

August 5, 2018
11th Sunday after Pentecost (Yr. B)
Sermon series: *Life in Christ*
Part 3: “Bound together” - Ephesians 4:1-16
The Rev. Carenda Baker

To begin this sermon, we are invited to listen to the story in song titled “Betty’s Diner”. The yellow folded sheet in the bulletin has the printed lyrics to follow along as we listen.

PLAY SONG – “BETTY’S DINER” (by Carrie Newcomer)

***“Here we are all in one place
The wants and wounds of the human race
Despair and hope sit face to face
When you come in from the cold . . .”***

We come together like those ordinary, hard working customers who frequent Betty’s Diner. Some of us hope to find something here to meet an unnamed desire, quench a gnawing emptiness, or help relieve a burden. Others of us are looking for a place to belong, a community that can help give our life meaning, purpose, guidance, and direction as we use our gifts. A gathering where we know someone cares, will listen and meet us right where we are. Still others of us secretly long for an experience of the holy that will satisfy, renew, heal and strengthen us. Maybe even change us.

So, for the next few minutes, let’s imagine the Church, the living body of Christ as the Holy Divine Diner. It is not yet fully completed, but the “Open for Business” sign hangs in the window. This Diner’s reach far exceeds Betty’s Diner, the Orchards Restaurant, or the McDonald’s fast food franchise.

The founder, proprietor, and benefactor of the Divine Diner is our holy and gracious God. The employees of the Diner – the pot and pan washers, the table setters, the decorators, the greeters and seaters, the wait staff, and the custodial clean-up crew who sweeps the floor, empties the trash, and cleans the bathrooms are us - Jesus’ people, the body of Christ.

The apostle Paul and his followers had a huge hand in writing the employee manual for the Divine Diner. Here is a little snippet from that manual, in contemporary language, (which sounds an awful lot like what we heard in the first part of the Ephesians reading).

“I want you to get out there and walk – better yet, run! – on the road God called you to travel. I don’t want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline – not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.” * That apostle Paul - he was so in love with Jesus. You can hear his passion for the work of Christ’s body, the Church, even as he’s writing the employee manual!

So that these biblical instructions won't get lost, here is the short, memorable list of guidelines for us as employees of the Divine Diner. There are four.

1. Show up.
2. Our designated daily uniform is to be humility and gentleness.
3. Always carry with you daily the primary tool we absolutely cannot work without - patience to the -nth degree – patience, patience, and more patience with each other.
4. It's best to take the long view of our calling to this work because the Divine owner certainly does.

As part of the Jesus movement, we know that we are going to be living, serving, and praising God together for eternity. So we need to practice right now, getting along with each other. God is good and powerful, but God is not going to wave a magic wand to force us into acting with love toward each other. That requires our faithful ongoing intentional effort and prayer. It is hard and painstaking work - "maintaining the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace." And this by the way does not mean we share uniformity in all things, or that life together will be free of conflict.

The rub is we don't have a choice about who our co-workers are at the Diner. If we were in charge, we would be hiring a whole different caliber of employee. Fortunately we're not in charge, and God is not nearly so picky about the Diner staff as we would be, if God had asked for our opinion.

This fact – that we have to live and work with people we did not, and some of us would not choose as co-laborers – can be a source of major frustration. Sometimes with each other we become irritated. Disappointed. Angry. Caught up in misunderstanding and hurt feelings. And praise God, there are also times when we are caring with each other. Kind. Encouraging. Hopeful. Prayerful. Generous and joyful.

The body of Christ, that's us, the Divine Diner staff - we are not a static unchanging, hodge-podge collection of people. We are a living breathing organism. Human, yet animated by the Spirit of the living Christ. As a living organism, we grow, we stagnate, or we die. A living body has to be tended and cared for. It withers away when neglected, and usually won't thrive when individual parts are disconnected, cut off and left alone to fend for themselves.

One final crucial piece to know about God's Divine Diner is what's served on the menu. There is one premier entrée, the mainstay. It has been exquisitely prepared by the Holy Proprietor. That main food is the bread of life, always served to us right along with the overflowing cup of sacrificial love, salvation and joy. This is the Divine Diner's signature meal, the specialty of the house.

As part of Christ's body, the Church, we need strength and courage to face the challenges of life in this world. We require daily strength to help us persevere when Jesus' way of love is difficult to walk. We need the power of forgiveness and renewal when we have turned aside from God and one another and lost our way.

This is why it's so important that when we're together we are fed soul food. Christ, the bread of life offers an unending supply of strength, sustenance, and fuel for service. And brothers and sisters, who of us doesn't need soul food? We need to feed on Christ, ingest Christ, lest we, His body in the world, wither away and starve to death without him.

Bound together in Christ - that's us – one body, one spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

“Let's take our lead from Christ, the source of everything we do together, and who keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love”. ** May it be so.

**Ephesians 4:1-3, Eugene Peterson, The Message.*

***Ephesians 4:15-16, Eugene Peterson, The Message.*

BETTY'S DINER (Lyrics and music by Carrie Newcomer)

Miranda works the late night counter
In a little joint called Betty's Diner
Chrome and checkered tablecloths
One steamy windowpane

She got the job that shaky fall
And after hours she'll write till dawn
With a nod and smile she serves them all

Here we are all in one place
The wants and wounds of the human race
Despair and hope sit face to face
When you come in from the cold

Let her fill your cup with something kind
Eggs and toast like bread and wine

Arthur lets his Earl Grey steep
Since April it's been hard to sleep
You know they tried most everything
Yet it took her in the end

Kevin tests new saxophones
But he swears he's leaving quality control
For the Chicago scene, or New Orleans
Where they still play righteous horns

Here we are all in one place
The wants and wounds of the human race
Despair and hope sit face to face
When you come in from the cold

Let her fill your cup with something kind
Eggs and toast like bread and wine
She's heard it all so she don't mind

Jack studies here after work
To get past high school he's the first
And his big hands seem just as comfortable
With a hammer or a pen

Emma leaned and kissed his cheek
And when she did his knees got weak
Miranda smiles at 'em and winks

Here we are all in one place
The wants and wounds of the human race
Despair and hope sit face to face
When you come in from the cold
Let her fill your cup with something kind
Eggs and toast like bread and wine
She's heard it all so she don't mind

You never know who'll be your witness
You never know who grants forgiveness
Look to heaven or sit with us

Deidra bites her lip and frowns
She works the stop and go downtown
She's pretty good at the crossword page
And she paints her eyes blue black

Tristan comes along sometimes
Small for his age and he's barely five
But she loves him like a mama lion

Veda used to drink a lot
Almost lost it all before she stopped
Comes in at night with her friend Mike
Who runs the crisis line

Michael toured Saigon and back
Hair the color of smoke and ash
Their heads are bowed, their hands are clasped
One more storm has passed

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Let her fill your cup with something kind
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