

THE MORNING STAR

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Abide with Me: Thoughts on Christian Unity

BY Catherine Sider Hamilton

What can be said about Christian unity in a month that has seen yet another church propose to split? (See: "The Methodist Church will probably split in two over homosexuality, and that's bad for all of us" at <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/17/us/united-methodist-church-split-christianity/index.html>)

I think about this question with increasing difficulty because there is a weight of sorrow in my heart. But it is upon us, intractably and practically, in deep divisions over marriage and what it means to be a faithful Christian in this time.

A few thoughts from within the midst

So I offer a few thoughts from the midst of the church's struggle.

One of the great privileges (and terrors!) of serving at St. Matthew's Anglican Church, Riverdale, is that we have two world-class theologians in the pews. After a recent sermon, Prof. Ephraim Radner said to me, "I agree with you. It is not staying that is absolute. It is Jesus. But that's just it. He is here. We don't go someplace to find him. He comes to us; he comes here where we are, right here into the place of our sin and division. Here he comes to us."

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 29, Wed

*Prof. John Bowen & Prof.
Terry Donaldson
Retirement Celebration, p.
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Jan 31, Fri

Theology Pub Night, p. 3

Feb 5, Wed

*Black History Month
(More info to come)*

Feb 18, Tues

Preaching Day, p. 3

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That seems to me just right. But I would note this: when he comes to us here, in the place of our sin, in the midst of our divisions – when he abides with us – he asks us who love him to abide with him.

“Where are you staying?” the would-be disciples ask Jesus (John 1:38). And he says, “Come and see.” Come and stay with me. Stay: μένω. That word μένω has a long footprint in John’s gospel. It is what the Holy Spirit does at Jesus’ baptism. “I have seen the Holy Spirit coming down like a dove from heaven and resting – staying, μένω – upon him.” It is what God does in Jesus (the Father who abides in me - μένω - does his works 14:10). It is what a branch does on the vine. It is what Jesus does with his people. “Abide in me,” Jesus says to his disciples on the night he is betrayed. Abide in me, “as I abide in you” (15:4, μένω).

The disciples have seen in Jesus (before they even know it) the crucial thing: he abides. And he invites us to abide in him.

What does it mean, this abiding?

“If you love me,” Jesus says, “you will keep my commandments and I will ask the Father and he will give you another comforter to be with you forever” (14:15). Jesus’ abiding – here, in the Holy Spirit, forever – is intertwined with our abiding, a love for him that is known in faithfulness to him. If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

“I am the true vine,” Jesus says; “you are the branches.” “Already you have been cleansed by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, as I also abide in you” (15:1, 5, 3-4). Jesus’ abiding and his word; his word and our abiding, cannot be separated; it is his word that does the cleansing work which makes abiding possible.

There is an “if” in this text. “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (15:10). It is possible, it seems, for Jesus to come here to us, to be here with

“Already you have been cleansed by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, as I also abide in you”

John 15:3-4a

and for and in the midst of us, and for us to turn away from him. It is possible to refuse the gift, to say “no” to the glory we have seen, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. He comes here to us in the place of our sin and pain and sorrow, a great drink of water in a desert place, and it is possible to say no.

Faithfulness is a word that is useful, as well as unity; faithfulness, and conscience, too.

It is not enough simply to stay.

It is necessary also to keep his word. This is a faithfulness that Ephraim and my colleagues here at Wycliffe show us how to live.

Surely no one wants this latest division. That it is happening again and again is a sign, in part, of the importance of the question and how deep it goes – for marriage goes right to the root of our lives, both as human beings and as Christian people. “This is a great mystery” – the cleaving together of husband and wife – “and I am applying it to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). The marriage of man and woman is deeply involved precisely in Jesus’ abiding with us. Marriage matters, not just as an ethical or social or justice or identity issue, but because the marriage of man and woman

in Christ is a place where Jesus gives to the church his abiding and its redeeming power.

What is at risk, in turning away from Christian marriage? That we turn away from Jesus and his abiding.

These splits are only the visible outworking of a leaving that began long before. The first leaving is the turning from Christ to the world.

For that is what we see, in the new marriage ethic. It is the world’s vision. It seeks the best the world has to offer: to be equal, to be self-determining, to be fair. But it can take no account of sin, and the sorrow that haunts us. And so it has no place for a Saviour.

This new word on marriage is the world’s word. But Jesus has said, “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” “I have given them your – the Father’s – word.”

