

10-27-19 SERMON CCI John 17: 20-26 Jesus' Prayer List, Part 3

For the past 2 Sundays we have been learning how to pray from Jesus' Prayer List in John 17, from the prayer Jesus prayed after he shared the last supper with his disciples and just before going to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray alone because his death was soon to come. In that prayer, Jesus prayed that for the rest of his life, whether long or short, and whatever was ahead, that his life would glorify God- everything he said and did, his attitude, everything. And he prayed that his followers would grow in knowing God deeply, and would live confidently as those who know God.

Last week we learned that Jesus thanked God for us, because God had given us to him, which makes us gifts to Jesus from God. I still marvel about being considered a gift to Jesus, because I know myself, and I'm no special gift. We also heard Jesus pray that his followers would be one together just as he and the Father are one. And that just as the Father had sent him into the world, he had sent us into the world to be his presence. On both Sundays, we asked what if Jesus' prayers became our personal prayers? And what if they were the sincere prayers of this church? If you notice, these prayers are now part of the prayer requests in the bulletin. And I was blessed as Mary Cline opened our board meeting last Sunday with a prayer that what we did in that meeting would glorify God. It is my prayer that we will all let these be an important part of our prayer lists. It's changed how I start my days.

Today, I want to focus our attention on one last section of Jesus' prayer that night found in verses 20- 23.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, Notice that Jesus prayed not just for the men and women disciples sitting there with him that night; Jesus also prayed for the people who would believe because those men and women shared the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus assumed his disciples would not keep their faith to themselves, but would be so excited by what God was doing for them that they would spread the news everywhere they went. And because they did, others would come to faith.

I was in an old church once that had scenes of people from the Bible painted on the high walls around the sanctuary. Churches did that back in the day so that children who got bored during the sermon could look at the paintings and still learn stories from the Bible. And I recognized story after story, but then the pictures were of famous Christians – like Martin Luther and others, but then there were pictures of modern people, average people. As though each of us are part of God's grand story that isn't finished yet. That church had it right. Every one of us sitting here came to faith in Jesus Christ because someone shared the gospel with us- a family member, a pastor or teacher, Billy Graham, a friend. Maybe more than one. Take a moment a recall who shared the gospel with you and thank God for their witness. Because down through the ages, followers of Jesus accepted the call to be sent into the world until finally centuries later, in our lives, some average people cared enough to not keep the good news to themselves, but shared it with us. Praise God for Jesus' sent ones through the ages. And now it's our privilege to be Jesus' sent ones in our day.

We've heard Jesus' prayer that his disciples would be one before. Except this time Jesus expanded his prayer that **all** his followers would be one, from his little band of about 120 followers at that time, to all his followers over the ages and around the world. Being one must be very important for Jesus to pray it again. Why? So the world will believe that God sent Jesus to the world.

But look at how much oneness he prayed for this time: "Complete unity." Most of us have been in churches all our lives. How often have we seen God's people working in complete unity? Most churches argue over what color of carpet or curtains to install! And don't even raise the possibility of changing out the hard pews for chairs or you'll have a fight on your hands. And that's just within a single church. What about complete unity among Jesus' followers in different churches? How many churches refuse to share the Lord's Table with people from other churches? Or reject baptism of a different church because that other church baptizes differently? And what about the fact that 11am Sunday mornings is still the most segregated hour of the week? Jesus' people don't agree on women in ministry, abortion, the death penalty, the second coming of Christ and the rapture, the meaning of communion, who to vote for, how to interpret the Bible, worship styles, church leadership, whether to eat meat or not, and homosexuality, just to name a few things good, faithful Christians disagree on. And the early church did not agree on everything either. They disagreed on leadership styles, the gifts of the Spirit, whether everyone should be vegetarian, whether to celebrate holidays, whether Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised, and more. Which is why the Apostle Paul wrote letters like Philippians that we used for our call to worship this morning. There Paul called the church to "make my joy complete by being of one mind, one love, and being one in spirit." That's a lot of oneness. One mind, one love, and one in spirit. That's what Jesus was praying about in John 17. Jesus knew how hard it is for us humans to agree with one another, and yet, he sincerely prayed that his people would be brought to complete unity. Was Jesus just a dreamer? Wouldn't it have been more realistic for him to pray that his followers would try to be of one mind 50% of the time? And then if they could accomplish that, try for 60%? Why set a goal it's crazy to think we could reach?

Whatever one-mindedness Jesus was praying about, I believe it doesn't refer to everyone agreeing about everything in a church. Whatever he was hoping for it did not mean that a congregation would end up being single-minded about everything. Being single-minded involves believing and acting with a singular focus. Single-mindedness is seen every election as people vote as single-issue voters. Only one issue is important to them, forget all the rest no matter how much they matter to others. What I have come to learn over time is that the one-mindedness Jesus prayed for was a hope that believers would not be single-minded, but that we would share a oneness of purpose—to be the expression of God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness in the world. Worked out in diverse ways.

Theologian Karl Barth wrote that a better way to translate the original language of this call for one mindedness is as a call to *mind the one thing*—to remain focused on the common purpose we have as people of faith, to never let our differences become so important that we lose sight of how to remain true to the purpose we have in ministry together. That means we may disagree- and we will- but we also care deeply about what matters to others.

The truth is that in this room there are as many visions of what is right and wrong, what would count as the best way forward for this congregation as there are people. In this room there are dreamers with ideas of things they want to do together. In this room are also realists who look around and question whether those dreams are reasonable. So what do we do? Someone once asked St. Augustine, "What is the first mark of true religion?" "Humility," he replied. "And the second mark?" "Humility." "And the third mark?" "Humility." So let's stay humble, because it's possible for dreamers to dream beautiful dreams that aren't God's vision. And realists who don't include God's very real power to bring about God's vision don't see the whole picture. We need dreamers and realists, and they need each other. Friends, your unity will never be founded in finally all agreeing about the one right way to be this community of faith. But what Jesus prayed that night was that we would mind the one thing of our call to place our shared mission and love above what divides us.

Minding the one thing requires listening to each another, to really hear the wisdom and the fears, to hear the passion and the dread. Not just half listening while we wait for our turn to talk. To seek together what will glorify God and bring oneness. To avoid the temptation to be so sure that we are right, that we stop listening. Listen and then speak to what meets the needs of each other as well as our own needs. If we must correct one another, let's do it with humility, because none of us have all the answers.

Minding the one thing does not mean staying silent to keep the peace. We do need to be wise enough to pick our battles- some people fuss over every little thing. But often, keeping silent is just a way to avoid a problem that needs to be addressed. Peace that can't withstand honest conversation is not real peace- it's more like the cold war between America and the Soviet Union. No bombs were launched but there was no peace either. There was only distrust and self-protection.

So Community Church of Issaquah, today after worship and a time of fellowship, you have the distinct privilege of practicing being a part of the answer to Jesus' prayer that we would be one as he and the Father are one. Even in your differences, to be of one mind, one love, and one in spirit. Today, you have the opportunity to humbly dream dreams and express realism as you discuss the future of this congregation.

Those of you who were a part of the Time of Discernment meetings earlier this year may feel that we already did this! You're right, but that was a few months ago and the discussion is needed to write the church profile. Also, we didn't talk about what this church needs, and more, we didn't consider what the community needs **from you** as a church. So, let's gather one more time and prayerfully and humbly, in oneness of spirit, consider the future of this church.