

Text: John 17:20-26

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Title: “That they may be one”

Vicar Michael Larson

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:22-23).

On Maundy Thursday as Jesus awaited his betrayal and crucifixion, he prayed. He prayed his prayer - the Lord’s prayer. He prayed the Psalms and he prayed the prayer in our Gospel reading today, known as the high priestly prayer.

His last prayer – the last thing Jesus asked his heavenly Father before his bloody trial was simple. **It was that we all be one.** We must wonder what our Lord was speaking about here.

For as He prayed, sweating drops of blood, anticipating his death, He prayed for us. Jesus prayed that His disciples would **“become perfectly one”** (John 17:23).

But there was chaos and lack of unity all around Him. His so called friend Judas walked alongside the marching Roman soldiers, coming to arrest him. The religious leaders were slithering into Caiaphas’s courtyard – gathering to hurl false accusations and lies.

As Jesus prayed for our unity, He knew discord and disorder. He was well aware that Peter would deny him three times, and that his disciples would scatter in confusion and fear in the coming arrest.

Besides Jerusalem, the whole Mediterranean world was in flux – in upheaval – in rebellion – wars – and political corruption. The barbarians were lying in wait to conquer the Roman world. And Jews were wishing for an insurrection. He said there would be wars and rumors of wars and that those things must happen.

Jesus prayed that we would all be one.

There is a lot of talk about “being one” these days. Or having “oneness” and unity. It has become a politically correct slogan to talk about “unity” and “togetherness.” It is on t-shirts. It is used in fundraising campaigns. The buzzword of unity is used on bumper stickers and pins.

The idea is to ‘just get along.’ Don’t talk politics and leave your religion stuff at the door. Gather around the campfire - sing Kumbaya – and just feel good. Don’t forget to smile.

But beyond all that sort of talk, we know the real story. The same chaos and disorder that surrounded Jesus as he prayed, also surrounds us. We have also had friends betray us for a cheap

and fickle reason or no reason at all. Like Jesus, we may have run headfirst into the condemnation of religious leaders, who sought to humiliate rather than welcome and love.

We know the discord and turmoil in our own families. We know that all is not right. There are disputes and fractures that have not been mended. Unspoken disagreements with loved ones that cannot be resolved – at least for now.

The reason why the world lacks **unity**, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself. Wars and governments are not to be blamed, but rather the poverty of our own hearts. It is the human heart where the great spiritual battle is waged. For we are secretly a people who delight in drawing boundaries rather than speaking invitations. In our sinful disjointedness we have a compulsion to accuse rather than defend and free.

In this confusion we need the help and mercy of God. And help he does. The accused one sets us free.

What took place at Jerusalem is bigger than a bumper sticker. And what we receive here at St. Paul is much more than a slogan. For Jesus accomplished on the cross what we could never accomplish for ourselves. He took all the disunity, chaos, and wretched fractures of humankind into himself – and made Himself to be the guilty one. And with great joy He did this work.

By the blood of the cross He has flooded the world with the power of forgiveness. The stain of disunity is washed away. By the passing of the peace that we speak to each other, the old divisions are banished away. For we speak the word of Christ. Banished by a single word – the ‘peace of the Lord be with you.’

Real unity in Christ cannot be organized – it is created by God – and is a precious gift to be received. The only real unity in this world is to gather around the crucified and risen Lord.

For He rose from the grave carrying the banner of victory over death, the devil, and all the divisions caused among us. And here at St. Paul we celebrate that victory. The victory of unity. The victory of “oneness.” Here, at the altar we may be one – of one heart and one mind. In this blessed victory wars cease, and weapons of spiritual violence are beaten into plowshares. Through the bright beaming light of the cross, the hostile and darkened human heart is warmed by the forgiving Son of the Father.

We are brought together into one faith and one baptism – by the one who prays, ‘that we all be one.’ And when the Son of God speaks it happens. The prayer that Jesus prayed in today’s reading – that we all may be one – has today been fulfilled. The unity of forgiveness was large enough for the betrayal of Judas, and for the denial by Peter. The unity of forgiveness is enough to put an end to war. The Words of Jesus unify us and mend the fractures in our families. The glory that is Christ’s covers his whole church on earth and supplies all that which is lacking. The unity that Christ gives us is a love that covers all our sins. And the great joy of the Christian life

is that God keeps taking us back – bringing us back – to make us all one again. One, through his Word of forgiveness – that calls forth a whole new world for us. And that unity is more than enough to please us.

Blest be the tie that binds us (*sermon hymn*). It is Jesus and Jesus alone.

As we continue to live in a disjointed world we know that we are all one in Christ. And it is the great joy of the Christian to seek to serve one another with the kind of unity and love that Christ expects. For in perfect unity – as one people – we receive the heavenly gifts of the present and risen Lord Jesus. **Come eat this bread and drink this cup. And be one.** In the name of Jesus. Amen.