

*John 17:13-24 (NRSV)<sup>1</sup>*

- <sup>13</sup>“But now I am coming to you,  
and I speak these things in the world  
so that they may have my joy made complete among themselves.
- <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word, and the world has hated them  
because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.
- <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world,  
but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.
- <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.
- <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
- <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.
- <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.
- <sup>20</sup>I ask not only on behalf of these,  
but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,
- <sup>21</sup>that they may all be one.  
As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,  
so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
- <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them,  
so that they may be one, as we are one,
- <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one,  
so that the world may know that you have sent me  
and have loved them even as you have loved me.
- <sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me,  
may be with me where I am, to see my glory,  
which you have given me  
because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

*Unity. The word is easily thrown around. So much so that it can be hard for us to bear Jesus' prayer that we be one people, one in Christ and in the Father, one in truth and in purpose. This is God's wish for us and his command to us.*

On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus met with his disciples for one last meal. He began it by washing their feet and concluded it with his lengthy prayer to the Father (John 17). Of course, Jesus praying is not quite like you and me praying. Jesus is the Divine Revealer in what he does, what he says, and who he is. To put it another way, Jesus is the complete and definitive revelation of God. Thus, Jesus is not only praying to the Father, he is also addressing us with a prophetic word that we need to hear.

There are several themes in Jesus' prayer: the glorification of the Father through Jesus' death and exaltation, Jesus' obedience of the Father, the revelation of God in Jesus, setting the disciples apart from the world, the disciples' protection, and their mission.<sup>2</sup> First and foremost, though, Jesus' prayer is for unity among the believers. Unity in Christ. Unity in truth. Unity in purpose.

*“That they may all be one” (v. 21)*

We live in the United States. We give to the United Way. Our coins bear the Latin phrase, *E Pluribus Unum*, “out of many, one.” As Americans, however, we are not united in our values or ethnicity. We are not united in our religion or beliefs. We are united in our laws. But what does Jesus mean when he prays that the disciples, then and now, will be one?

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<sup>1</sup>I've followed some commentators in rendering this passage as poetic thoughts rather than simple prose. It helps to see the flow of Jesus' prayer. I have also used the NRSV's alternative translation for v. 13: “among” rather than “in.” Finally, “sanctify” in v. 17 translates the verb form of the Greek word for “holiness.” As is the case with words like “faith” and “righteousness,” there is no verb form of the noun “holiness” in English, so we use the word “sanctify.” The base meaning in the Bible is “set apart.” That which is sanctified is set apart for God and God's purposes. In John's gospel, such “sanctification” is always for mission.

<sup>2</sup>From D.A. Carson's commentary on John in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series, Eerdmans, 1991.

Here is how Jesus describes this unity in his prayer. The Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father. Jesus prays that we will also be in Jesus and the Father (v. 21). We are to be one, as Jesus and the Father are one (v. 22). Jesus is in us and we are in Jesus so that we, the disciples then and now, may be completely one (v. 23).

Whew! That is enough to set any head spinning, so let's unpack it a bit. Jesus and the Father are one but they are still distinguishable. The Son prays to the Father; Jesus isn't praying to himself. The Son is obedient to the Father, who sends the Son into the world. Yet when people saw the Son, they saw the Father (John 12:45). What Jesus does, the Father does (14:10). One . . . but distinguishable.

Perhaps the best way to understand Jesus' meaning is to look ahead to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, aka the "Spirit of Christ" and the "Spirit of God," arrives to dwell not only in the fellowship of believers but in each believer. There is even a Pentecost moment in John's gospel when, after Jesus' resurrection, he breathes on the disciples, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). The Spirit, who is also one with Father and the Son yet distinguishable from both and from us, forms us into one body. We often affirm this in the benediction taken from one of Paul's letters: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and

the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor. 13:13).

#### Reading John's Gospel

John's gospel is different! It bears little resemblance to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Very few of the incidents in John are also found in the other three and vice versa. John's gospel has very little in the way of ethical teachings such as we find in the Sermon on the Mount. John writes so that "you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." (20:31).

