



Sunday, March 10, 2024

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: John 17:20-26

Sermon Title: Prayers for Diverse Unity

Thank you, Marianne [Posthumus]. God is good. We can see how God's goodness occurs even when Jesus was on earth. Today we're going to look at one of Jesus' prayers. What is often called his high priestly prayer in John 17. As you're finding John 17, let me begin by saying a few things about the first part of Jesus' prayer. In **John 17**. This is the first part of his prayer, "**1** Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." Jesus' first prayer was to glorify God. This was hours before he was going to be crucified. His first prayer was not, "Lord. Father, they're going to crucify me. Help me through this journey." His first prayer was, "Father, glorify Your name. I know exactly what I need to go through. May Your name be glorified in all of this."

Marianne shared about how she knew that it was going to be a tough journey. But yet she listened to God and sought His will, and to be glorified in that. God was glorified. Evert and Marianne were taken care of, and Selina and the rest of the family. Jesus' first prayer was to glorify God in everything that He did. Even the hard things. And that's a reminder for us as well as we go through life. It may be difficult to be a Christian. We may face circumstances that are difficult. But in that, if our first desire is to glorify God and think about God and what His will is rather than our problem, God will be there. God will give us peace through it.

Jesus first prayed for himself that he may be faithful and glorify God. Then he prayed for his disciples. As he prayed for His disciples, He prayed that God would protect them as well. And we know what happened to many of the disciples. They were martyred for their faith. But he prays that the Word of God may go through them and that God may be glorified in their lives.

And then we pick up in **John 17:20** where Christ prayed for you and for me. Maybe we need to take that in for just a moment. Jesus prayed just before he went to the cross for you. Jesus prays for you. And here was Jesus' prayer. **John 17:20-26**, "**20** My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **21** that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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. **22** I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— **23** I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. **25** "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. **26** I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we first of all need to praise You and to give You all glory. For You alone are the God of all creation, God of the universe, the God who sustains us, the God who redeems us, the God who has loved us before the creation of the world. And Jesus, you are the one who prays for us. As we now look at Your prayer for us, Lord, we pray that You will mold in us what you have for us, that we may hear Your words. And Lord, I pray that nothing of me may come out but that it may be Your words, because we have come to hear You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Jesus prays for the church and in his prayer, he begins by praying for unity. He says in **John 17:20**, "I pray that those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one father, just as you are in Me and I am in You." Jesus prays for the unity of all believers. And he understands - and you can see it in his prayer - that he understands that people are going to hear about the gospel through the preaching of the Word. Through the distribution of what the gospels had been written out as, Jesus knew that the Word would be shared and it would be written down, and it would be written down in multiple languages so that people all over the world could hear the Word of God. And that they can be saved as well.

But then he says, "I pray that they may be one." That they may be one. I think if we look around the world today, we can obviously say that as Christians in the worldwide face of things, we're not really good at being one. Yet, when Christ prayed for us just before he died, he said, "Lord, may they be one as you are in me and as I am in you." And if you look closely, you may see that **John 17:20-21** is almost repeated again in **John 17:20 and 22** which in that style of writing means, "We'd better pay attention to this. This is important." Jesus is saying this twice because you need to hear how we need to be together as Christians.

If you look at the end of **John 17:21**, it says, "**21** May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Have you ever thought that your life as a Christian and the way we love each other is the biggest witness to the world in knowing whether they want to follow Christ or not? Jesus is reminding us that we and our lives are a witness. And so when we pray for each other, we are being a witness. When we make comments on Facebook, or Instagram or Snapchat which are negative toward each other, we are also being a witness. And so God calls us to be one.

But yet, how can we be one when there are so many differences? We have a church here. We're part of the Christian Reformed denomination. Across the street, there's a Free Methodist church. Down the street a little bit further, there's a Pentecostal, downtown you've got United and Anglican and Catholic. We've got all these denominations. How do we say then, "How are we going to be one?" Because we are different. I mean, if we can take just the differences within our church, right? We have differences for whether people think they should be infant baptized or believers baptized. Whether we should have drums or an organ. There's lots of different personal preferences. And we go, "Okay, so how do we agree to be one in that sense?"

