

“Are We One?”

The Gospel Lesson for today is read from John 17:20-26

Hear the words from the Jesus’ beloved disciple, John:

Read John 17:20-26

“The Word of God for the people of God.”

“Thanks be to God”

Let us pray:

Mysterious God,

You reveal yourself in Jesus, your Beloved Child

who gives us a glimpse of your glory

and invites us to share in the unity of all that is Holy:

the holiness that is You, your creation, your people,

united in the Spirit that breaks through all boundaries of fear and injustice.

Meet us here today, O Trinity, O Unity, and teach us to be one:

One in love for each other

One in love for Creation

One in understanding with all who find in Jesus - the Way to You

One in peace with all who find other paths to your Truth.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus, whose fervent prayer was ever:

“May they all be one.” Amen!

Intro:

Today on our last Sunday of the Easter Season, the Revised Common Lectionary cuts Jesus’s “High Priestly Prayer” in half. The half we just heard from is the second half of his prayer and is John’s memory of Jesus’s farewell speech to his disciples. The setting once again is in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday. Jesus has just washed his disciples feet, has foretold of Judas’ betrayal, predicted Peter’s denials, promised his disciples the Holy Spirit, and taught them what to do in his absence as if time is running out. And only understood by Jesus and not the disciples – time is running out.

In the final moments before his arrest, he “looks toward heaven and prays.” I’ve heard some people call the high priestly prayer the other Lord’s Prayer — the one we don’t memorize and recite on Sunday mornings. It’s certainly not polished and poetic like the “Our Father.” It

“Are We One?”

doesn't flow, or cover its bases efficiently. It's long, rambling, and rather hard to follow. And though the disciples are meant to overhear the words, Jesus's tone has an urgency and passion that is achingly private. Jesus isn't engaging in a teaching moment with this Lord's Prayer; he's rending his heart. And it is here we get a glimpse into Jesus' heart and longing for the believing community, for us, his followers.

In an outpouring of words and emotions, Jesus asks God to do for us what he himself cannot do. To be for us in spirit, that which he can no longer be for us in body. “May they be in us,” he prays. May they all be one. May they know the love that founded the world. May they see the glory of God.

I have to admit that when I read “may they all be one,” it stuck with me and began an entire snowball affect of questions. I said wait a minute, did Jesus just pray for us all to be one? Like completely one? In a world where an “us versus them” mentality is so prevalent how is that possible? Just what is this unity Jesus is asking God for on behalf of us?

Trying to understand Jesus's understanding of unity I began to rack my brain for analogies and examples. My mind went straight to matrimony. To my wedding with Kendall that is now less than a month away. Where perhaps this unity Jesus is speaking of is like a union between two people, a mutual trusting and loving relationship. Then my mind went to a news story I read on BBC about the connection between identical twins who had been separated for 70 years at childbirth. And then it went to the Native American and psychological idea I read about in psychology on collective consciousness where people can somehow share a connection and be thinking of the exact same thing at the exact same time. This happens to me and Kendall all the time now, where we're constantly saying to each other “I was just thinking the same thing.”

“Are We One?”

Either way just to make sure I checked on umcdiscipleship.org preaching notes and other commentaries where they say “That they may be one” (vs. 21) refers to a unity that moves beyond agreeing on important issues or accepting differences and moves into a mirroring of “the mutuality and reciprocity of the Father/Son relationship.” In other words, here is where we are given the model of the Trinity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is a model for our own relationships with each other and much more importantly with God.

So to go ahead and ask the most important question today so you can think it over... are we one? Are we one in the same way that Jesus is one with the Father and Holy Spirit? If not, how can we become one?

The answer is ironic, how we in fact become one begins with prayer. Just as Jesus is praying for us to become one, we too should pray for the same thing. So in asking the question are we one, really means to ask the question are we in prayer? Because through prayer we are made one with the Trinity. And it is through this prayer Jesus prays that we are now able to go to God in prayer.

And we are to look to Jesus Christ as an example for us as someone who prays, who speaks of putting his will and his decisions at the service of his Father. He is someone who is in a relationship of dependence on the one he prays to as Father. In him there is divine purpose, power, and action; but there is also humility, responsiveness, and receptivity.”

But do we know this Jesus, the one who pleads so earnestly? I think I know the Jesus who teaches, heals, resurrects, and feeds. But do I know this one? This vulnerable one who in this passage does the single hardest thing a friend, a lover, a spouse, a parent, a child, a teacher, a pastor ever does? Sends his cherished ones into a treacherous, divisive, broken world on nothing but a hope and a prayer? Entrusts the treasures of his heart to the mystery that is intercession?

“Are We One?”

He says to God, “I ask”. As if to say: I don’t know what you will do with my asking. I don’t know how or when or if you will answer this prayer. I can’t force your hand. But I am staking my life and the lives of my loved ones on your goodness, because there’s literally nothing more I can do on my own. I have come to the end of what this aching love of mine can hold and guard and save. I ask.

Jesus asked because he loved too much not to. And that is also how we become unified and that’s through love.

May we bravely and humbly do likewise.

SENT FORTH:

This is what I ask you to do: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you must love each other.

We love because Christ first loved us.

May God bless you and keep you, may God’s face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, may you know the eye of God upon you with the gift of His peace.

Amen!