Here are a few ideas to keep in mind when you come to John's gospel:

First, John binds together the *already/not* yet that we've discussed so often, emphasizing that God's kingdom has come already! Jesus says, for example, "Those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed" (3:17) and "anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life" (5:24). As Richard Hays notes, this means that "for those in the believing community, eternal life is now." The glory of God's kingdom is fully revealed and present in Jesus.

Second, the immediate reality of God's kingdom is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (14:16). This Advocate, the Spirit, teaches us, the community of believers, in all things and reminds us of what Jesus said.

Finally, in this community of faith, we are called to love one another just as Jesus has loved us. Rather than give us long passages of Jesus' teachings, John gives us the enacted parable of Jesus' washing the disciples feet (chapter 13), leading us to see Jesus' sacrificial love on the cross several chapters later. It is to this unity expressed in love and mission that Jesus calls his disciples.

*"That the world may believe"*

Why are we to be united? Or to put it more carefully, why has God set us apart as a single body, grounded in God's truth?

First, Jesus has given us the glory that was given him by the Father (v. 22). "Glory" is often a misunderstood word. It refers to the manifestation of God's being or character through an act that reveals it. Glory is about showing that God is God. Jesus revealed the love and faithfulness of God in his suffering and death. We too are to reveal God's love and faithfulness in what we do. The world is to see who God is through us.

Second, we are one *so that* the world can know that the Father sent Jesus and loves the world just as the Father loves Jesus. There could hardly be a more striking evangelistic appeal. We are not formed into God's people for our own sakes, but for the sake of the world. God's purpose is that every person might come to know God and know God's love. Our mission, as believers, is to carry forward that purpose.

There can be no sitting on our hands, no comfort with the status quo. Are there people who do not know that God loves them and that Jesus is their Lord? Are there believers who have only begun to taste the riches of God's faithfulness?

Whether it is reaching out to children or to youth, to white or to black, to the rich or to the poor . . . we can never forget why God has blessed us by calling us to him and setting us apart for his work.

This is why the strategic vision for St. Andrew that we cast last year is so outwardly focused and why its

implementation was unanimously embraced at the most recent church conference. There are always more children to introduce to Jesus. More youth to help understand what it really means to be a believer. More adults to teach and to help grow in their own discipleship. More people to care for. More who need to be invited to the Lord. More poor to feed and to clothe. Always more. Always more.

I see none of this as a burden or even as an obligation. Rather, revealing the love and faithfulness of God is a privilege, a profound and energizing privilege. This is not only who we are to be, it is who we are. God has formed us into a fellowship, empowered by his Spirit, to do and to be more than we would ever imagine. My own story is certainly a ringing testament to the truth of Jesus' prayer.

By the grace of God we are united and unlimited. Who says so? Jesus.

#### Rev. Michael Reeves on Our United and Unlimited Prayers

Think for a moment about your experience with prayer. Are you a person who starts and ends your day with prayer? Are you one of those who tends to pray erratically as the mood hits you. Are you one of those folks who shoots off a fiery dart to God in a panic. Part of being united is sharing in prayer. It is a regular part of our worship experience. We fill out prayer cards assured that the prayers will be shared with those in our caring ministries and with the staff. And prayer can lead us to that unlimited part of our faith...

Today's passage from John's gospel is one of the famous prayers in the Bible. Jesus has accomplished all he set out to do during his lifetime. He passed God's message on. He has made God known. Now there remains only his death. But his followers will be left bereft in a hostile world. So Jesus prays to the Father

- to protect his followers;
- that their lives might be shaped by the truth of God's word;
- that they might display unity among themselves,
- and that in the end, they may go to be with Jesus.

In today's passage, Jesus says that he has passed his mission on to us and urges us to have one heart and mind. He finishes the prayer by saying that we are united in his glory and that our unity is an indication of our spiritual maturity. What does that mean to us?

