

**BECOMING ONE**  
Randall Tremba  
May 16, 2010  
7th Sunday of Easter  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

\* \* \*

Yesterday I officiated not one but two weddings here. One at 12:30; the other at 4:30. Joan Piemme and Erdem Ergin first; Julia Baker and David Springer second.

Kari Edge played the piano for both; and Joanna Moomaw sang for the later one. Both performed beautifully. Their music opened the windows of heaven! Yesterday this House of Prayer was oozing with love.

Not once but twice that day I offered the hopeful matrimonial prayer: may these two become one. It's an ideal susceptible to skepticism. Years ago I heard someone say: yes, they will indeed become one; it's just a matter of *which one!*

But, alas, that is not what the covenant of marriage implies or strives for.

May they become one.

It's not a reduction to something lesser but a glorification to something greater; not losing oneself in the other but discovering more of oneself with the other. It's as though a two-dimensional flat square were taken up into a three-dimensional cube. The square doesn't lose its identity; rather it is glorified in relationship with others like itself.

May they be one. May they be greater together than they are alone.

Marriage isn't everything; it isn't the greatest or highest good in life; but it is an example of how we can bind ourselves in love to that which is not ourselves or to those whom are not ourselves. It's a paradigm of living faithfully and joyfully with all that is "other" in this world.

That's one way to hear "may they be one." And here's another: May they be more *at one* than *at odds* with each other. And come to think of it, that's a pretty good prayer for all us in whatever place or situation we may be. May we be more *at one* with others than *at odds*—one with the earth and its creatures rather than at odds.

"One," you see, is not just a numeral; it's a relationship of harmony—the way two dancers become one fluid body or the way a choir becomes one voice or a rider becomes one with the horse. Not less, more. Not reduced; glorified.

We've all had moments when all seems right with the world and for a moment we are one with all that is, in harmony, not at odds; we are totally absorbed in the moment; we forget ourselves and yet are not diminished. We are caught up in that which is greater than the sum of its parts. We are one with the whole and holy.

But, alas, those moments vanish all too soon and we are apart again.

Of all the creatures on earth it seems only humans are haunted by a sense of apartness, of aloneness, as though we don't quite belong, as though we are misfits in the world.

That aloneness is portrayed in one of the folk tales from the Great Ancestors found in Genesis chapter 2.

Once upon a time, the Lord God said, "It is not good that the human should be alone; I will make it a helper as its partner." (At this point in this story there is neither male nor female. Just the human one, the earthling.)

It's not good, said the Creator, for the human to be alone. So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air. Picture that: God the creator as a potter madly and furiously making one thing after the other to please the human one! God brought each and every creature to the human breathlessly waiting to see what it would call them; and whatever the human called every living creature, that was its name.

The human gave names to all the animals; but for the human there was not found a helper as its partner.

This, as you can see, is a sad story so far and a serious problem. Nothing in all of creation could satisfy the human longing except, as it turns out, another one like itself. But, alas, as these mythic folk tales continue further into Genesis, these two so suited for each other wound each other, turn their backs on each other and cower in fear at a distance.

And that, as we know, is all too often the human predicament.

Who or what can save the human ones from this hell of estrangement and alienation?

Because one is the loneliest number that you'll ever do

This is a Harry Nilson song made popular by Three Dog Night in 1967.

*One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do; two can be as bad as one, it's the loneliest number since the number one.*

So what's so great about becoming one?

It's true: we can feel alone in a crowd. We can feel estranged in the wondrous web of life. Who or what can save the human ones from this hell of estrangement and alienation? What will ever satisfy the human heart?

When Mother Teresa was asked on an America talk show years ago, what she saw as the number one problem in America, she replied: *loneliness*.

Well, that may be true. But I don't think it's limited to America. In some ways it's part of the human predicament because we have forgotten who we are. We have forgotten whose we are. We have forgotten that we are one family and that we belong to God, which is to say, we belong with each other.

Not once but twice yesterday I offered the hopeful prayer: *may these two become one*. And by eerie coincidence "may they be one" is in the gospel lesson appointed for this seventh Sunday of Easter. Listen and count the number of times you hear it in this prayer of Jesus.

*"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." **John 17:20-26***

May they be one, as it turns out, is Christ praying for and in us. The voice of Christ in the Gospel of John isn't so much "Jesus of Nazareth" as it is the voice of deep, eternal wisdom not unlike the Tao in Confucianism, Atman in Hinduism, the Buddha in Buddhism, Sophia in Judaism and the Great Spirit in American Indian spirituality.

This longing to be one is universal. It's shouted from the mountaintops everyday in every part of the world. You can hear it in this song from the "Lion King."

We are one, you and I  
We are like the earth and sky  
One family under the sun  
All the wisdom to lead  
All the courage that you need  
You will find when you see  
We are one