

Unity in God – UCA's Anniversary (37 years)

John 17: 20-26 & Psalm 122: 1-9

I came from the dream-time, I came upon the prison ship,
We are one, but we are many. And from all the lands on earth we come. We share
a dream and sing with one voice: I am, you are, we are Australian

"I Am Australian" (or "We are Australian") is a popular Australian song written in 1987 by Bruce Woodley of The Seekers and Dobe Newton of The Bushwackers.

Its lyrics are filled with many historic and cultural references, such as to the 'digger', Albert Namatjira and Ned Kelly, among others. It is commonly taught in primary schools.

For Indonesian, there is also a slogan, 'Bhineka Tunggal Ika' means 'Different but One'. It reflects different ethnics, cultures, traditions, beliefs but they are all share the same identity as Indonesians.

For many people, union or unity is a form of commitment to work or live together. For example, a young couple decided to marry – wedding is a form of union and commitment.

Today UCA celebrates the historical moment in the 1977 when three denominations: Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches decided to become one: The Uniting Church in Australia. This was a bold action of faith. I knew that many of us here were part of this historical moment.

For me, who came already within the UCA, I need to read some of historical documents to understand UCA. I read the first Statement to the nation; it gave me the foundation of the union: mission within the Australian landscape. UCA is the first native Australian Church. It grows within the Australian society and culture.

I think, there is one fundamental reason why people form partnership or unity: that is a hope for future. People saw the bright / goals or dreams that will be achieved if they come together. They see the benefit for their future by working together with others.

Unity. We are one but we are many.

In John's Gospel reading, that is a part of Jesus' prayer for his disciples and for those who believed because of their witness.

Jesus prays: "that they may all be one" (v. 22). This is the dominant emphasis of this entire chapter. It is a perfect description of the unity shared by the members of the body of Christ. While there are many members, we are joined into a spiritual entity—the church.

The purpose of this unity is at least twofold: (1) that believers may be in the Father and the Son and (2) that the world may believe that the Father sent Jesus.

Jesus prays that we may have the same oneness that He and the Father have. As we experience this intimacy with one another, the world will believe that the Father sent the Son. In other words, Christian unity enables the world to see and understand that Jesus comes from God. This Jesus' prayer about unity is the heart of Christian community. We are one in God the Father through Jesus the Son. It is a relational union. It's like the relationship between parents and children. God gives this relationship of unity to those who believe in Christ. This is a Christian's identity – that we are in relational with one another not because of any benefit from others or because of a bright future for us. Unity is a gift from God. A gift that we need to thank. A gift that gives us better future and a tool to show our faithful witness to the world.

In relational unity, each of its members will be able to exercise its own gifts and talents. There is always a balance between love and freedom in relational union. Love within its community binds freedom of its members.

What does this unity mean for me?

It encourages me to focus on what unites rather than on what divides. "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." This is especially critical in the local church. We must major on the majors not minor on the minors. We must focus our hearts and our minds on Christian essentials. We must always remember that as Christians, we agree on far more than we disagree. Thus, it is helpful to identify those areas on which we do agree. A few examples: The Bible is God's Word, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, salvation is by faith through Christ. These beliefs are very important, but many others are not. E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973), missionary to India, once said, "Talk about what you believe and you have disunity. Talk about Who you believe in and you have unity." May we be a church that is all about who we believe in and the essentials of our faith.

Unity will enable us to have an attitude of 'agree to disagree'. It is acceptable to disagree on issues for example: baptism, the ways we accept God through Christ, the structure of church government, the charismatic gifts, and timing of Christ's return. These are, I think, non-essential issues that we can discuss and disagree. After all, we are one!