He comes to us, right here where we are, in this church. He abides with us. And he calls us to abide in him. If you love me, he has said, you will keep my word.

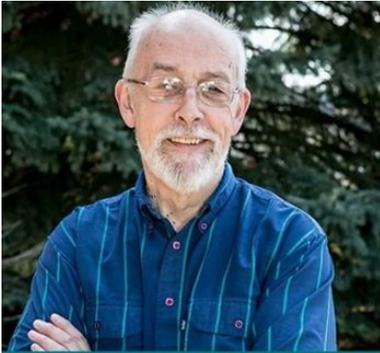
And as we seek to do that in the midst of a wandering church, it is not necessary to see the end of the road. It is only necessary to keep our eyes on the one who is the Way. “Come and see!” Jesus says. “Abide in me.”

ABOUT

Catherine Sider Hamilton is priest-in-charge at St. Matthew’s Riverdale and Professor of New Testament and New Testament Greek at Wycliffe College, Canada.



This Wednesday...



*Please join as we celebrate
the careers and retirement of*

*Prof. John Bowen
&
Prof. Terry Donaldson*

*January 29, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.
Leonard Hall, Wycliffe College*

*RSVP to Karen Baker-Bigauskas -
kbaker@wycliffe.utoronto.ca*

Public Events at Wycliffe



THEOLOGY PUB NIGHT WITH MARION TAYLOR AND KIRA MOOLMAN — *BREAKING SILENCE: THE GRANDMOTHERS WE NEVER KNEW WE HAD*

Friday, January 31, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. in Leonard Hall, Wycliffe College

Professor Marion Taylor, scholar of Old Testament and Women's Interpretations of the Bible, will join Kira Moolman, PhD student at Wycliffe College, on uncovering the voices of women in the history of biblical interpretation and theology. Come hear some of the fascinating stories of women who were pioneers in these areas, how the culture of interpretation shifted in the beginning of the 20th century, and what work is yet to be done in this emerging field.

This is a free event and it is open to the public. There will also be snacks and beer so bring your friends! For more information: wycliffecollege.ca/theologypub



PREACHING DAY—THE PSALMS: SONGS OF HEALING

Tuesday, February 18, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Wycliffe College

Preaching Day is an annual event at Wycliffe College. This year we welcome Dr. Ellen Davis from Duke Divinity School, whose research interests focus on how biblical interpretation bears on the life of faith communities and their response to urgent public issues, particularly the ecological crisis and interfaith relations. For this event, Dr. Davis will be exploring preaching from the Psalms in the context of some of the traumas we experience in life and in ministry such as the opioid crisis, PTSD, and the global refugee crisis. Purchase your tickets at wycliffecollege.ca/preachingday.

From the Registrar's Office



Dear Wycliffe Students,

Do you expect to graduate this May? Be sure to sign up for a photo sitting for January 29 or 30. Your robe and hood will be provided for you at the session. These photos will be used for the graduating class composite which will be hung in the ambulatory, so be sure that you are included! You also have the option of purchasing copies for yourself. Please choose a time slot on the signup sheet which will be posted at the front desk the week before the photo shoot. Cannot make either day? Please contact Jeffrey Hocking (jhocking@wycliffe.utoronto.ca)

If you are hoping to convocate in May 2020, please return the Graduate Information Form to the Registrar's Office as soon as possible and no later than February 17; otherwise you will have to wait until the May 2021 ceremony.

Tax forms will be available during the month of Feb and can be printed from ACORN if you are in a conjoint program and will be mailed to non conjoint students. Now is a good time to check that your address on ACORN is correct.

Barbara Jenkins, Registrar, Director of Enrolment Management

Some key academic dates

- Feb. 28: Last day to submit ThM (II) extended essays for examination for spring convocation.
- Mar. 2: Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) application due.
- For more academic dates, visit <https://www.tst.edu/academic/key-academic-dates>.

OGS Scholarship

This is a reminder that if you expect to be registered in a conjoint MA, ThM, conjoint PhD, or ThD program in academic year 2020-21, you may be eligible for an Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) award. For eligibility information, application instructions, and the application link, please see <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/awards/ontario-graduate-scholarship/>. Please also see the updated TST SSHRC/OGS Application Guide for important additional information. TST's deadlines are as follows: Domestic students: 11:59 pm, March 2, 2020 (EST), International (visa) students: 11:59 pm, March 2, 2020 (EST). Applications are completed entirely online.

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