Let's face it - in our age of "me first" it is challenging to be together about very much. And we share a very diverse faith background. More than half of us come from other than Methodist backgrounds. It is difficult at times to find common language to express our faith. Our strategic plan challenges us with direction including a capital campaign to provide resources for our mission. But the plan requires a broader base of participation. Our vow of prayers, presence, gifts and service is not a vague multiple choice suggestion, it is a definition of being a community of faith. We face some challenges as well as unlimited opportunities to be God's people. The starting point and catalyst is prayer.

We call all of St. Andrew together in prayer. To help you we have developed some information and some prayer support resources. We've prepared a packet that contains a brochure identifying some of our opportunities. The packet also provides a DVD for you to view. Finally, there is a prayer guide to help you pray every day. Also, on two Saturdays, April 12 and April 26, we will have a special prayer time in the Chapel from 7-9 AM and 7-9 PM.

Prayer was the approach Jesus took when defining the purpose he saw for his people. How else could we do this? We, as a church, have sensed God's direction. We want to draw together in unity of purpose and unity in prayer. We hope that you will identify one of the prayer vigil times that works for you and come to pray with other members. Come join with one another, united in prayer.

### READING WITH HEART & MIND, APRIL 6 - 12

**Monday, Psalm 133** How good and pleasant it is when God's people live in unity.

**Tuesday, John 10:1-21** The good shepherd and his sheep, one flock (v.16).

**Wednesday, 1 Cor. 3:3-11** We are God's co-workers, each assigned to his or her task.

**Thursday, 1 Cor. 10:14-17** There is one loaf of communion and one body.

**Friday, 1 Cor. 12:12-31** Again, there is one body, diverse though we are.

**Saturday, Ephesians 4:1-16** Even a few decades after Jesus, Paul had to do a lot of teaching and persuading about unity among the believers.

## Sermon Notes

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### ***Get the Monkey Off Your Back: Making Sense of Creation and Evolution***

#### **A New *Something Else* series on Sundays begins TODAY!**

The debate around issues of creation and evolution isn't going away. Instead, it seems to get more and more heated, with a lot more talk than understanding. In this series, we'll try to make sense of the debate and see that Christian truth claims are not at odds with scientific claims.

**Taught by Scott Engle at 11:00 in Festival Hall on Sunday morning.**

### **A Bible Academy Saturday workshop on April 19 *How to be a Conservative/Liberal Christian without Losing Your Faith with Dr. Leroy Howe***

Too often, too much of the energy that the Holy Spirit pours into our lives and into the ministry and mission of the Church gets swallowed up in rancorous disputes about the right and wrong way to interpret the message of the Gospel for our own time. And yet, conscientious Christians do sometimes find themselves in disagreement about matters of faith and life. This course explores ways of pursuing these differences of opinion toward a greater unity of belief while assuring that the dictates of conscience need never be compromised.

Childcare available. Lunch will be provided.

**To register go to [www.thebibleacademy.com](http://www.thebibleacademy.com)**

## **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. In last week's background study, I wrote:

"Too many Christians have this idea that we get through this life so we can get on to the next life, where we can leave all this behind and enjoy some sort of eternal, disembodied bliss. However, the biblical story is not about a world left behind, but a world put right. Easter doesn't point us toward some faraway place we imagine to be 'heaven' but to the marriage of heaven and earth in this place."

How would you relate the "marriage of heaven and earth" with Jesus' prayer for unity among the disciples so that they might reveal God to the world? You'll recall that Paul's big "therefore" after the resurrection is that our work is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

2. Any congregation is a diverse set of people, often with vastly different backgrounds, talents, and opinions (see 1 Cor. 12:12-31). In what are we unified as believers? Beliefs? If so, what beliefs? Actions? If so, what actions? If you could ask Jesus to be a bit more specific about this unity, what do you think he would say?
3. Our five year ministry plan has four primary objectives: (1) expand our focus on discipleship, (2) expand the caring ministries, (3) increase mission and outreach projects, and (3) continue to grow as a teaching congregation. Our church has voted to undertake the building renovations and expansions needed to move forward on these objectives. We are now beginning the campaign to pay for it. Read back over Jesus' prayer for unity and mission. How are our objectives an expression of unity and God's purpose for us?