**With One Accord**

Based on [Acts 1:12-26](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Ac1.12-26) and [John 17:1-11](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn17.1-11)

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The Seventh Sunday of Easter

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Today’s readings teach us about the necessity of unity and agreement in the church. In Acts, Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father and it says literally he was taken “out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). Practically, that’s what it means to say Jesus ascended into heaven. **It doesn’t mean he’s far away or on holidays. He is still with us even now; and he is involved in and upholds the whole universe even now.** But he is ascended, meaning he is taken from our sight, invisible, only to return to our sight on the last day in clouds of glory where every eye will see him.

If Jesus had not ascended, was not taken from our sight, we could go to him and ask him what we should do as individuals, as the church. But he’s not, and as individuals and as the church, we have to make decisions about things without him. **Not without his presence, for where two or three are gathered in his name there he is, even if we don’t see him.** Not without support, for he does not leave us as orphans but gives us a comforter, The Holy Spirit. And he does not leave us without clear guidance, for he has given us the words His Father gave him; His own word which is as a lamp shining in a dark place. Nevertheless, he’s not visibly present to approach and ask questions, to render judgments, to tell more parables or to decide matters for the church. And this is for our good. This is the way our Heavenly Father wants us to operate, because though we don’t see Christ, he is seen in his visible church that always strives to agree in all things.

In Acts Chapter 1, the church is for the first time without Jesus to visibly turn to, and they have to make their first decision on their own. Judas, the son of destruction, one of the original twelve disciples betrayed Jesus. Afterwards he tried to redeem himself by returning the blood money he sold Jesus for. But no man can redeem himself. And failing that he hanged himself and falling headlong he died, and Luke provides the gory details. So Peter stands up and quotes the Psalm 109:8, "**Let another take his office**." The disciples, the church, they need to replace Judas, but how do they decide? They can't just go to Jesus and ask him whom he would choose. Jesus has ascended, they cannot see him. Training wheels are off, now the church has got to peddle and keep balance without them. How do they decide?

Ladies and gentlemen, the church makes decisions, judgments all the time…in things that Jesus has not commanded one way or the other. We have to decide things and Jesus is ascended, and so he’s not available for dialogue or to provide feedback. **Now, we can and should bend his ear in prayer, and he promises to hear us, but he does not respond with any new directions.** He has already said all he has to say in the Holy Scriptures. Genesis through Revelation is the beginning and the end of what God has to say to us. The Holy Bible is Jesus’ last will and testament to his Church and it is complete, finished, and all we need for faith and assurance. After all, Jesus has not left us as orphans, but has equipped us to abide in his Word and Commands thereby giving us his Holy Spirit. And what is most important about such decisions that the church is free to make at her own discretion is not what is decided, but that what is decided is agreed upon by all.

A perfect example today is, when a church needs a pastor, who do they call? If Jesus was visible, you could just ask him and he would tell you. But that’s not the way God has ordained it. He actually wants believers to decide and to agree on who to call. **And what is most important is not finding the perfect fit, or a pastor that I can relate to, or who can tell good jokes and who you can have a beer with.** That’s all wonderful if it works out, but it’s not likely that a pastor will be a perfect fit for everyone in a congregation in these inessential qualities. **But any pastor who is qualified to preach, administer the sacraments, who is not a scoundrel or life is not a scandal and who is willing and able to do the job is okay with God to be your pastor.** What is more important than whether your pastor is someone you can relate to or not, is that you agree with your brothers and sisters that once he is qualified and once he is called, he is your God-given pastor. And what is essential is that there be no divisions over him, but that shoulder to shoulder and with one accord, you receive his ministry as if Christ himself were ministering to you.

Consider how the church, in their first decision without Jesus makes that decision. They have to fill an office vacated by Judas, and so they find two qualified men and then they let God choose between them. **They don’t look at a resume, they don’t consider inessential things like which one Justus and Matthias is more down to earth; better looking; younger, smarter, more hep with the kids.** They don’t even take a vote to decide which of them is more popular like most churches do today in considering who to call with a popular vote. They know both men are qualified according to God’s word. That means they know that God is willing to work for their benefit through either candidate. **So first they pray that God would guide their decision, and then they flip a coin, literally cast lots so that, whoever the lot falls on, they can be sure that personal preference and covetousness didn’t get in the way of the decision**. In the end they know that this man was chosen by God, because they didn’t play favorites and pander to personal preferences which only cause disagreement and division. This is the man chosen by God because he is qualified and they agreed.

