

## ONE CALL, ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM

May 16, 1992 -- 150th Anniversary Celebration --  
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*I [Paul], a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

"... to maintain the unity of the Spirit..." All too frequently, life's events and conditions conspire against us to prevent our recognizing our unity in the Spirit. Our personal struggles, which seem to us unique, our pain and hurt, our failures and disappointments, all separate us from one another and convince us of the illusion of our isolation. Age gaps, gender gaps, racial gaps, economic gaps, generation gaps, perpetuate this illusion and conceal from us the glorious truth proclaimed to us by the Gospel: that we are not alone, that the Spirit of God joins us together as one.

An event such as we celebrate today, the 150th anniversary of the founding of this parish, helps us to lay hold of that truth, to grasp the depth of its mystery, and to see its implications for our lives. For our unity in the Spirit extends not just to one another, whom we are to love with patience and eagerness, but also to those who have come before us and to those who will follow after us.

In preparation for this celebration, I have been reading through the Vestry minutes, which we still have from 1875 on, and other historical material. I have found that those who have preceded us in this parish had a number of things in common with us as well as some differences. A frequent item throughout the minutes, for an example of the former, is the election of someone to replace a Vestryman, "who had removed from the parish." People moving away has been a constant part of life in Chapel Hill.

Many other things have not changed either. The minutes of June 19, 1934, which happen to have been taken by the Rector, Mr. Lawrence, reflect some familiar themes: "Finances in rather bad shape. Receipts about \$300 short of what [was] expected... Treasurer requested to send out notes in effort to collect money. Matter of leaks in the church was discussed." That was only nine years after this church was built!

Nor have there been any lack of controversial decisions made. The founding of the parish itself and the building of the chapel were controversial. Some in the University thought it divisive and sectarian for all students not to worship together in the University Chapel. In 1912, the controversy was whether to build a parish house and/or a rectory on the parish property; some felt that an additional building would hurt the University. After several parish meetings it was finally decided to build the parish house on the parish lot, but the rectory on the old rectory lot.

A few years later, the question of whether to build a bigger church was controversial not only in the parish, but beyond as well. A ringing editorial in an area newspaper spoke out against it. Having been tipped off by a female parishioner that the picturesque architecture of the chapel might be obscured by being built onto, the outraged writer concluded a long editorial by saying:

Of course it is none of our business what the Episcopalians of Chapel Hill do to or with their building; but we can't resist the impulse to wish the recalcitrant sister who called the matter to our attention complete success in her opposition to the progress that would disturb a tendril of the ivy which clings to the little chapel, which is in itself a seven-day sermon more potent

than any we ever remember having heard inside it.

On Wednesday evening at Evening Prayer, many of us heard Emmet Gribbin tell of the controversy that raged here when he was campus minister, fifty years ago, some thirty years after that editorial, of the "pro-ivy forces" and the "anti-ivy forces." Obviously the "anti-ivy forces," of which Emmet was a part, ultimately won out, but unfortunately for him, not until several years after he had left!

Besides regular parish controversies, another thing that has not changed is the cooperative spirit between what we now refer to as the downtown churches, manifest so generously to us during both last summer's and our present renovations. The minutes of April 30, 1917 reveal that the Vestry offered to the Presbyterian Church the use of both what we now call the chapel and the (then) new parish house for use during the construction of the new Presbyterian Church.

But if some things have not changed, other things have. The minutes are full, for example, of rector's resignations. Every year or two, it seemed, the Vestry would have to call a new rector, and frequently, several calls would be issued before one would be accepted. In 1887, for example, no less than nine calls were issued before the tenth choice, the Rev. R. E. Wright of Philadelphia, accepted. He, however, resigned after one week in the parish, saying that "the ways and customs of this diocese were so different from what he had been accustomed to that he did not think he would be able to do the good he would like in the parish." After an eleventh call was declined, the twelfth choice accepted and stayed for one year! Alfred Lawrence, who came in 1921, and who broke the mold by staying twenty-three years, was himself the sixth person called by that Vestry.

