

Do you want to see a miracle? I know just the place to go! Mind you, not everybody can see one in the location I'm going to mention this morning. But I can assure you it's a place where miracles happen.

And no, you don't have to travel to some far away holy place and drink some special holy water to experience this miracle. No this miracle can be seen without leaving the Seacoast of New Hampshire. And I'll tell you a little secret: I've *seen* it, but I have to confess, most of the time I take it for granted.

The miracle I'm talking about is this Church. And yes, I'll be preaching this at both churches, so I'm talking about both of them – even if the manifestations of the miracle differ slightly at Christ Church from Trinity's version of the miracle.

I saw evidences of it in the comments so many of you added to our recent survey. All of the folks who called [Trinity] Church "my church" – and, just as validly, every person who called [Christ] Church "my church." You see there are a whole lot of people who call this church "my church" even though we don't see them every Sunday morning. It might even annoy us a bit that such folks make this comment because...well, they aren't always here.

But that's the miracle I'm talking about. This church is made up of people who are incredibly different from one another and diverse in their views...and whose views count even if they're not always here. Indeed, we are separated and divided by a whole host of things – distance, different interests, differing philosophies and different understandings of God. But we're still all in this thing together. In this church there are people with a basic and simple understanding of the Christian faith and others who are incredibly well grounded in Anglican/Episcopal theology. Some may have been to courses, programs, or even have degrees in what the church teaches. And they sit right alongside – and get along well with – other people whose interests and inclinations are entirely someplace else.

There may be some – and I'll confess, when I read their comments, some of them grated on me – who get on our nerves a bit. We have some folks among us who cause the rest of us a bit of stress – not because there's anything wrong with them, but

because they've expressed the blunt things they may have said out of their passion for their church. They care – and things they don't always understand rile them. And yet when they turn up at the church door we welcome them as part of "our church." I can't imagine our church without them.

So here's the mystery – the miracle. As diverse as our views are, we're the People of God and we come together. We may not come every week and there may be some among us who come hardly at all but still they are drawn to call [Trinity Church] [Christ Church] "my church." What draws them together? Of course I can't speak on behalf of everyone and say what motivates them to do this but I believe the majority of people feel there is something different about this church and, whatever their complaints are, find themselves happy to call it "my church." This is what I call the miracle of the church.

Paul spoke of this kind of miracle when he wrote to the Ephesians.

People in Paul's day were divided into two classes of people – Jews and Gentiles – people who had undergone the ritual that brought them into the Jewish Covenant before they had converted to Christianity and those who had not. They mixed about as well as oil and water. The Jews saw the Gentiles as a threat and the Gentiles saw the Jews as a threat. The two didn't mix. Their religions clashed. One acted superior to the other and when that happened it was evident that they would never get along.

Paul wrote, "*Christ himself has brought us peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people. With his own body he broke down the wall that separated them and kept them enemies*" (Eph. 2:14). Remember: Jews and Gentiles had been enemies for as long as anybody could remember, but by his death on the cross, Jesus united everyone together. There's a miracle for you! Jesus brought together people of such different and diverse backgrounds and interests. He made them "*fellow citizens*" (2:19) to use Paul's own words. This whole section of Paul's letter emphasizes how the death of Jesus on the cross brings healing and reconciliation between people.

So what is it that draws *us* together? I may be naïve to suggest this, but I think it's the very thing Paul is on to in this letter. By his death on the cross, Jesus has broken down the wall that we put up between each other. When we gather in Eucharist, we receive Christ's forgiveness and what does Christ do? Christ sends us to break down the walls *out there* that separate folks from each other – walls of anger, hatred, prejudice, intolerance, jealousy, and unkindness. Forgiveness and love are the binding glue of God's family. All this is Christ's doing. It's his miracle!

Similarly, there's something about sharing together bread and wine – Jesus' body and blood in Holy Communion. Through this eating and drinking, no matter what differences we bring to the Table, we are sharing the same Christ, we are receiving the same blessings from Jesus, we are expressing our oneness and togetherness through the Sacrament. All this regardless of who we are and who the other person is. We are one in the body of Christ the Church.

You leave your seats and kneel or stand at the altar. Perhaps you kneel next to a person you haven't seen for a long time. Perhaps you stand next to someone you don't particularly like. Perhaps it's someone you've had harsh words with, or perhaps it is a total stranger. Do you see what is happening?

As you come to this altar, drawn by Christ, you share together the same body and blood, you not only come closer to your Savior, but you also come closer to one another, and here's the important part: this happens even if you weren't at the same table. Or at this table at the same time. Little by little the things that divide vanish. That is a miracle! And as this is happening we all growing together into Christ!

Whatever your input, whatever your views, whatever you bring to the Table, if the entire purpose of being here *isn't* to break down walls of hostility – we need to rethink why we're even here in the first place. It is at this Table that we are fed with the peace of Christ; with the forgiveness, fellowship and love that, by God's miracle, fills the gap where there was once hostility. We have a responsibility to leave this Table as catalysts for bringing about reconciliation, not for finding new ways to divide ourselves into factions.

So this is the miracle. Those who meet to worship are celebrating this miracle. In fact, if you are worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ you *are* a miracle. Yet it is not *our* miracle, it is Christ's. From all the diversity that exists in the church, Christ makes us one body, his people. That the church exists at all, made up of sinful people, that's a miracle. If you want to see a miracle, look around you and see the church. *This* church.