

## Reflections on the case for Unity-Lena

### Psalm 133 says

<sup>1</sup> How good and pleasant it is  
when God's people live together in unity!

For there the LORD bestows his blessing,  
even life for evermore.

We need God's blessing as a community and unity leads to blessing.

In Feb when Dan wrote his pastoral letter outlining his, & therefore our, church position my immediate reaction was 'Oh well, I will have to leave!'. No one wants to be part of a church which holds a different opinion on something they think is important or do they?

The Church of England, of which we St James by the Park are part, was established over 400 years ago to be a place where we could disagree strongly yet still be in communion with one another around our core beliefs in Jesus. Anglicanism commits its members to an affirmation of the main points of the Christian faith (as we say or sing each week in the creed-our basic statement of belief). This allows a considerable degree of freedom in relation to areas of potential division' (McGrath 1997 486)

On Sunday we will say together these words based on Ephesians 3

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.  
We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.  
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.  
We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

We don't say what we disagree with, it is presumed that we have different priorities of mission & worship, different gifts and callings.

In John 17 Jesus prays for all who are to believe in him in the future;

'that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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' John17:21.

Is Jesus unaware then of the passion of future believers to interpret their faith in their own way? Of course not, humans have disagreed from the beginning of time till now, & will continue doing so.

Jesus is giving us a template of his unity with God, the unity between the Father & the Son that we are to emulate, to mirror. Then, perhaps because it is so revolutionary and counter to natural human desires, it will result in the world seeing and believing in God. Christianity aims to be exceptional.

‘A unity across all traditional barriers of race, custom, gender or class which can only come from the action of a creator God ‘So that the world may believe’. (Wright 2004 p99).

This links into Jesus words on love from John 13.35;

<sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’

Unity is intrinsically linked to our proper love for one another. When love breaks down unity breaks down also. Whether that is in a friendship, a marriage or a church community.

And we see this in the New Testament as the early church develops with all its struggles and disagreements: Firstly over distribution of help to the poor verses preaching, to the discussions over circumcision, clean and unclean food, and on and on.

Many of the letters of Paul & Peter are exhorting the church to maintain its unity despite their differences. With these new church communities having heated debates until they do finally reach those points of agreement. Paul says to the Ephesians in chapter 4:2-4

<sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;’ Ephesians 4:2-4

As I outlined in my previous talk there have been constant revisions in belief and practice as Christians have built upon the theological understanding of previous generations and all the God given developments through the last 2000 years.

So am I going to leave StJbtP and go to the Methodist Church? No, lovely though they are. I quickly realised this wasn’t a correct response. I’m not saying it is never right to leave a church but it is not something to be done lightly, in anger or hastily but only after careful consideration with others, after much prayer & fasting. So currently I have no plans to leave (sorry for those who I annoy).

Neither will I stay but be subversive. I will submit to Dan’s leadership and continue to advocate for inclusion and unity in the hope that Dan will submit to the leadership of his bishop whatever their personal beliefs on this matter because the love of Christ is able to overcome all our disagreements.