



**Celebrating What Unites Us
As God's Family
July 26, 2020 Middleburgh,
New York**



Warm up Songs (Reggie Harris)

Welcome & Call to Worship (Pastor Dave Houck)

Leader: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

People: May the peace of God be in our hearts as we share our faith with one another.

Leader: We are one human family with God as our Father. United to give and receive the strength of each other's faith.

People: May the Holy Spirit keep us true to Christ as we encourage one another to the Christian life.

Hymn: Let There Be Peace on Earth

Unison Prayer: Gracious God / you sent your Son to live among us / to reveal your great love / and to share our suffering. / Bless your people with compassion for one another and care for the earth / so that we / may give a powerful witness to our world, / of the work of your Spirit among us. Amen

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 12:12-27

A Time for Children of all ages (Pastor Mary Ellen Moore)

Sung Response: Reggie Harris [In the Shelter of Each Other]

Gospel: Mark 8:34-37 (Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM)

Message (Friar Peter Chepaitis, OFM) [Can you name that hymn?]

♪ *We are many parts,/ we are all one body, and the gifts we have,/ we are given to share.
May the Spirit of love /make us one indeed.*

*One the love that we share,/ one our hope in despair,
one the cross that we bear. ♪*



I believe the words I just sang. They are based on the reading from Paul that we heard & Pastor Mary Ellen reflected on. They are part of what Christians say we believe, but we are still challenged to live them in a “me first” world too often infected by racist structures and unearned privilege.

I grew up in the 1950’s in a family that was somewhat diverse for its time – my father’s parents came from Lithuania & my mother’s emigrated from Italy. I was taught to respect and care about everyone as part of God’s family but as a child & adolescent, I didn’t know many black people. I didn’t even have many friends

who were Protestant, or Jewish since I grew up in a Catholic family & went to Catholic school through college. Thankfully, I’ve been blessed by meeting many more persons of different races & religious traditions since I became a Franciscan Friar.

One of the roots of racism is simple ignorance or lack of contact with people of different backgrounds. I remember when I was 19 & was supervising a summer baseball league for 13-16 year olds. One of the players, a black kid, slid into home & scraped his leg. I drove him to my home a few blocks away and my mom helped me patch him up. My grandmother from Italy was visiting my mother and as she watched, remarked, in Italian, “è rosso!” “It’s red,” referring to his blood. She was surprised. She didn’t realize that the blood of people of all races was the same color.

I grew up with the conviction that I needed to respect all people, but I was not always conscious of how the world, the culture around me, my education and TV had infected me with assumptions about race & privilege which didn’t reflect the values I wanted to live by.

As I watched in horror at the scene of George Floyd dying & was reminded of how many have died by violence just because they were black or brown or Asian, or Jewish or Muslim. I resonated with interviews with Jane Elliot – a teacher like my mother – a white woman who often speaks about a simple & powerful truth: **“God created one race, the human race.”** [repeat] In 1968, the day after Martin Luther King Jr was murdered, she did an experiential exercise to explain racism for her all white 3rd grade class in a small Iowa town. She helped them to experience what it was like to be put down or to feel superior for a day because of an arbitrary physical characteristic [in this case, eye color]. The next day they switched positions. They were powerfully affected & it got her in a lot of trouble - The kind that John Lewis might call “good trouble.” She is 87 now & is still doing this exercise as a way of helping people experience racism – or any kind of privilege - so awareness can led to healing. The story is available in many interviews & a documentary on the internet. It touched me so deeply that when I filled out the census questionnaire & came to the section that asked for my race, I hesitated. The choices were white, black, Asian etc.

The last box was marked “*some other race.*” I checked that one and wrote in “*Human.*” I later discovered that the separation into different races was a human invention in the 18th century & that we are all at least 30th to 50th cousins by our DNA. One of the roots of toxic racism is ignorance of history and science not to mention the values of Scripture.

Another one of the roots of racism is a cultural tendency to see everything from my own experience & privilege. When I was a campus minister at SBU, in Western NY, south of Buffalo, I remember being with a group of students & staff listening to a talk by Yolanda King, the daughter of ML King. One of the white students asked her, “What can we do to fight against racism on campus and in our world?” She immediately answered, “**anything!** As long as you do it **together** & get to know each other.”

I remember a time when I was with Reggie & Kim, where they had done a program for the students at St Bonaventure. One morning we went to brunch at a local restaurant. I went to the salad bar first & chose the house dressing. I liked it. When I returned to our table, they asked me which dressing I had chosen. I replied, without thinking, “*The one that’s flesh colored.*” And what did you both say? – “**Not our flesh.**” At that time we were already good friends – and we laughed a lot. But I never made that mistake again.

At that moment, I realized that I needed to grow in my ability to look at the world through the eyes of others – those who are different from me, yet part of the same human race. America has been called a melting pot, but I would rather use the image of a salad: We are wonderfully different, like tomatoes, cucumbers & spinach, but mixed in the same bowl.

During this pandemic & time of racial unrest, I am called to let go of the illusion that my perspective is the only one that’s true, or normative or at least more important than yours. I am called by my faith in Christ and my own best humanity to remember that I am part of one family with people who are different, especially those who are oppressed or rejected or stigmatized in any way.

In the Gospel passage Sr. Anna read Jesus says, “*If you want to be my disciple, you must renounce self and take up your cross and follow me.*” I believe that also applies to anyone who wants to live as a decent human being. To follow the values of Christ is to be the best human being I can be. I am called to bear the cross of my still imperfect humanity, and the cross of my identity – in little ways & bigger ones. I am still continually learning to walk in the shoes of someone else and to see with their eyes.



One of the symbols of the cross I am called to bear today, as the song says, is this – [a mask or facial covering.] It’s not a big thing, but it’s uncomfortable, it’s inconvenient. It’s a small but significant way that I can protect you & every other member of the human race that I meet, from a virus I may not even know I carry. A way I can carry the cross of compassion.

The healing for both racial injustice & a world wide plague is rooted in living the spiritual, historical & scientific truth that we are one human race living on one earth, our common home. But knowing that is not enough, I need to be willing to bear the cross of love, the cross of caring about your needs the cross of seeing life from your side. That’s what I am called to do as a follower of Christ & as a member of the human family.

I'm going to end with a verse of the song I began with followed by the refrain. I invite you to sing each line of the refrain after me.

♪ *So my pain is pain for you, in your joy is my joy too; all is brought together in the Lord.
We are many parts, / [repeat] we are all one body, [repeat]
and the gifts we have, / we are given to share.
May the Spirit of love / make us one indeed.
One the love that we share, / one our hope in despair, / one the cross that we bear.* ♪

Litany of Unity (Cheryl Cater)

Leader: Praise be to God who unites us as one family.

People: There is one God, one Lord and therefore one church, but with many different responsibilities.

Leader: God made us different people but with our faith to serve the Lord.

People: We celebrate our unity in Christ and our diversity in ministry that all people may be brought into our Lord's saving grace.

All: We praise God for the many different gifts with which he has endowed His church, united as the Body of Christ.

Hymn: Bind us Together

Closing Prayer (Reggie Harris)

Lord's Prayer

Hymn: "If I Had a Hammer"

Benediction: (Peter / Anna)



Link to video of the service

<https://www.facebook.com/464815553885239/posts/1172114539822000/?vh=e>