

One in Jesus
John 17: 20-26
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What a wonderful time we had last Sunday. It was a great celebration as we thanked Corey and Miriam for their presence with us and their ministry. We said lots of nice words. It was a highlight day in the life of our church.

People come and go in our lives and sometimes, frankly, we're glad to see them go. But there are people that we're not glad to see go. We wish Corey and Miriam well as they head off to their new ministry. I want us to remember as we begin this sermon today that we are still one in Christ with Corey and Miriam. They're moving off to another ministry but it's not another ministry – it is the same ministry of Jesus Christ that we are engaged in together.

I was thinking this week about the words of send-off that were given last week and I was thinking about words of send-off at all stages of our lives. We send our kids off to camp when they're little and we have things we want to say to them to assure them that we love them and tell them what to do and what not to do, of course. And then we send them later off to college, sometimes on to new jobs then and marriages perhaps.

In all those times of life when we are sending people off to something new, we do take at least a moment, if not a longer moment, if not a long time in fact to tell them how much we love them, to encourage them to continue to grow into and to act out all the things we have taught them in the past. Perhaps to tell them to do better than we have done as they head into the world as well.

Our text for this morning is a send-off. It's not words of wisdom so much as it is prayer. Jesus is praying before he leaves the upper room to go out into that awful and fateful night. This is the last peaceful, private time that Jesus has with his disciples before his life careens to the cross and ends there. And then as he is brought back to life and is ascended into heaven. So this is his lasts

moment with the disciples when he's not reacting to all the things that are going on around him.

John, chapters 15, 16 and 17 are often brought together as a unified whole because this is when Jesus is giving his last words to the disciples. In chapter 15 he teaches them about his connection with them. He reminds them that that connection is going to result in opposition from the world around. It's not going to be easy.

In chapter 16 he again teaches about the coming of the Holy Spirit and how, in his absence, the Spirit will come and inhabit all believers and give them strength for the journey they face. Specifically he says that his joy will inhabit the disciples as they go about their way in the power of the Spirit. On the one hand, there's going to be worldly opposition; on the other hand there will be enough strength and more than enough joy through the Spirit to lead them forward.

In chapter 17 Jesus prays. There are three sections to the prayer. First, he prays for himself, that he will have strength to face the challenges of the next hours of his life. He prays for the disciples, that they will have strength to do what he has called them to do. And then in the last section, Jesus prays for all believers. It's quite a remarkable thing that Jesus prays in the presence of the disciples for everyone who will come to faith as a result of their ministry, ongoing into eternity. He doesn't limit it to one generation. He says that everyone who comes to believe in me, I am praying for today.

Now I think if we pay any attention to Jesus' last words, all of them, it ought to be these as they function as a critical piece of his perspective on what we are to be about and what we are to experience in our life in Christ. His theme is oneness, becoming one. We're not called just to get along. That's a wonderful start but if we're to have this sort of relationship with one another in the church that Jesus has with God the father – a seamless, personal engagement with one another – that we are related, that we are adopted to the

family of faith. And Jesus directs this to the disciples and to all the disciples that will come. Jesus is praying for you and for me. He is praying for us. It's a remarkable thing that he does.

Ray Steadman, a pastor in northern California who is now passed away said one time that it was amazing to him to think about the fact that he belonged to the same church as the apostles. He belonged to the same church as Martin Luther and John Calvin and John Wesley because in Christ we are part of Christ's church – much, much more than any denominational vision that we might experience in life.

I want to talk for a few minutes this morning about being one with Jesus. Next week, I'm going to talk about how we are one with one another as well as we develop a body life in the way that we develop a relationship together. But all throughout this let's remember that the word Jesus uses is oneness. First of all, we are one with Christ by faith. Oneness with Jesus is a function of faith, a function of belief and it's a function only of belief. It's not earned, it's not performance oriented, it's not inherited, it's not bought. Our relationship with God and Christ is through faith alone.

It's a covenant relationship with the living God and it goes back consistently to the Old Testament. Moses is at the burning bush and says, "Who shall I say sent me?" God says, "Tell them I Am sent you." So God gives a name and Jesus, later on, says to his disciples, "I will be your God and you will be my people. You go out in my name." It's a personal relationship with a God who is named and his name is Jesus.

Jesus uses the word *one* four times in just a couple verses then he caps it off by saying, *completely one* in the NRSV and in other places, *perfectly one*. Now I don't know about you but anytime I see the word perfect, I start to run away because I know I'm not there. It's just never going to happen. So when Jesus uses this word completely one, it doesn't mean that we're without blemish but he says that we are becoming the people that we are intended to

be. The Greek word means completeness, it means to bring together all that we were meant to be, even in our imperfections, even in our failures, we're moving on the road with Jesus – we're becoming who we were meant to be. And we are incomplete until we realize and claim and enjoy this oneness with Jesus Christ.

In our denomination's statement of faith, it begins by saying, "In life or in death, we belong to God." We understand that in terms of life, we understand it in terms of death but I hope that we understand it in terms of all the ups and downs, the failures and the rough patches, all the good times and bad times in between we are one with God in Christ. It is not because of our strength, it's because of the tenacity of God's grip on us, that God will never let us go.

