

In the name of ✝ Jesus. Amen.

It doesn't happen any more — that's a good thing, I think. But I have been told by Zion members who walked to Zion's school, when St. Peter's had their catholic school running at the same time: Zion kids would walk to school on the south side of Creighton, and St. Peter's kids on the north side of Creighton, and if they met in the middle, there would be some "hatin' on Creighton." I'm talking fisticuffs here. Fighting. Lutherans against the Catholics. Catholics against the Lutherans. I'm glad we don't deal with that much any more — even though our current situation is similar: a Lutheran school right next to a Catholic school, albeit a grade school next to a high school. Not that that means there's no fighting at school. There is, after all sinners will be sinners. It's just not the old Lutherans against the Catholics.

There has been through the years a lot of animosity: Catholic and Lutheran. One can understand that. War was waged against the Lutherans by Catholic rulers. Lutherans fought back. There were hard feelings. In this country, the Protestants were ascendant, and the Catholics felt discriminated against. How far have we come in this country from 1960 when a Roman Catholic was first elected president with questions about whether he would be loyal to Pope over country to today where six of our Supreme Court Justices are Roman Catholic, and there's not a Protestant on the court.

But the animosity in the church meant for many a casting out of everything that was too Catholic. I'll bet you've heard that, and may have even said it yourselves. Ascension Service? No way! Too catholic! Ashes on the forehead? No way! Too catholic! Making the sign of the cross? No way! A corpus of the crucified Christ on the cross? No way! You guessed it — too catholic.

But that's just not the way Luther worked. Luther sought a reformation of the church at the time, not an overturning of all things catholic. Only those corrupt things that had made their way into the church's worship and life were to be cut out, like a cancer in the body is, not destroying the whole body.

Some of you know that I listen to a number of podcasts, one of which is one called "Interfaith Voices" hosted by Maureen Fiedler, a Roman Catholic nun. I was surprised recently by her. In conducting an interview, her guest mentioned that it was a corruption in the church that was Luther's motivation for the 95 theses — to deal with abuses in the church, and Maureen admitted: *"Oh, I didn't know that!"* I don't know how you can be an educated nun and not know that. But this is what Luther sought to do: reform the church, not throw out the proverbial "baby with the bathwater."

The distinctions are not only with the Roman Catholics, either. There are differences as well among Protestant Christians. The Reformation started off in a conservative way with Luther and the magisterial reformers, but differences were quickly emphasized, and radical reformers began tearing down statues and breaking stained glass windows and casting off vestments and initiating rebaptisms and rejecting Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Oh my!

There are truly differences among us, significant differences: not just with Lutherans and Catholics, but also Lutherans and Protestants. And this is said with the backdrop of Jesus praying in our Gospel lesson: "*Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that **they may be one**, even as we are one.*"

And not to discount the differences — they are significant, and they do keep us from the full manifestation of our oneness here on earth — but the fact is, indeed, kept in the Father's name, we are one. I'm not talking about those in the world who say that God is not Father, that He has no Son. They are not kept in the Father's name; we are not one with them. I'm not talking about those in the world who say that the Father and the Son are not one, along with the Holy Spirit, that the Son is not the only-begotten of the Father from eternity, that He is not of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made. They are not kept in the Father's name; we are not one with them.

But those who confess the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and especially Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, who came down from heaven for us, was born for us, becoming man for us while never giving up His divinity, who grew in wisdom and stature for us, was baptized for us, preached and taught and did mighty wonders for us, was handed over for us, was condemned for us, was smitten and scourged for us, was lifted up on a cross for us, bearing our sins for us, gave up His spirit for us, was buried for us, rose again on the third day for us, ascended back into heaven for us, will come again for us—we are one.

Jesus said, "*I am coming to you,*" praying to the Father of His ascension. And while He was here He kept His disciples in the Father's name and in His word. Now He was departing, and so now He sends out His apostles with His word and charge: preach and teach, baptize and forgive. The need was so great that we hear of the necessity to replace the only one that was lost, Judas, "*the son of destruction,*" that Matthias who witnessed all these things might also be sent out to preach these things with the others: Christ, crucified and risen for you, forgiveness of sins in His name.

It's into this one body of Christ that we have been baptized by the one Spirit, St. Paul says. We are His. He is ours. As St. John says, as we believe the testimony concerning Him, we have the Son of God, Jesus—He is ours—and we have life.

Therefore, Paul again says, “*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.*” Again, St. Paul tells us to strive to maintain this oneness through love— “*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the **unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*”

There is a reality of oneness in the body of Christ. We are not a bunch of His bodies, but we are “*one, holy, Christian and apostolic church*”—one body. We confess it; it is an article of faith. The Augsburg Confession teaches, “*one holy Church is to remain forever.*” It is, in reality, and yet is not seen by our eyes. It is hidden from our view, for this oneness is a result of faith, birthed in Holy Baptism, sustained by the word, fed in the Holy Supper, but a faith that none but Christ Himself can see. It’s like dark matter in the universe, which scientists know is there because they can see the results of its gravity, but they cannot see it. So it is with faith; it’s invisible to our eyes, but the results of faith are visible in its fruits of love.

On the other hand, what is also visible in the church results from a corruption of the truth of God that Jesus has given to us. That corruption comes in part from the evil one’s corrupting influences. He has sought it from the beginning, and revelled in Adam’s and his offspring’s demise. He’s still at it. The corruption comes in part from the world, from loving the world too much or, at least, trying to get the world to stop hating us, or from trying to be too much of the world, when we have been *ekklesia’d* —ekklesia, that’s the Greek word for church, and it means “the called out”—so we have been *ekklesia’d*, called out of the world that we might be sent into the world with the truth of Jesus, of God’s love, of the forgiveness of sins, etc. The corruption comes from our own fallen reason that falls prey to false teachers that twist the Scriptures to their own liking or for their own benefit. The corruption comes when we seek to elevate the testimony of men and the doctrines of men over the testimony of God which is truth.

Repent, and pray, “Lord, help us,” for we know He hears the constant prayer of His Son, crucified, risen, and ascended for us, who sits now at His right hand, making intercession for us. He defends us from the evil one and his cunning ways. He guards and protects us from the evil of this world. He brings to nothing the errors of the false teachers. He teaches us the Father’s ways as we listen to Him whom the Father sent to lead us in the truth.

As the fledgling church did, grant that we may devote ourselves to the Apostles' teaching, and to the Fellowship, which is the Breaking of Bread and the Prayers. Sanctify us in this truth. Give us faithful pastors to proclaim this truth. Help us to live our lives, fed by these gifts, trusting in the forgiveness they bestow, rejoicing in the eternal life that is ours in the Son, proclaiming Your truth also to others, and loving those whom You send our way. And grant that, acknowledging the differences, we might nevertheless rejoice in the oneness we have with Christians everywhere—Lutherans, Catholics, Protestants, Christians in the US, in the Dominican Republic, in Brazil, Christians in Ghana, in South Sudan, in Liberia. Yes, Lord, we confess, we are one in the oneness that is in Your only Son, O Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is is Your Tri-Unity.

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