

Scriptures

John 17: 6-19

In The Real World

Today's scripture was Jesus' final prayer for his disciples before his death and ascension. Jesus pours out his heart and longing for his followers to his source of life and love. He prays that the disciples may have the kind of connection with God that he does. Jesus knows intimately that life on this earth is not an easy one and so he prays for them that they may be sourced with the life-giving water that he has experienced from the Father. There are three parts to this prayer that were as important to the disciples then as they are to followers of Jesus today.

The first is, this world can be a difficult place to live and be. "This perhaps doesn't seem like much of a promise, or at least good news. But it's the truth, and given how many voices in our culture invite us to imagine that if we just buy the right product or vote for the right candidate life will be honky dory, it's important that church be a place where we can stop pretending and tell each other the truth. This life is at times beautiful and difficult, wonderful and painful. Jesus knows that his departure will prove immensely challenging for his disciples, and he does not sugarcoat that but instead tells them the truth."¹

Secondly Jesus points out that being a follower of Jesus, connected with the holy does not eliminate life's struggles, but rather gives comfort and support so that we might flourish even in the midst of them. David Lose writes "One of the more heart-rending elements of this prayer... comes when Jesus prays, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one." Oh, how much easier it would be, the disciples may have thought, if you would only take us with you. Yet that is not Jesus' promise. Rather, he asks for God's support and protection of them against all the evils of the world."² Faith is to assist us in keeping grounded in the earthquakes of life. Being a Christian does not mean you will not struggle, but it does mean you will not be alone in those struggles.

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/05/easter-7-b-called-and-sent/>

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The third point of this prayer is more of a reminder and a commissioning for us. We are here for a purpose and that purpose is to love. As we love God and are so connected with the holy that we are one with the spirit we will then love our neighbours and ourselves in ways that bring abundance and joy. It may be hard to believe but the truth is, this difficult and at times painful world is beloved of God. And we are sent to this world to bear witness to the truth that God loves the whole world, even when the world runs contrary to God's design or desire.

And so with all this knowledge Jesus prays that we may be one with God, as he is so that our joy may be complete. Susannah Metz addresses how improbable this seems in her sermon "To be one" She writes "We might be tempted to say, "Who are you kidding, Jesus? It didn't happen in your time, did you imagine it would ever happen in ours?"³

Jesus told his followers that they were to be one with God. In the midst of their world and culture yet one with the Father. He reminds them that the kingdom of heaven is here and now, not in some distant future, not in the world beyond. He talks about the ability for them to connect with God as he has as if he believes it is a true possibility, a longing for them to perceive and receive.

Metz continues "Either Jesus is wrong, or we're wrong. Well, let's take a vote on that!

How many of you think Jesus doesn't quite understand the penchant for human beings to be divisive?

Now, how many of you think we may be misunderstanding what Jesus means when he calls us to unity?

It's pretty much a guarantee that Jesus knows what he's talking about. It's probably our misunderstanding of "unity" and "respect" that is at stake here. We may not even understand truly what it means to "be one as Jesus and the Father are one." It's hard enough to understand the vagaries of human nature, as evident in our lack of understanding of people and cultures who are different from us. How can we ever understand the theological implications of the unity within the Trinity?"⁴

"In a 1997 edition of the magazine Christian Century, the Rev. Dean Lueking wrote an article that put this conundrum very well:

³ To be one BY THE REV. DR. SUSANNAH METZ

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“Nevertheless, that they may be one still haunts as well as inspires. It is wearisome, deadly wearisome, to endure church battles that split not once but repeatedly. The blight of triumphalism, of power games, and the obsession with always being right still throw up huge, offensive roadblocks against Jesus’ prayer. Such sin drags us back to the Upper Room, to dull disciples among whom we now sit, to the grief of our Lord over our tearing apart the seamless robe of unifying love in which he would wrap us.”

Lueking is focusing on the tearing apart from our own church battles. Jesus included not only those, but also the tearing apart of cultures, peoples, nations, every bit of our human existence. Oneness with God means being at one with all God’s gifts: cultures, peoples, nations, every bit of our human existence. To tear apart one bit of our gift is to put a tear in the beauty of oneness with God and oneness with each other.

If we begin just with our problems of division as churches, we see how quickly we destroy what we often hear called “unity within diversity.”⁵

We are always called to be connected first with God and then with one another, and in this time of new life for our congregation we are called to it in concrete, visible ways as we worship with others, and eventually as we share our land, building and resources with others. Called to be one, connected in love, caring for all God’s creation. Being the same and believing the same is not the basis of unity, love is the basis of unity.

“When St. Paul said there was no more male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free, he certainly didn’t mean that men and women morphed into some other form of human being or that Jews and Greeks would suddenly become one new nationality. He meant that each of us in our uniqueness would look with love on all the other precious creatures of God. He meant that we would see beauty in the gifts others have and join together to build the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps Jesus was praying that we would be able to worship God in many different ways, many different liturgies, and many different traditions – that our unity would be in the fact that we share our love and praise of God with others and invite them to seek our God with us.”⁶

I look forward to seeing how we unify with God’s mission for all of creation in the next few years and beyond. I believe the spirit is moving and calling us to something new. I believe that there are great possibilities and experiences in store

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for us even in this time of transition. I can't wait to see what we learn from one another. I anticipate us experiencing new connections with people in this room and faith community in ways we can imagine. I know that will happen with folks outside our walls. Let us begin this journey first and foremost grounded in love, connected to the true vine, drinking of the living water, that we may be one as Jesus was one with our creator, sustainer and life giver. May we know in the midst of this transition, in the midst of our questions that we are not alone.

“The love that exists among the Trinity is not a stagnant, complacent love. It's a love that not only draws the Trinity into one, but also burns outward to include all creation. Jesus offers this love to be our reservoir of strength and truth, that sacred place where we gain the words and guidance we need as we build God's kingdom here on earth.

If we take Jesus' words seriously, we'll hear that the same vibrant, outpouring love that is God, there for us. All we need to do is believe it and then let it guide our words and actions.”⁷

There will be challenges along the way. There are always challenges in life. But my prayer for us is that we may go from here today being reminded of the deep, all encompassing love God has for us. May we see how that love was lived out in Jesus. May we know true connection and oneness so that even in the midst of the tremors of life we will know we are not alone.

Jesus in this prayer continues to tell us the truth, life can be difficult and yet God has promised to be with us amid the challenges in such a way that we not only survive but actually flourish. And with that God intends to use us wherever we are to work for the good of this world God loves so much. Whether we will be at home or school or work or a place of volunteering, and whether the week brings challenges or blessings or some measure of each, God continues to be with us, strengthening us, and using us to care for each other and this world.

⁷ IBID