

*From the One, Many*

John 17: 20-26

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Babcock Presbyterian Church

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Jesus said, "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us." (John 17: 20- 21)

After passing on final instructions and assurances in the Upper Room the night before he died, Jesus prayed for his disciples sitting around the table. He then transitioned his prayer to include all the disciples following them, including you and me. He prayed for us to become one with God and one with each other through himself so the many can become one.

This may seem confusing until we remember our national motto, E Pluribus Unum, "out of the many, one," the proposition being all citizens become one as loyal citizens under to The Constitution of the United States of America.

Jesus prayed for something radically different. Just as the father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the father, Jesus prayed those who believe would all become one living and serving together according to God's will.

Created in the image of God each one of us is unique and special. Through Christ, God invites us to blend our unique personalities, including our natural talents and spiritual gifts, so we may "all may be one" for a defining purpose. Through the Holy Spirit we are given the same heart and mind of God the Son who has the same heart and mind of God the Father.

Remember what Jesus said, "I and the father are one." The leaders of the religious establishment were scandalized, believing Jesus committed blasphemy when he made this claimed. I can almost sympathize with them. Whenever I hear about someone claiming to be God, I remember cult leaders like Jim Jones or David Karesh. The difference is, unlike a cult leader who grabs power for himself, Jesus came down from heaven to give his power for the many.

Unfortunately for them, the religious leaders were blind. Their prejudices kept them from seeing the truth so, they naturally refused to accept Jesus at his word. The same brand of prejudice keeps latter day cynics equally blind. They repeat the worn out mantra that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is a cult, robbing vulnerable people of their individuality. We are brainwashed because we surrendered our individuality to false doctrines. They can't or won't see that Christ doesn't rob us of our individuality. On the contrary, through Christ our

individuality is enhanced. According to the scriptures, God encoded into our DNA the gift of free will, the ability to think and choose for ourselves. It's true the Bible says God created us for himself but the Bible also proclaims God gave himself for us.

The cynic also rejects the notion God came down from heaven to surrender his humanity on the cross, making it possible for us to become fully human. They'd never concede that human beings are, by design, dependent on God, the same way children are dependent on their parents for nurture, guidance and love. They rebel against that notion but they might as well rebel against the air by holding their breaths. Cutting yourself off from God only deprives you of the source of life.

"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were created through him and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness when the darkness could not comprehend it." (John 1:1-3)

There it is, in the beginning, Jesus was the agent of creation bringing life out of chaos. All the more reason to be in awe of the creative love of God bringing life into the chaos we created.

Oneness with God means entering into Christ's passion and resurrection, allowing your old self to die with Christ before experiencing rebirth.

I'll now stop with the theological jargon and speak plainly. Being "in Christ" and "one with Christ" begins when you know Christ. Only then can you begin really knowing yourself. By knowing Jesus, not just knowing about Jesus but intimately knowing Jesus, you get to know yourself, maybe for the first time, as a person of value because Jesus paid the highest price possible to reclaim you for himself.

In time, this new identity takes root and grows, crowding out the old false image you had of yourself. Despite your flaws and guilt, you experience the power of grace when you realize every time God thinks of you (which is always) God falls in love with you all over again. Through God's love you become one with God and God becomes one with you. Separation is impossible, you are saved to enter eternal life beginning at the present moment and continuing into eternity.

However, our salvation takes us much further than that. You are also saved to be "in Christ", to become a good neighbor through servanthood and assuming your new role in Christ's Church.

The word "church" is a Greek word meaning, "called out." You're called out of yourself, your safe room, your insular way of life, to engage the world. You also discover as a member of Christ's Church, you have a definite calling to carry it out. But not to worry you're not alone.

God is with you and God sends other people in Christ to encourage and help you put the world we broke back together again.

You've heard me say these things this so many times you may think I sound like a broken record, but I speak the truth. You were born is to satisfy God's need for pleasure and nothing pleasures God more than anything is when you take the calling of discipleship seriously and offer up your life for Christ and his kingdom. Your offering of yourself begins with prayer.

We read a book of Acts that the disciples witnessed Christ ascension, they returned to the Jerusalem:

"When enter the city they went to the room upstairs where they were staying...All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer." (Acts 1:13-14)

Question: if you were with the disciples in the Upper Room, what would you pray for? Like Jesus in Gethsemane before his crucifixion you might pray, "Father relieve me of having to give up my spare time and energy. I really don't want to this but I guess if there's no one else, I'll do what you want, not my will but yours be done."

Once you get past the initial jitters, maybe your prayer will become bolder, "Lord, I'm finally willing to take the next step get out of my comfortable pew and do whatever you want me to do. I'm not sure I have the right stuff so I'm going to really need your help."

It's possible this is what the disciples' prayers sounded like at first but as time passed their prayers became more intentional. By being with each other they became one in Christ. They still didn't know what they were getting into, they had to be wondering what God would require of them. They also had to be apprehensive but not one of them went wobbly and wandered away. They stayed and waited in that room for their assignments.

Thank God they did, otherwise we might not be here. Come to think of it, if we don't stay here and wait for the Spirit, the next generation of believers may not be here in this room.

One week from today we celebrate Pentecost. It's not just a celebration of what happened then, it's a celebration of what's happening now. The Spirit is on the move. The question is, will you allow yourself to catch the Spirit and move with the Spirit or will you be left behind?

I don't know what God will require of you. Ordinarily but I don't think God would ever ask you to do anything contrary to your abilities, unless God wants to prove that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Either way, Pentecost is all about awakening the many and uniting us as one. Then, after pouring into us the desire and energy, the Holy Spirit sends us out into our mission field to continue the ministry that began two thousand years ago. Now it's our turn to change the world one life at a time.

Will you pray with me?

Holy Spirit, comfort us when we want it but also disturb us when we need it. Bless us with wisdom, courage and love as we claim our unity with Christ and each other. Use even us to accomplish great things on behalf of the least of these for Christ and his kingdom. Amen.