

Easter 7
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

June 1, 2014
Rev. Paul Moore

The Empty Tomb as Community

As you all know, my mother slipped out of this life into the Larger Life a week ago Thursday. As we did with our father a year ago, to usher them to the gates of heaven we did what we always did as a family. We sang. It was especially poignant for us because our mother taught us to sing, to love music and to appreciate what singing means to being human.

What was also especially meaningful was that all four of her children were present. On Wednesday night a week ago, the night before she slipped into the Larger Life, we had had a particularly splendid time of singing. The four of us were there, including two in-laws, two nieces, a nephew-in-law and two great-granddaughters. We sang in English, Spanish and Tsafiqui. We sang our hearts out, we sang our love for God and for our mother. We had gathered to be family at this most significant of times.

You were extremely gracious with me while I was away, tending to my mother in her last days. I offered updates on what was happening in e-mails and you kindly circulated them. I received dozens of e-mails from members of this parish, reminding me of your love, your support and your prayers. I felt connected, upheld and strengthened by your expressions, and I am so grateful. Others weighed in as well, or bishop expressed his support, as did others in the Diocese, the President of the Standing Committee, the Canon for Renewal, Fr. Colin Kelly, and others. Members of the Board of Honduras Good Works, LULAC and of the Rotary Club also expressed their concern. I have rarely felt so connected to so many loving, caring, and good-hearted people.

My situation was not unlike the disciples. In the first lesson Jesus meets the disciples at the predetermined place outside of town. He is risen from the dead, and now he is rising to heaven once more, completing the final work he came to do. Then Luke notes a very telling detail. He lists all the apostles by name. He notes that they are gathered in the upper room, the place of safety and revelation. Just like my family at a significant moment in our lives, they, too, gather together. They have heard Jesus' words, they anticipate the coming of the Holy Spirit, and now they gather together, they huddle, and they pray and offer praises to God.

In John's Gospel the evangelist records Jesus' preparation for this moment. We call it Jesus' Farewell Discourse. Jesus speaks part of the time to the gathered disciples, and part of the time about the coming Church. It's all recorded in rather convoluted phrasing,

but in the end there are some recurring themes that stand out. One of those themes is the word "in." Jesus is in the Father and we are in Jesus. The dance of the Trinity is a mutual self-giving such that if you've seen one you've seen the other. This is the glory to which Jesus refers—and we are caught up in that same glorious mystery.

What must it be like to be one as Jesus and the Father are one? I don't think it's just impossible idealism or Jesus would not have prayed it, but it is an ideal. We will never fully achieve it in this life, but we can pursue it, approach it, get close, get it right more and more times than not. We just have to figure out what it could look like. For that we have to look at the relationship that is its source, that of Jesus with the Father, in other words, the Trinity. Let's look at two aspects of being one.

Being one is foundational to being a human being and a Christian. Recently, after Karisse had made a batch of her wonderful Amish Friendship Bread, we cut a small loaf and enjoyed a piece hot with butter on it. Wow, was that good! After our little snack there was a crumb on the cutting board. I pinched it between my fingers and ate it. Instantly the unmistakable flavor of Amish Friendship Bread once again flooded my mouth. The crumb was not a whole slice, and the slice was not the whole loaf, and the loaf was not the whole batch, and the batch is not the sum total of her production of this fine food. But the crumb was recognizable as sharing the identity of the others. So in the same way the dance of the Trinity spins the world into being. Being a dance of love, what lies at the heart of creation is unconditional and limitless love. Each element in creation holds at its best a reflection of that love, one part this, one part that, yet sharing a common essence, a common identity. Like that crumb, none of us are the whole.

The crumb does not look like a slice or a loaf of bread. We, too, do not always show clearly the shape of that love. It is often hidden under the ragged edges of an ego in control. Our very real struggles for wholeness express our sense that we do not have it. But the essence is there, unmistakably and completely. We are already created by, in and for love. Christ has already died and risen again for us. That love already wraps us in its loving embrace. Being human is living in, by and for that love. I believe this is what Jesus meant by saying that we would be "in" him as he is "in" the father. The further we are from being human the more disharmony there will be, the closer we are to that ideal the more "in" one another we will be.

Being one means having the same purpose with different functions. I stepped out of my office the other day into a bright and clear sunshine. I thought in my head, "There is nothing like the clear air of the mountains on a sunny day. Elevation makes the world crisper to the eye." What makes it so? Is it the thinner air? Is it the relative lack of humidity? Is it the subjective sense of coolness against the heat of the sun? Or is it a

nostalgic memory of Quito, Ecuador, a city at 9000 ft. elevation in which I was born? One might say that all of them together gave me the sensation of clarity in the air. All were completely and totally necessary in all their differences, and all comprise one single experience.

The unity of the Trinity is not in uniformity, it is in variety of function and role in the context of a shared purpose and identity. The Church, too, has a common purpose, but within that purpose there exists a wide variety of roles and functions. The differences may even be best distinguished by how we describe our faith—that is, our theology. We can be one without being the same, in fact, we need one another to be different.

So what is our common purpose? It is to show the love of God in this world. You and you alone, can make manifest that particular aspect of the love of God that is yours to show. You are the only place where I can see it. I need you, and you need me, and we need one another to be different from each other. Our oneness lies in our common vision of the transformation of the world by God's love.

Just over a week ago our small community was rocked to the core by an awful tragedy. Three young people were killed along with the pilot in a small airplane crash out at Whiskey Creek. All were students at Aldo Leopold High School. One was the only daughter of a widow. The pilot, from reports I have heard, did everything he could have done, to the point of heroically choosing a crash site that was not in the middle of a trailer court. When my mother died she left behind a full and meaningful story, a legacy for many, many people, blessings that continue to bless. But when young people die there is precious little legacy. their stories end abruptly with no resolution to the themes that have begun to emerge. We want desperately to know that these lives were not lost in vain. That there might be no meaningful story behind them, no point, no rhyme or reason is intolerable. It implies that existence itself is absurd, pointless and meaningless.

I can imagine that the disciples wrestled with questions like these after the crucifixion. The resurrection was not only the return of joy, but a vindication that at the core of the world is the great story of unconditional and limitless love. These four people WERE wrapped in the arms of God's love. They are in the light we have yet to come to know. They no longer suffer as we do. From their point of view they see the story clearly and it makes sense, and it is the story of love. We, on the other hand, are not yet in full light. We are striving to make sense of it all, to discover a way of telling the story that makes it the story of love. I don't know what that is yet, or I would tell you. But if I believe in the resurrection, and I do, I believe that the story exists for each one of them. It is the story of being created in, by and for love, and of being and living in a community of love. We can find some solace in knowing that the story is there, even if we cannot see it. It lives

in the context of all of our stories, in the story of humanity itself.

We can strive to tell our own stories as stories of those who are created in, by and for love, who live in a community of love, who are "in" one another, each one giving what is theirs to give, and receiving what is given by the others—and bearing witness to love's transformation of the world.