

THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

John 17:20–26

In our lesson today, we're given a wonderful glimpse into Jesus' heart and soul. His complete passion and commitment. It's no ordinary teaching. It's not a miracle. Or a parable. It's Jesus praying just hours before His arrest. And for what? He prayed for Himself! He prayed that His Father would glorify Him, so that He might glorify His Father, God. He prayed for His disciples asking for their protection. Their joy and dedication to the Truth. And He prayed for all future believers. For us! That we may be one. That we may share in the love and Glory He had with His Father God. It's selfless!

Even in the shadow of the cross Jesus focused on others. On unity. On love. On truth. And on His mission. It's a prayer full of hope. Jesus had just finished His final meal with His disciples in the Upper Room (John 13–16) and knew what was coming. His betrayal by Judas. The denial by Peter. His suffering on the cross. He knew all that was near yet, He focused on love. He knew the weight of the cross He would carry. Still, He trusted His Father. And instead of retreating in fear, or lashing out, He turned to His Father in prayer. A prayer that is often called the High Priestly Prayer.

Prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount Olives just outside the walls of Jerusalem. It's the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. And deeply personal. He prayed not only for those present then in the world. But for those who later *would believe*. He prayed for the Church. Even before it existed! It's a deeply loving prayer. His greatest desire was for His believers to be united in Divine love, and to be with Him in Glory. It's not theological because of its themes of glory, unity, and the mission of the Church. It was a deeply emotional moment that showed the heart of Jesus. Full of grace. Full of purpose. Full of love for His people. And it wasn't a prayer for His rescue. Not for vengeance. Not even for His own strength. He was praying for *us*! And for all who would come to believe in Him. *"I ask not only on behalf of these who are My disciples, but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their word..."* (John 17:20)

That means, Jesus prayed for *you*. For *me*. For the *Church*. And what He asked for was simple. But it is extremely challenging! *"That they may all be one."* Not powerful. Not famous. Not problem-free. But *one*! He prayed we would be one in the same way that He and His Father were one. Not an on-the-surface agreement or casual togetherness. But a deep relation. A spirit-filled unity. Rooted in Divine love. *"...that they may be one, as We are one... that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them."* (vv. 22–26) It's a oneness shared in identity with Christ that reflects the Trinity itself. Three in One. In perfect spiritual union! Jesus didn't pray for unity just for our own sake. He prayed for unity so that the whole world may believe. A oneness that bears witness *"...so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."* (v. 21)

The believability of the Gospel is tied to love and unity in the Church and puts emphasis on the way Christians should live their faith. Especially in terms of love and unity. It serves as a testimony to the Truth of the Gospel message. When Christians show genuine love, and work together in unity, it reflects the power of the Gospel. On the other hand, division, conflicts, and lack of love within the Church undermine its credibility. When the Church fails to stand for the teachings of Christ, it can lead to skepticism among believers and non-believers.

So, this prayer is a call for Christians to enthusiastically pursue love and unity by recognizing relationships are fundamental to the witness and mission of the church in the world. Unity is fundamental to the credibility of the Gospel. Because it reflects the heart of Jesus' message and mission. It emphasizes the way Christians should live out their faith. Especially in terms of love and unity. It serves as a testimony to the Truth of the Gospel.

And it's a hard truth because we live in a world where sometimes churches are viewed more by division than by love. They divide over theology. Different worship styles. It may be Traditional Worship with hymns, organ or piano, liturgy, scripture readings, creeds, choir; or Contemporary Worship with modern worship bands, casual atmosphere, lyrics projected on screens, less formal structure; Blended Worship, which is a mix of traditional hymns and contemporary praise songs, combining old and new; Charismatic Spirit-Led Worship with extended singing, spontaneous prayers, speaking in tongues, prophetic words; Liturgical Worship based on a set liturgy as in Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and High-Church Lutheran traditions with sacraments emphasized, seasonal colors and readings, which is what we have here at Everglades Community Church; or, House Worship with intimate settings in homes or small gatherings with no music, but highly involved by all.

Jesus knew the greatest defense for His mission was a unified church community! A loving Church. A living testimony to a loving God. So, what do we do with this prayer? First, we must recognize that this was Jesus' desire for us. If we love Him, we must care about what He prayed *for*. Second, we must examine our hearts. Are we living in love with our brothers and sisters? Are we seeking to bring together where there's been hurt? Are we building bridges or walls? Third, we must remember, unity is not something we just pull together. It's something we receive through the Holy Spirit. Unity begins with worship supported in prayer. Practiced in humility. And sustained by grace. The Church is a powerful witness to the world when Christians demonstrate genuine love and work together in unity. It reflects the nature of God and the transforming power of the Gospel. While on the other hand, division causes conflicts. A lack of love within the Church. And undermines its credibility. When the Church fails to show the teachings of Christ, it can lead to skepticism and disillusionment among believers and non-believers.

That's why understanding this prayer of Jesus calls Christians to enthusiastically pursue love and unity recognizing that relationships with one another are vital to their witness and mission in the world. Visible love and unity in the Church are crucial to the authority of the Gospel because it reflects the heart of Jesus' message. And His mission is found in His teachings and actions throughout the Gospels.

Jesus emphasized the two greatest commandments are to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind. And to love one's neighbor as oneself. (Matthew 22:37-39) He preached about the Kingdom of God. He described it as being both a present reality and a future hope. He taught that the Kingdom is described by justice, peace, and righteousness. (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15) His message often included the sidelined. The outcasts. It demonstrated that the Kingdom is open to all, regardless of social status, background, or past sins. And the main point of Jesus' mission was the offer of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. He came to seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:10) To provide a way for humanity to be restored to a right relationship with God through His sacrificial death and resurrection. (John 3:16) He called individuals to follow Him. And that involved a commitment to live according to His teachings and example.

Discipleship was a life of service, humility, and self-denial. (Matthew 16:24) He gave time to His disciples teaching them about the nature of God, the moral principles of the Kingdom, and their role in spreading the Gospel message. He demonstrated a deep concern for those sitting on the sideline in life. The sick. The oppressed. And His ministry included healing, feeding the hungry, and promoting justice. (Matthew 25:31-46) He often tackled religious and social injustices calling for a deeper understanding of justice and mercy. And He revealed the nature of God as loving, compassionate, and personal. He represented God's love and grace by showing humanity what it means to live in harmony within God's will. (John 14:9) And Jesus spoke of eternal life as a present reality for those who believe in Him. (John 3:36; John 10:10) He offered hope beyond this life. He assured His followers of a future with Him.

Jesus prayed this prayer knowing that the cross was before Him. He prayed for a Church that did not exist yet. Yet, believed it would. And now, we should understand that we are the answer to His prayer; to be *one*. To love deeply. To reflect the Divine unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in how we live, and serve, and bear witness to the world in our churches, in our homes, and in our hearts. So that the world may believe... because they see that *we are together*, the answer to Jesus' prayer. Let us pray.

Lord, we thank You for the gift of unity among believers. Help us to have this unity in our lives, that we may be one, as You are one. May our love for one another be a testament of Your grace and truth to the world. Teach us to love as You have loved us. To forgive as we have been forgiven. And to serve one another with humility and kindness. Let our hearts be filled with the desire to reflect You in all that we do. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.