A little known theologian in the 17th century, Repertus Meldenius wrote this, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." When Jesus said we need to be one, we need to, as a Christian faith around the world, big city, big church, bride of Christ, be one in what Jesus says is the Truth and the Way and the Life. What are some of these essentials? The fact that we are all sinners is an essential belief. We need to know that in order to be saved, we are sinful, we need to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that Jesus is both God and human.

So we talk about the deity of Christ and the humanity of Christ. Those facts are essential and cannot be taken away. The triune God is essential. The authority of Scripture is essential. The resurrection of Christ and being saved by grace through faith and not by works is essential. The fact that Jesus will come again is essential. But even then, that last one of Jesus coming again, there are many different views as to how that's going to look like. For those of you who know the terms of premillennialism and postmillennialism and amillennialism - and if you don't know about it, don't worry about it - I once heard somebody say, "It'll be whatever millennialism." Whatever God does, He does. Is it important to think about these things? Absolutely. But we cannot let these things divide us to a point in which we are hostile to each other. When we come together under the truth of Christ, we are saying as Jesus prayed, "We are one as Christ is one."

In **John 4**, Jesus said that we are going to worship in spirit and in truth. So we can never compromise the truth in this. But where do we give grace? Where do we give grace to other people to say, "You know what? Maybe I don't quite agree with you on this one. But that's okay. I love you anyways." It's amazing how society is trying to push this against us. In society, this aspect of toleration has become affirmation in where anything goes. That we have to say, "Yes, that's okay too." And it's difficult to say, "You know what? We stand differently on this, and that's okay. I don't have to agree with you on this one." And Jesus says, "There is truth."

So how do we pray and how do we leave ourselves, that we may be truthful to the Lord, and yet graceful to other people? In **1 Corinthians 6:17**, it says, "**17** But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit." And so how do we go about doing this? We could have a whole nother sermon on what I would call the 'one another verses.' If you look through scripture where it says to love one another, or build up one another, or encourage one another, or pray for one another, or teach and admonish one another, we have all of the 'one another verses' there. And maybe that's a good thing to do this week. Check out the 'one another' verses and see what God says about the unity of the church, and how we live that for other people.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this, "When the church is absolutely different from the world, she will invariably attract it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first." We have a message to give the world and that message that we have to give to the world is the love and the peace of Christ. That message is displayed often in how we look and work with each other. What does that look like?

This time of Lent, we've been talking about prayer. When we look at how Jesus prayed just before he went to the cross, we see how his prayer was to glorify God in all that He did. But we also see that Jesus prayed for us. Jesus prayed that we may be together as part of a family of God that loves each other, even though we are different. In fact, the diversity of the church is a good thing. When we can get along because of the fact that we are all different is great. We all represent the image of God. God has made us all differently and I'm glad because I am not musical but I love music. And I am thankful for the people who make music so that we can sing.

And some of us have different ideas as to what worship looks like. Should there be dancing in the aisles? I don't dance either. So you're not gonna see me doing that. But should there be dancing in the aisles? For many people, that's like, "This is my expression of worship." And for others of us, our expression of worship is very quiet and we sit in a quiet space and we spend time with God. For others of us, worship is being in the garden and tilling and making beautiful creations. Or having God create flowers and plants. Or maybe it's doing other things with your hands or with your mind.

God has created us all differently. And that expression of worship is all different as well. So we together, as a church, need to say, "This is who we are and we can celebrate that. And that is who they are and we can celebrate them as well." And how do we, as a church, love all believers? I think the biggest thing we need to remember is that when we love each other, people notice.

