

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Polarization is a word that describes our nation these days, and that for a nation that once proudly proclaimed that we were a “melting pot” of many nations come together into one. *E Pluribus Unum* became our motto — out of many one. It doesn’t seem that way today. We still have fifty states, but from my vantage point, they seem far from united.

On the other hand, neither is the church winning any awards for her unity. Most of you know our brother Tim Goeglein. Tim often sends me articles to read. One day this week I was inundated with articles from him — most were rather depressing, for they set before my eyes not the oneness of the church but her divisions. It makes me think of the days of Israel during the time of the judges, when “*there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 17:6).

This is what I’m talking about. This is just a sample of three articles that Tim sent me. The first had to do with the “Sierra Pacific synod” of the ELCA. It gleefully announced that it had elected “the first transgender person to serve as bishop in the denomination or in any of the U.S.’ major Christian faiths” (Paul O’Donnell, “Lutherans elect Megan Rohrer first transgender bishop,” [apnews.com](https://www.apnews.com), May 10, 2021). How odd, and dare I say divisive, to elect someone to lead your synod who rejects the reality of God’s creation: “*male and female he created them*” (Gen. 1:27)

The second story has to do with Roman Catholic priests in Germany “across more than 100 churches [who] have blessed gay relationships in recent days in a coordinated — and sometimes live-streamed — defiance of a Vatican order signed by Pope Francis” (Luisa Beck and Chico Harlan, “German priests defy Pope Francis with blessings of same-sex unions,” www.washingtonpost.com, May 10, 2021).

The third story has to do with “Saddleback Church, one of the largest churches in the Southern Baptist Convention and home to . . . pastor Rick Warren [of “purpose-driven” fame]. The megachurch “ordained three women as staff pastors this past weekend, a move that critics say violates the denomination’s statement of faith” (Bob Smietana, “Saddleback Ordains 3 Women, Violating SBC’s ‘Baptist Faith And Message’ Doctrinal Statement,” [ministrywatch.com](https://www.ministrywatch.com), May 11, 2021).

Why this madness, we might be asking ourselves? Jesus prays for us in His church. Surely, it’s because these people were not content with the word Jesus had given them. It’s because they didn’t like it that the world was hating them; they surely prefer friendship with the world. Oh, how exciting and rewarding, they think, to be “*of the world,*” though Jesus says that His disciples “*are not of this world.*” It seems that they have stopped resisting the evil one.

St. James has hard words for them or anyone who might want to pursue such ways: *“You adulterous people!”* he said. *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4).

It bears witness to the weakness of our flesh infected with a damning inclination to sin, yes, that seeks its own way rather than God’s, pride rather than humility, worldliness rather than Godliness. Repent! *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you”* (James 4:7-8, 10).

Understand what Jesus has done for you — what He was about to accomplish on the night when He prayed this High Priestly prayer for you, for Jesus would be arrested on this very night, though innocent of every accusation leveled against Him, indeed, innocent of every sin. Yet, He was condemned for you, sentenced, and executed, bearing upon His tortured body the sins of the world. By this, Jesus set Himself apart from all others for the sake of us all, that we might have life, through this truth of God’s own Son proclaimed by the apostles here sanctified in that truth, received through faith in Him. For *“God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life”* As St. John wrote, *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

Thus, Jesus, on this night of His betrayal, prays for His disciples, and by extension for His church, that they might be kept in this truth and faith, that they might be kept in the holy name given them, that in this name, they may be one, even as God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is one, that they might be unified in word and deed. And the apostles were, but as we heard yesterday, not just the apostolic proclamation of the New Testament, but the Old Testament, too, unified in their proclamation of Christ crucified for us and risen from the dead.

Moreover, we pray for this unity, as we pray the prayer Jesus taught us, particularly the petition, *“Hallowed be Thy name.”* You recall, Luther teaches us: *“God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also.”* Then he asks, *“How is God’s name kept holy?”* And we answer, *“God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven!”*

We are kept in God’s name by God’s holy word, by holding fast to it taught purely and truthfully, and then by seeking to live according to it. Confessing this word and truth, then, we have a oneness that is God given. As we confess of the

church: she is “one holy Church,” though the fullness of her glory may be hidden from our eyes. “The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments” (Augsburg Confession, VII:1-2).

Of course, because we are weak, we often fail to live up to the Godly standards set forth in His word. But we don’t lower His standards to our own profane ones; rather we pray, “Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven.” Help us to lead holy lives, as those sanctified in the truth.

On the other hand, Luther explains, “anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!” When we seek our own way rather than God’s way and truth, we not only profane God’s name, but we also are disruptive of the unity that is ours as we live in the Son and in His unity with the Father and the Spirit. As St. Paul teaches, *“If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and ... [his teachings] produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth”* (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Dear saints, there is a oneness to the church, although her unity is marred by wrong teachings. Nevertheless, Christ is not divided. We who have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, have been baptized into one Christ, as St. Paul says: *“in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit”* (1 Cor. 12:13). Again, St. Paul reminds us, *“in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal. 3:26-28). Thus, as we are kept in the truth of Christ, we are kept by the Father in “the name,” and we are one.

It’s hard to fathom that those who want to claim the name of Christ can depart so far from the truth of Christ and so profane the baptismal name by which they were brought into Christ, that is, into His church. By their false teachings, they destroy the oneness that is ours in Christ Jesus. Therefore, “protect us from this, heavenly Father.” “Keep us in Your name, in unity with You and Your Son; keep us from the evil one. Guard us now while in the world, until, at last, You take us from this world to our heavenly home.”

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.