The Vestry not only spent a good deal of time calling rectors, they also had a rectory to worry about and maintain. The minutes of Sept. 7, 1884 reveal that "The Junior Warden was authorized to rent the Rectory to Mr. Charles Malone [the great-grandfather of Ted Malone, our deacon, who also at a later point in his life became a deacon] at \$6.25 per month payable in advance." It goes on to say, "The Warden was directed to supply the parts of the Rectory Fence requiring renewal of Barbed Wire." This was apparently to protect gardens from the pigs who roamed freely in Chapel Hill!

Other vignettes from the minutes that show how parish life has changed include these: The minutes of June 26, 1898 state that after issuing a call to be rector to a man in Morganton (who subsequently declined it!) the Vestry "ordered that notices about bicycles be posted. On failure [of] bicyclists to give proper heed, it was decided that the church yard would be closed as to prevent its use as a bicycle path." On September 25, 1917, St. Hilda's Guild requested permission of the Vestry to give a fund-raising Bridge Party in the Parish House. "After considerable discussion" the request was granted. The minutes of six weeks later, however, state that "In view of the Bishop's objection to the use of the Parish House for card parties... St. Hilda's Guild had withdrawn its request." It went on to say that "It is also the wish of the Bishop and his advisers that the Parish House be not used for dancing." Later whether motion pictures could be shown in the parish house became the issue. And finally, I share with you this sentence from the minutes of the Vestry meeting of May 14, 1919, "Mr. J. A. Holmes and Mr. H.C. Wills were appointed a committee to investigate the advisability of furnishing the several pews with hat-hooks and were clothed with the power to act upon their investigations."

Despite changing times, and not only because of the similarities which bind us, we are one in the Spirit with our predecessors in this parish. Not only because we share the same name, "the Chapel of the Cross," and the same history; not only because we share the same parish lot and buildings; not only because, despite many changes, we share the same basic worship. Our unity with those whom we celebrate and give thanks for on this 150th anniversary runs much deeper than that. It is based on one

"call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism." It is given to us by the "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."

Because of that unifying life and love of God, we share also with them the call or mission proclaimed in today's Gospel: "I do not pray for these only," Jesus says, "but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

That mission, accepted by those who went before us, and lived by them both imperfectly and wonderfully, is now ours. We are now, as the founding document says, "the congregation of Christian people" in this place. We are to be the ones who are so one with one another and with God, so forbearing of one another in love, that the world may come to know that the Father has sent his son, Jesus.

We are a diverse congregation, with different worship styles and theological viewpoints, different budget and staffing and building priorities, different perspectives on moral and social and political issues. If we were each choosing who would belong to this parish, we might each of us leave out at least some of the others who are here. No doubt some of you may wish that I had followed the example of the many priests who declined to serve as Rector of this parish, rather than that of the few who have accepted!

But our unity is not based on our similarities or on our agreements or on our mutual attractiveness. Rather it overflows from our one "call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all." Acting out of that profound mystery rather than out of our illusion of isolation, we are to "lead a life worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

We are to be eager to maintain that unity not only with ourselves, and not only with those who have gone before us, but even with those who are to follow after us. One of the great benefits of a celebration like this is the perspective it gives. Those who founded this parish, those who saw it through hard times, those who celebrated its 100th anniversary, whether they knew it or not, were not doing something which affected merely themselves. As all of us here can attest in one way or another, their actions and their faith have had a profound effect on us. And so will ours on future generations.

Some of these children who are singing in the choir this morning, and reading a lesson and participating in the service, will be here for the 200th anniversary of this parish, as will some of their children and grandchildren. They will talk of the common struggles and the peculiarities and the contributions of those who preceded them. And if we have grasped our unity with them and our obligation to them and our call to prepare the way for them, then they, too, will find themselves equipped to be "the congregation of Christian people" in this place. They, too, will hear the words of the Gospel addressed to them, "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-6; John 17:6a, 15-23