In his absence, Jesus promises that he will make his decisions through us. Jesus says in Matthew 18:19, "**Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven**." All this to say, brothers, that the basis for unity in the church, the basis for gathering together, the basis upon which we place our hope that Christ will make his decisions through us is that we agree...that with one heart, one mind, one faith, we move forward. And though every choice made is not everyone’s personal preference, what is most important is not that you get your way, but that you submit to agree.

Immediately after Jesus ascends and is taken from the apostles’ sight, they return to Jerusalem to an upper room where they were saying, and the Scripture says this marvelous thing: “**All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers**.” Jesus ascended and it didn’t lead to squabbling, factions, divisions, dissensions. Jesus was still their head, and in his visible absence they still had agreement, for the Holy Spirit found it important to point out this simple and central fact, they were worshipping “with one accord.”

“With one accord” that is how the church is supposed to be. “With one heart and one mind” That is how our Lutheran Church is organized. The name of what used to be our University in Edmonton is “Concordia University.” Concordia means “with one heart.” The name of our Seminary in Edmonton is also “Concordia”, St. Catherines seminary is also named “Concordia.” **In the US, our Lutheran church has 10 universities and two seminaries all named--you guessed it--“Concordia” with one heart.** (The creativity is astounding I know). And more importantly the 8 confessional documents of the Lutheran Church—the documents that define what Lutherans confess the bible to teach--were compiled into a single volume called the Book of *Concord,* the book that says where the Lutheran heart is at. St. Luke the author of acts believed that what made the early church work, able to make decisions approved by God was because they were in concord, of one accord one heart and mind when they came together. So does the Evangelial Lutheran Church.

And so does Jesus. In our Gospel lesson John 17 Jesus is praying to his Father in the midst of his disciples. And he says, anticipating his Ascension, “**I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one**.” Jesus wants us to be in concord, in agreement, of one heart and mind and will with one another, just as he and the Father are of one heart and mind and will. Jesus is never disagrees with the Father, neither are we to disagree with our brother when it comes to the Father’s commands. A church that agrees to disagree about God’s word is not one with God, and therefore, not of one accord. But Paul writes, “I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”

Jesus is now invisible on earth, but the church is visible. You can see it. And the true visible church is seen when it is in full agreement and unity about the teachings of Jesus Christ, and in every other matter--whatever is decided the church agrees to agree. As you confess in the Nicene Creed, You believe in *one* Lord Jesus Christ, who is of *one* substance with the Father. Who was crucified died and was buried in *accord* with the Scriptures. You believe in *one* Holy Christian and Apostolic Church. You acknowledge *one* Baptism for the remission of sins. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism. You are one in Christ Jesus, baptized in to the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Not three names but *one* name. And when we are one in doctrine, we decide matters with one heart…the heart of Christ who promises “**If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my father in heaven**.”

And you share in one Holy Communion, one Eucharist, one Lord’s Supper. St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10, **6The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17Because there is *one* bread, we who are many are *one* body, for we all partake of the *one* bread.**

And this is your comfort. There is only *one body* that will be spared the wrath of God on the last day. It is the body of Jesus Christ, because it already suffered the wrath of God on the cross once and for all. **And though you are many members you are one body in Christ Jesus.** You partake of the one bread, you confess the one faith, you have been baptized into the Name of Jesus, and Peter the Apostle says plainly in Acts 4:12, “**And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**” That name is yours in your baptism, wherein he saves and preserves you in his one Christian and Apostolic Church.

*Elect from every nation, Yet one o’er all the earth;*

*Her charter of salvation: One Lord, one faith, one birth.*

*One holy name she blesses, Partakes one holy food,*

*And to one hope she presses With every grace endued.*

(The Church’s One Foundation, LSB Hymn #644 v.2)