Let me give you an example. How many of you - you don't need to raise your hand - know a family who you know that they just love hanging out together? They don't have to tell you, do they? You can just see it. Now I ask the other question. How many of you know a family where you know there is always tension in the house? They don't have to tell you. You can just see it. Now you get invited to a house. Which one are you going to? There is an aspect of being intentional about loving each other. And how do we do that? And this is where prayer comes in.

Marianne talked about her journey with Evert. The one piece she said in there was, "I talked to God a lot." How do we love each other? We talk to God a lot. We spend time in the well, swimming deep, being with God, and saying, "Lord, give me grace that I may extend it to other people. Lord, show me the beauty of the other person." Or maybe, "Lord, show me the burden that they are bearing, that I may not only pray for them but that I may help carry it with them." It says in Scripture, "Bear one another's burdens."

Our time of prayer with Christ is a time to go deep and a time to be with Christ in this prayer. This prayer of unity within the church. This prayer of unity within the church comes on the heels of the prayer we prayed last week, where we repent but we also release those who have sinned against us. If we are going to pray for unity in the church, we need to say to ourselves and to each other, "You are more important than I am. You are more important for the body of Christ to be a witness to the community than maybe my feelings on this." We, as a community, are important as a group to witness to the world because as a group, we send a huge message to the world.

This is the house of God. Is this a house where people come and say, "This is a place that I want to hang out." I am grateful that right now we are. But that is by God's grace and that is not something that we should take for granted. That is something that we need to constantly be at work with and saying, "How do we unfold and welcome all people so that we may together see who God's glory is?"

Matthew Henry says this, "To know and believe in Jesus Christ, in the midst of a world that persists in ignorance and infidelity, is highly pleasing to God..." Jesus began his prayer by glorifying God. When we live in unity with each other, we glorify God. For those of us who are parents, I think one of the best sights that we can ever have is when our kids are playing great together. For those of us who are parents, we know the pain when our kids are not doing great together. Now imagine God, as He watches the Church of Christ over the whole world, sees pockets where it's like, "Hey, this is fellowship."

But what if this fellowship would join that fellowship and they could do things together? How would that work? How could we work together as a body of believers within Peterborough to do the work of God? What would that look like? If Peterborough suddenly saw a Christian standing up and saying, "Hey, we're in this together. There's one God, there's one truth, and there's one way. We want to share it with you because it's about loving each other. Loving God, and then loving each other." How would that look? And so our prayer today is that we may do our part in keeping unity with believers.

I need to say one final thing about when this prayer was made. This prayer for unity was made just before Jesus was abandoned by the Father. Jesus knew that in this prayer, as he's praying, that God the Father and He are one, that there will be a time within the next 48 hours that he will be abandoned by God. And they won't be one. And he knows the pain of that piece. And in that time, Jesus prays for us and says, "Lord, I pray that those who have heard the Word may never be abandoned. But that they may always be in you, as I am in You. And that together, they may be in you as I am in you."

Jesus, through his prayer for us, prays that we may be in Him and in the Father . He prays that we may be unified with each other. And again, that means we're not uniform. We are unified in the truth. In **John 17:26**, it says, "**26** I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." That's Jesus' final words in his prayer. "I will continue to make you known to them."

God says, "I want to be in a space where you continue to learn more and more about me. And you do that when you dwell deeply in prayer. And you can hear words like, "home." Sometimes God doesn't have to say a lot. Sometimes God can give one word and you know exactly what needs to be done. But you only hear those words when you spend time with Him. Because it's when you spend time with Him that you can clarify the words from God from the words of this world. God says, "I will continue to pray for you. I will continue to make myself known to you. I will continue to be with you. And I will continue to be in you."

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You that You are now praying for us. Lord, we thank You that before you went to the cross, you prayed, "Lord, that we may know you just as you know the Father." And Lord, we thank you for making Yourself known to us. And we thank You, Lord, that even when we are not faithful in prayer, You are. And Lord, we ask that You will draw us to deeper times of prayer with You and that we may see that that time of prayer with You is a beautiful time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*