

If Jesus had a grave, he'd be rolling over
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Neglected Flag Day, June 14, deserves attention. Flag Day reminds us that the United States of America is a united nation. Fifty stars represent our fifty states. These fifty stars shine from a blue field of heaven, representing, "a new constellation in the firmament." We started with thirteen stars in a circle. It would be exciting to see four more stitched into the union. Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Guam, District of Columbia. A perfecting union: "Responsibility has its own burdens."

Union, an inspiring word. People come together for a common purpose. Unified. United. Unity. Unison. Etymologically, all these words originate from the Latin word for 'one.' E pluribus unum.

We honor the flag, thus we are reminded we are united. This doesn't mean we all agree. Hardly. You should hear how one of my brothers and I disagree. It's healthy to avoid thinking of unity as conformity. Our nation embraces an exciting tension. We celebrate our individuality while surrendering our individuality to a nobler calling. America: patchwork quilt and melting pot. We're both, paradoxically, dialectically.

How can this happen? Take, for instance, when Christians talk about Christian unity. It gets clumsy if we assume oneness happens when all Christians agree to one set of approved doctrines or structure, liturgy or theology – like that's ever going to happen. Even if it did, that's religious conformity. Given Baptists and Presbyterians, Romans and Lutherans, Quakers and Assembly of God, Unitarians and Methodists, what we got now are differences of opinion.

Unity. Thankfully, individual churches never experience divisions, no never. Except, perhaps, when it comes to the color of Sanctuary rug or new hymnbook. If Jesus had a grave, he'd be rolling over.

Have we ever really ever been 'organized religion?' Kathleen Norris winked when folks told her they have little use for participating in organized religion. She joked: "Then come to my church, we're terribly disorganized." What's offered a thirsty and alienated people is community, connection, meaning, worth.

Maybe this explains why silly us are once again fussing over the Ten Commandments and public schools -- a two-dimensional reaction to life feeling out of control, disappointing, scary, empty. You want respect for the Ten Commandments? Come to church. Open your Bible. Far better than posting them is showing them by living them. Same with the Pledge of Allegiance. Hey, I want what she has, he has, life at its most practical and sensible and fulfilling in a world that isn't. Being mischievous, it might be frolicking fun for us to crusade for Jesus' Sermon on the Mount instead posted in classrooms, since the Sermon on the Mount brings into full spiritual flower the unfinished law of the Ten Commandments.

It should be mentioned that we Presbyterians, having suffered and caused religious repression, historically object to any door being opened to religionists to impose their brand of faith. There are versions of Christianity (white nationalism most notably) I'd never want spoken in any classroom as an authoritative prayer, just as some Christians might find blasphemous what I'd pray. I'll leave it to the Sermon on the Mount to be the measure.

Christian unity, for instance, happens when, despite our denominations and differences of opinion, we stand fast together by following the corrective way of Jesus against fell forces that divide and destroy, ruin and degrade, us unified for a common purpose that is truer and holier than ourselves.

Unity like the Danville Community Band. Persons from all walks of life come together to play music – different instruments, different notes, coming together for making beauty in a noisy, discordant world.

Unity like the Ukrainians, them united in resolute opposition to the evil of Russian aggression, murder, and atrocity, united for democracy and prosperity for her people.

Unity like my brothers. Okay for them to pick on me but never anyone else in the neighborhood.

What happens when there is a crisis, where there is a real threat? When the hour demands we be united? When there's a school shooting. Well, some of us anyway. When divorced and bickering parents are told their child has leukemia. When a town is threatened with flooding. One of our prouder moments happened when the river was rising and it was going to rise regardless, and my son and I, along with soccer team, football team, electrician, surgeon, maintenance man, shopkeeper, commissioner, started sandbagging together. We do have our finer moments.

One nation. A fact. Under God. A warning. Indivisible. A necessity. With liberty and justice for all. A responsibility.