

**Homily - One with All Others**  
**The Rev. Rob Keim**  
**April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – St. Barnabas Episcopal Church**

Today, I start with Maya Angelou's poem called "Alone."

Lying, thinking  
Last night  
How to find my soul a home  
Where water is not thirsty  
And bread loaf is not stone  
I came up with one thing  
And I don't believe I'm wrong  
That nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Sometimes, since Covid, it seems like we are all a little more isolated than we were before the pandemic. God created us as social creatures. We thrive when we are in healthy loving relationships with others, so we are we feeling more and more alone?

I dream of a world in which we are united again with one other. I can imagine a world in which we look with affection at our differences. I believe in a world in which we see God in all and around all. I dream of a world in which we can see how extensive God's love is for all of creation and for all people.

Today's Gospel reading has Jesus using two related metaphors. In the first, Jesus is the shepherd who leads the sheep in and out of the gate. Jesus cares for the sheep, and the sheep identify with their shepherd.

In the second metaphor, Jesus is the gate. Like a door, the gate controls who goes in or out. And for some, this means that Jesus is the great divider. Jesus divides the sheep from the goats. Jesus separates the wheat from the chafe. Jesus judges some as worthy and lets them in, and he judges others as unworthy and he keeps them out. For some, there is great comfort in having Jesus as the great divider. Jesus rewards those who have done the right things or properly believed. He is the gate that keeps those others out so that we can remain untainted by the dirty people.

Now, I am not one of those who sees Jesus as the great divider. That view would go against my view of our Triune God, and my understanding of the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus. Instead, for me God is the great uniter - the ultimate connector.

We have a God who created all and declared it good.

We have Christ who is throughout the universe as the perfect combination of spirit and matter.

We have a Holy Spirit who connects all things in that universe, and certainly connects all people.

We have a God of unlimited grace and mercy whose very nature is to love us unconditionally.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus says, "I am the gate." He does not say, "I am the wall, the barrier, the enclosure, the dividing line." He does not say, "I am that which separates, isolates, segregates, and incarcerates." Instead, Jesus is the gate, the door, the opening, the passageway, the bridge. These are the places where freedom begins.

Needless to say, most of us, left to ourselves, don't associate "gates" with freedom. We think of bars and locks and alarms and enclosures. We imagine toddler gates, maybe, or puppy training gates. Prison gates and gated communities.

But what if Jesus is a different kind of gate? A gate that opens out instead of closing in? Not the barrier itself, but the aperture in it. A place of release. Movement. Spaciousness. Liberty, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."

Furthermore, when we look at Jesus as the great connector we see a gate that is open to all. It is open to all irrespective of whether a person has been good or bad.

This is a gate that has qualities of grace and mercy. This is a gate which includes all, welcomes all, and invites all.

Today, I want to invite you to let go of any notion of God that divides us, and instead embrace the certainty that we have a God who unites. We are united to God and we are united to one another.

That is a message of hope that is sorely needed in our world. It is a message of reality that we can share with the world. We are all one with one another.

Now, when we have Jesus as the gate of union, then we can look around and see that we have been gather together with people who are very different than we are.

We often surround ourselves with people who are already like us, but Jesus calls us to reach out and be in union with the other. Jesus calls us to be connected to our enemies. During his lifetime, Jesus was constantly reaching out and connecting to

the people around him, but sometimes we reject being united, especially with people that bring out the worst in us, or we bring out the worst in them.

In his book “The Great Divorce” C.S. Lewis tells the story of a bus load of people who travel from hell to heaven. And, some of the people who had the blessing of traveling to heaven get back on the bus and go back to hell. One of the common reasons for leaving heaven is because some saw people in heaven that they didn’t want to be around. One person with an inflated ego is offended because she sees people in heaven that she considered beneath her. Another leaves because he will no longer be able to dominate others in heaven. But the most common reason people choose to leave heaven is because they see people who have wounded them in life. Resentment and trauma can lead a person away from God because we can’t stand that God would be connected to someone like that. We reject unity with God and others because our wounds hurt so much. We mistakenly insist that God have as little use for that person as we do.

Is it any wonder why Jesus taught so much about forgiveness and healing? Our false self and wounded ego cause us to reject unity with God and others and move back toward separation and division. Sometimes we prefer a Jesus who is a gate that divides us. What part of your own history causes you to prefer division? Who are the voices in your own life that lead to division? Can you silence these voices? Can you turn off that noise so that you can focus on unity?

And, as followers of Jesus, I want to suggest to you today that we should all be working to be united with all others, and not just those who are already like us.

Some may think that this unity is only possible in the next life. But, Jesus tells us to be his hands, and feet, and voice so that these Godly things can happen in this world.

I hope you can imagine a world in which we are united to God and to others. We must believe in a future that we can imagine. followers of Jesus we must work against the dis-ease that we all continue to feel. The fear of being around others. The uncertainty of what is going to happen in the future. The anxiety that hits so many of us. When we focus on the unity we have through God, then we work against the dis-ease that is going to last so much longer than the Coronavirus disease.

Remember the basis of the world “religion” is religio which is Latin for re-ligament or reconnect. We have a specially calling in our churches to help people re-ligament or reconnect. After all the basis of spirituality is connection, connection to God, others, self, and the rest of non-human creation.

So, in a time that has so many shrill voices, may we be light. May we mirror beauty back to others so that they can see themselves in our smiling eyes. May we drown out the noise with songs of unity. We have a God of unity. Embrace that unity with God and with others.