I mentioned that in chapter 16, Jesus teaches about the Holy Spirit. He is following this up here because of the Holy Spirit living within us. God gets hold of our hearts and our lives and doesn't let go. In that oneness that we experience with Christ, we see Christ's glory, we see him for who he is. We share Christ's glory; we see how we belong to Jesus because his glory alone can meet our deepest needs in life.

When we encounter our rough patches, it's not because we've done so well over the last twenty years that we have confidence. It's not because we're so strong in ourselves that we can face everything. It's because Jesus draws us to himself and reveals his glory and such that we have confidence in moving into the future that he has called us to. So by faith we are one with Christ. We are connected with Christ by faith.

Earlier in chapter 11 of John's gospel, Jesus gives the image and he says to the disciples, "I am the vine and you are the branches. There is that connection. He says, "Apart from me you can really do nothing but if you live in me, if you abide in me you will know my love and you will bear much fruit." I love that image that we're connected in such a vital and life-giving way.

One of my professors in seminary was a man named Bob Munger and earlier in his life, before I had met him, he preached a sermon at his church called My Heart, Christ's Home. And in this little booklet that Intervarsity publishes, Bob made the comparison image that our lives have different roles in them. Many of those roles and activities compare to the rooms of a home. If we compare those and invite Christ to be at home in all of those rooms in our lives, we begin to live out this seamlessness, this life of him being the vine and us the branches. Here are some examples. The first room is the study, the library, where our minds are. Christ asks to come into that room of our hearts, into our minds and to influence our minds in his direction.

Next is the dining room, the room of appetites and desires. We are invited to give those appetites and desires to God in Christ and allow him to shape those in our lives as well. I love the one of the recreation room, the place that we look to have fun. He wants to be part of those rooms in our lives as well. You get the idea. The idea is that the oneness that Jesus teaches can be a reality in our lives. It's not just a matter of coming to church on Sunday or reading our Bible a few times a year. But Jesus, in entering into our hearts, desires that the oneness that he has with God be the oneness that we would experience with God. So we are one with Christ by faith.

Jesus also says that we are one with him in witness because he prays that all the world will come to know his love through us. So we're a reflection of Christ in the world. As his church, we're the embodiment of the fellowship he created. As followers of his priorities and values, we're an illustration to the world around of his values here on earth. As bearers of his glory, as he says, we reflect his character in the world.

I know that when we start talking about witness and evangelism we all get nervous. I get that. It is an integral part of our oneness with Christ, that our lives point to the glorified and risen Christ. In the Alpha course, Nikki Gumbel says at one point that we're not all called to be evangelists; we don't all have that gift. But every Christian is called to be a witness, to say to the world by

our lives and our words, Christ loves me and any good I do is because he is living in and through me.

What Jesus teaches here about witness is very different from our usual understanding. You know the caricature – the Bible thumper who hounds uninterested people into hostile responses. That is not the evangelism that Jesus is talking about. Here he says the measure in which we live out our oneness in him is the measure in which the world might become interested in him. He says, how we love one another becomes the most powerful witness to a world that needs to know of his love. It's important that in that oneness we recognize, it's not just for us, it's also through us.

The apostle Paul followed up on this concept in the book of Colossians, chapter 1, verses 25-27. "I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christ in us is the witness that we give to the world. As Paul writes this, the "you" that he writes is plural. It's not just individual, though that's part of it; it's how we, as a body together, witness to the love of Christ around us.

My cousin told a story a long, long time ago about a pastor who's trying to explain to a young girl, the concept of Christ living inside of us, having a personal relationship with Christ. As is often the case, the pastor was speaking metaphorically. And the young lady was hearing things concretely. The pastor said, yes, Christ lives in our hearts, he lives in our lives. She is trying to figure out how big Jesus is and she says, "Well, if Christ lives in me, shouldn't he stick out?" Yes, that's the answer. That as Christ lives in us and the glory and love of Christ inhabit us, that sticks out. It happens not because we've earned it. It happens by the grace of God as we come to faith in Christ.

Next week I want to talk a little more about how we have not only upward focus in this but an outward focus in one another. Over the next week, I invite you to consider what it means to be one with Jesus. Not just members of a church, not just associated in some way, but even as Jesus prayed that we would be one in him – what will that look like?

I encourage you to spend some time in scripture, the gospels especially in John. Reread chapters 15, 16 and 17. Take some time to get to know Jesus better as he's revealed in the gospels. Pray for the strengthening of that oneness in your life and mine. Look for the signs of glory, not only in the world at large, but also in the lives of believers around you. And pray that Jesus might indeed, stick out. Most of all, may we be thankful that the Lord of all has expressed a desire to be part of you and me.

So what might our lives look like? What might our service or witness be? If Jesus' prayer was really answered in us and the oneness that he prayed for in us comes to drive who we are and what we do and surrounds us and blesses us and becomes a blessing to those who surround us. It's an exciting journey. It's an adventure in faith. It can be hard, so as we come to the Lord's Table today, it symbolizes many things to us. It symbolizes the place of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, it symbolizes a reminder that believers all around the world gather around this table – thousands and millions of them, perhaps even today, and worship as one with Christ, even as we are. It reminds us of our place together, one with Christ and one at this table. Mostly, it's a place where Jesus has said to us, "Join me for a meal; let's get to know one another better. That is Christ's call to us – to come to this table together. Amen.