in Deuteronomy, is a way of living life with a deep awareness of God's presence within us and around us. It is the ability to recognize God's grace active and alive in one another and in all people everywhere and to give God thanks. The joy that flows from this grace is so great that it embraces even "the aliens who reside among you".

Gratitude, in the ecumenical context, means being able to rejoice in the gifts of God's grace present in other Christian communities, an attitude that opens the door to ecumenical sharing of gifts and to learning from one another.

All of life is a gift from God: from the moment of creation to the moment God became flesh in the life and work of Jesus, to this moment in which we are living. Let us thank God for the gifts of grace and truth given in Jesus Christ, and manifest in one another and our churches.

Questions

What are the gifts of God's grace that we already experience from other church traditions in our own communities?

In what ways might Christians of different traditions better receive and share the varied gifts that God has given to each of us?

In what ways might Christians of any and all traditions better receive and learn from the gifts of grace carried by migrants and indigenous people?

What is the relationship between gratitude and reconciliation?

Prayer

Most loving and gracious God, we give thanks for the gifts of your grace that we experience in our own tradition and in the traditions of other churches. By the grace of your Holy Spirit, may our gratitude continue to grow as we encounter one another and experience your gift of unity in new ways. This we pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

DAY 3 Together... we are not lacking in any spiritual gifts

Job 28:20-28 Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom
Psalm 145:10-21 You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing
Ephesians 4:7-13 Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift
Mark 8:14-21 Why are you talking about having no bread?

Three Points for Reflection

Job realizes that even though all has been taken away from him, the fear of the Lord remains – that is wisdom. As brothers and sisters in Christ, even though we are impoverished by our divisions, we have all been graced with an abundance of diverse gifts, both spiritual and material to build up his body.

Yet, despite God's promises and Jesus' generous life and love, we, like the disciples in Mark, sometimes forget our true wealth: we divide, we hoard; we speak and act as if we have "no bread".

Christ has not been divided: together we have gifts enough to share with one another and "with every living thing".

Questions

Can you remember a time of serious disagreement in your local congregation/faith community? How was it resolved?

Can you remember an occasion when the prophetic naming of a painful church disagreement was the beginning of a renewed struggle towards greater unity?

Think about/discuss what you know about your church's (local and more broadly) method of decision-making and management of disputes. Is it effective? Helpful? Inclusive?

What issues still cause divisions among us ecumenically?

What paths do you see towards greater unity?

Prayer

Loving God, you give us prophetic witnesses in times of conflict and division. Help us to recognize and listen to their voices. When we seek you, Lord, send us your Holy Spirit to guide us in the way of reconciliation, that we may be united in the same mind and the same purpose. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

DAY 7 Together... we belong to Christ

Isaiah 19:19-25 God will send them a saviour
Psalm 139:1-12 Where can I go from your spirit?
1 Corinthians 12:12-26 If one member suffers... If one member is honoured...
Mark 9:38-41 Whoever is not against us is for us

Three points for reflection

Isaiah envisioned a day when Egyptians and Assyrians would worship together with Israel as God's people.

Christian unity belongs to the design of God for the unity of all humanity, and indeed of the cosmos itself. We pray for

Prayer

God of love, you have called us into the fellowship of your Son, and taught us to regard each other as equals and to treat each other with respect. In this way we will bear fruit in our witness to the gospel. By the grace of your Spirit, enable us to love one another and to dwell together in unity so that you will be honoured and our joy may be complete. Amen.

DAY 6 Together... we seek to be in agreement

Judges 4:1-9	If you go with me, I will go
Psalms 34:1-14	Seek peace, and pursue it
1 Corinthians 1:10-15	Be united in the same mind and the same purpose
Luke 22:24-30	A dispute also arose among them

Three points for reflection

The disunity described in 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 reflects a distortion of the gospel, undermining the integrity of the message of Christ. To acknowledge conflict and division, as Chloe's people did, is the first step to establishing unity.

Women like Deborah and Chloe raise a prophetic voice among God's people in times of conflict and division, confronting us with the need to be reconciled. Such prophetic voices may enable people to gather in renewed unity for action.

As we strive to be united in the same mind and the same purpose, we are called to seek the Lord and his peace as the psalmist wrote.

Questions

In what ways have we forgotten the abundance of God's gifts, proclaiming instead "we have no bread"?

Name six spiritual, five practical and four material gifts present in your congregation/faith community; in your local community; in our country.

How are people in your congregation or faith community invited/encouraged to use and develop their gifts? How does this contribute to the unity of the whole?

In what ways can we better share the spiritual and material gifts entrusted to us to share with others? And in what ways can we better receive the gifts others have to offer us?

Prayer

Faithful, open-handed God, we bless you that you have given us all the spiritual gifts we need to come to the measure of the full stature of Christ : for wisdom, for gifts of service and for bread. Help us to be signs of your bundance, gathered in unity to bring the gifts of your everlasting kingdom to every place of pain and lack. Filled with the Spirit, we pray in the name of the One whose gift was the bread of his life broken for us, now and forever. Amen.

DAY 4 Together... we affirm that God is faithful

Lamentations 3:19-26	The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases
Psalms 57:7-11	God's faithfulness extends to the clouds
Hebrews 10:19-25	He who has promised is faithful
Luke 1:67-75	He has looked favourably on his people

Three points for reflection

The eternal unity of Father, Son and Spirit draws us closer into the love of God, and calls us to participate in God's

work in the world which is love, mercy and justice. Mercy and justice are not divided in God, but rather are joined together in the steadfast love manifested in God's covenant with us and with all of creation.

The new father Zechariah testifies to God's manifestation of mercy in keeping his promises to Abraham and his descendents. God is faithful to his holy covenant.

As we continue to pray for the unity of the church, we must not neglect to meet together and encourage one another, spurring each other on towards love and good deeds, saying: "God is faithful."

Questions

How do you understand the idea that God is "faithful"?

In what ways have you discerned God's faithfulness in your life and the life of your faith community in the past year?

What is the "New Covenant" to which God is faithful?

What is the significance of this for the church local and universal?

In what ways does God's faithfulness inspire us to pursue the goal of Christian unity?

Prayer

Faithful God, we give thanks for your steadfast love and your devotedness that extends to the clouds. As we wait in joyful hope, working and praying together for the full visible unity of your church, fill us with confidence in your promises. We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

DAY 5

Together... we are called into fellowship

Isaiah 43:1-7

I will be with you

Psalms 133

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

1 John 1:3-7

We have fellowship with one another"

John 15:12-17

I have called you friends"

Three points for reflection

We are called into fellowship with God the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As we draw closer to the Triune God, we are drawn closer to one another in Christian unity.

Christ has initiated a change in our relationship, calling us friends instead of servants. In response to this relationship of love, we are called out of relationships of power and domination into friendship and love of one another.

Called by Jesus, we witness to the gospel both to those who have not yet heard it and to those who have. This proclamation contains a call into fellowship with God, and establishes fellowship among those who respond.

Questions

How would you define fellowship? How do we express, maintain and develop fellowship?

In what ways do you experience the call into fellowship with God? How do you respond?

How can we have fellowship with Christians from other traditions and people who are not Christians?

In what ways is God calling you into fellowship with others within your church or faith community and beyond?