

A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Easter 7, June 5, 2011 dedicated to all artists and all who love and support them, to Luke Timothy Sitler Ahrens and Kirsten Roche as they prepare for marriage and to the blessed memory of Robert Francis Sitler (1929-1974) who was born and died this day, and always to the glory of God!

“TAMBO: That All May Be One”

Acts 1:6-14; John 17:1-11

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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At the close of worship today, we bid farewell to the Easter season and turn our hearts and minds to the fire of the Holy Spirit given on Pentecost. This transition from resurrection revelation to fiery spirit is no small matter.

For 50 days of Easter, we have received one revelation of God after another. We started with Christ’s Garden resurrection appearance to Mary, then moved “behind closed doors” to his revelation to Thomas and the others, then on to the road to Emmaus and his revelation in the breaking of the bread. The Good Shepherd revealed his leadership and love for his followers, and then the promising revelation that there is actually a place for all of us in God’s heavenly home, followed by Christ’s continuing promise of the Holy Spirit and finally (today) the revelation and promise of unity in the church - “that we may all be one.” This season has been

filled to the brim with texts and tales of God's revelation in the Risen Christ.

As the church, our imagination has been strained and challenged in the season of Easter. We can only practice stunned receptivity, which shakes us out of our self-control. We want to furrow our brows and wonder how we agreed at our baptism to be a part of these odd events and this new rule of God on earth. However, God in the Risen Christ calls us to smile, to let go, to wonder, to wander, to allow our imagination not our doubt who we are or where we are but to guide our way forward.

In other words, during the Easter season we have been called to believe the unbelievable, to walk on roads where God's mystery and majesty are revealed and to see the world (and the universe) through lenses that expand our eyesight and vision. More light is shining. More truth is opening up before us. More God. More good.

For us to walk in the (imaginative) light of the Risen Christ, Jesus himself proclaims in John 17:1-11 that HE must let go and let God guide us. In this prayer for his disciples, Jesus says (I am paraphrasing): *"Father, this is it. I have done everything I can do. You are going to have to take it from here. It is out of my control. If your disciples are going to make it into the future, they are going to have to move from **fear full mumbling to faith full action**. Help them come to know they can One. But, to become One, they will have to act, not as little, separate units, but as One Resurrection People!"*

TAMBO - That All May Be One.

We are called to do and be this way - in all of Christendom - and as members of this congregation. In case you didn't know, the symbol of our United Church of Christ comprises a crown, a cross and an orb enclosed within a double oval bearing the name of the church and the prayer of Jesus, "That they may all be one." (John, 17:21) Let me break

it down a bit more. The symbol is based on an ancient Christian symbol called the "Cross of Victory" or the "Cross Triumphant." The crown symbolizes the sovereignty of Christ. The cross recalls the suffering of Christ – his arms outstretched on the wood of the cross – for the salvation of humanity. The orb, divided into three parts, reminds us of Jesus' command to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) John 17:21 reflects our historic commitment to the restoration of unity among the separated churches of Jesus Christ.

When the United Church of Christ formed in June 1957, we were the first cross-cultural, cross-denominational group of Christians to come together in unity **in the entire history of Christendom. We reversed a 1,924-year-old trend.** While that may seem hard to believe, it is true. We stepped out on a limb and declared (in the name of Jesus) that we would stop dividing the church and start knitting her together again. We believed in and acted upon the unity proclaimed in this passage.

Since June 1957, all our pastors have been ordained with a promise to bind Christ's church together. At our ordination, as the hands of clergy are laid upon our heads and the Holy Spirit is invoked, we are called to heal the wounds that separate us. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to commit our lives to the unity of the church. We are a wedge driven into the breach of division by no less than the breath of God.

It takes a lot of imagination to stand in the breach! Just ask Jesus! Or, ask J. K. Rowling.

That's right - J.K. Rowling. In Rowling's commencement address at Harvard University given three years ago today, the author of the fabulously successful Harry Potter series spoke about **"The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination."** Fred Hadley gave this piece to me. I shared some of her thoughts at Julia Hadley's memorial

service last week.

In this commencement address, Rowling tells of her own poverty and what she feared most in life - her failures. She said that to not fail in life is to live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all - in which case, you have failed by default. She also spoke of the boundless possibilities of imagination. While some choose to live their lives within the bounds of their own experiences, never troubling to wonder how it would feel to have been born other than they are, some people venture far through the expansion of their minds and into the fullness of imagination. Rowling reminds all of us - as a student of classics - of the words of the Greek author Plutarch. He wrote: **“What we achieve inwardly will change our reality.”**

Near the end of her speech on Harvard Commons, J.K. Rowling said:

*If you choose to use your status and influence to raise your voice on behalf of those who have no voice; If you choose to identify not only with the powerful, but with the powerless; If you retain the ability to imagine yourself in the lives of those who do not have your advantages, then it will not only be your proud families who celebrate your existence, but thousands and millions of people whose reality you have helped change. **We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already; we have the power to imagine better.***

We cannot unite all 2.1 billion Christians. However, we can do our part right here in central Ohio. We can use the power of imagination to become one in Christ. We have the creativity, the imagination, and the spirit to become more unified each day. We have the love, grace, and presence of God to become a healing balm in the heart of a hurting city.

Unity finds in beginning and end when we come together eye to eye, hand to hand, heart to heart, laughter to laughter,

tears to tears, meal to meal, prayer to prayer. It is in the simple and beautiful acts of imagination and love that church unity finds its power and place.

In fact, let us begin right now. As we turn to the table of grace, the table of our savior, let us all approach the bread and the cup with one thought, something like this:

As I receive your body and your blood O Christ, unite me - body, soul, and spirit - with all my sisters and brothers with whom I worship and praise you: members and non-members, young and old, rich and poor, black and white, gay and straight, and every other imaginable difference which we create. Give me the power, O God, of your imagination to heal, to help, to love. Help me bind the broken parts of our body and bring us all together as ONE People in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

That is a lot to remember. So, as you come to the table today, pray “TAMBO: *That All May Be ONE.*”

The only thing holding us back is the power to imagine better. We have that power inside each one of us. It is not magic. It is faith.

Let us be one in Christ. Come to the table, people of God for this our last communion of the glorious Easter season! Alleluia! Amen.