

May 29, 2022
Seventh Sunday of Easter
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 17:20-26; (Acts 1:12-26; Revelation 22:1-6, 12-20)

THAT WE MAY BELIEVE AND BE ONE

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St John, the 17th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

If you have not yet read my June Newsletter, I encourage you to do so. In it I explain the importance of attending Bible study and the Divine Service every Sunday, and to read your Bible. It is so the Holy Spirit, working through God's Word, can create and sustain within you true faith. Faith that is always under attack.

Research has shown that many Christians – including many Christian pastors are being deceived and led astray by the devil into a hodge-podge of different non-Christian belief systems could ultimately lead into unbelief and eternal damnation. The devil knows his time is short. The Last Day will soon be here when he will be crushed under Jesus' feet. (cf: Genesis 3:15; Romans 16:20) He tries every trick in the book and will not stop until he wears you out, so that you either renounce your faith or become indifferent to the truth. (cf: LC, V, 26) So the Christian must put on the whole armor of God, so that you are able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (cf: Ephesians 6:11) And it all begins with abiding in God's Word: in the Divine Service, in Bible study, and when you read and meditate on His Word at home.

God's Word is the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. Whenever and wherever the Word is read, the Spirit is present. (cf: Plass, What Luther Says, 1462 [4724]) The Word always brings about that which God sends it out to accomplish. (cf: Isaiah 55:11; Hebrews 4:12) Now, it is true that the Bible never commands us to read the Bible. But Jesus commands us to abide and dwell in Him. Abide in His Word and His teachings. (cf: Matthew 28:20; John 8:31, 15:7; 2 John 8-9) So read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word. As you abide and dwell and meditate on God's Word, the Holy Spirit works through the Word to strengthen your faith so that you not be led astray. (cf: Romans 1:16; 10:17)

In our Gospel text, Jesus is in the Upper Room with His disciples on the night when He was betrayed. He is praying aloud to God the Father in what we call His High Priestly prayer. As your great High Priest, Jesus intercedes on your behalf with the Father. Not only interceding there in the Upper Room, but even today, He is today interceding for you at the right hand of God the Father. (cf: Romans 8:34) In our text, as your great High Priest, Jesus is on the eve of offering Himself as the perfect Passover sacrifice for your sin and the sin of the whole world on the altar of the cross.

His High Priestly Prayer is longest of Jesus' recorded prayers in Scripture. We only hear one portion of the prayer in each year of our three-year lectionary rotation. Today's portion is the final portion. In the first portion, Jesus prays that God's will be done and that both Father and Son be glorified in His work of salvation on the cross. He prays for all His disciples who have received His Word and come to faith in Him. (cf: (John 17:1-11)

In the second portion of the prayer, Jesus prays that His disciples would be kept in God's name, have the fullness of the joy of Christ, be kept safe and secure from the evil one, and be sanctified in the truth of God's Word. (cf: John 17:6-19)

As I said, our text today is the final portion of Jesus' prayer. When He finishes these words He will lead His disciples from the Upper Room, across the brook Kidron, and into the Garden of Gethsemane (cf: John 18:1) where He will be betrayed, arrested, led away to be whipped and beaten, and nailed to the cross. He knows it is coming. He's just hours from suffering the most pitiful and painful death anyone would ever face. What does He pray for? He prays for you and me and believers of all times.

If our text were your prayer or mine, we might have prayed for an alternate plan of salvation, or an escape path, or that God would relent and change His mind. We might have prayed that the coming pain be diminished in some way, or that death come quickly without all the agony and suffering. But that isn't what Jesus' prayed for. Jesus prayed:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:20–21)

When Jesus says ***“these only,”*** He is referring to the disciples reclining with Him at the table. But when He goes on to pray for ***“... those who will believe in me through their word,”*** ***“... those who will believe”*** is you and me and all who ***are not*** eyewitnesses to His death and resurrection. He is praying for all who in the future would ***hear or read*** the ***truth*** of the disciple's eyewitness testimony recorded in Holy Scripture and come to lifesaving faith, that they be sanctified in the Father's truth and ***“that they may all be one”*** (John 17:21) following the perfect pattern that Jesus and the Father have had from eternity.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus looked into the future and saw you and me dead in our trespasses and prayed that we all be one, united in the Truth of His Gospel. He prayed that you know that the Father loves you every bit as much as He loves His own Son. So much love that He bought you out of hell with the price of Jesus' precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. You are His because the Holy Spirit has created faith within you through God's Word of Truth.

Apart from the Word there is no Holy Christian Church because there is no faith apart from the Word. The Christian Church is all who have faith created by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word... the Spirit inspired Word recorded by the prophets and apostles. (cf: 2 Peter 1:21) The Word is the very means and the root of faith.

As Jesus prayed for oneness, He knows it would not last long among sinful people living in a sinful world. In our first reading this morning the disciples and the women were in ***“... one accord... devoting themselves to prayer.”*** (Acts 1:14) But it wouldn't be long until the Judaizers were teaching that to become a Christian a Gentile would need to be circumcised and adhere to

other Jewish Laws. (cf: Acts 11:1-3) After that came Gnosticism and Arianism and Nestorianism and Pelagianism and every other kind of “*ism*.”

So much for human oneness. Since the fall in the garden, the devil has been working overtime to deceive and bewitch all men to fall into unbelief. Wolves in sheep’s clothing rise up to preach false Gospels of human reason... false Gospels that suit people’s passions and tickles the desires of their ears... false Gospels that true oneness is built on putting our doctrinal differences aside and coexist. (cf: 2 Timothy 4:3–4) But we must stand on the truth of God’s Word. God, through His prophet Isaiah says:

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” (Isaiah 40:8)

In our Epistle text, the Spirit, through the Revelation according to St John, warns not to add or subtract from His revelation of prophesy. For those who do will suffer the wrath of God, and lose their share in the tree of life and in the holy city in heaven. (cf: Revelation 22:18-19) St Paul said that anyone who would distort the gospel of Christ, even if that person would be Paul himself or an angel from heaven – ***“let him be cursed.”*** (cf: Galatians 1:6–9)

It is not Jesus’ desire that we create false unity and oneness for unity and oneness’ sake. No, He provides us the precise formula by which the Holy Spirit creates oneness. He says:

“¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Oneness isn’t created by man. Oneness isn’t something that’s acquired by means negotiation and agreeing to compromise. This oneness is in opposition from the world and resembles the Oneness of our Triune God. (cf: Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel, 1155) In our text Jesus is praying:

“... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you... that they may be one even as we are one... ... that they may become perfectly one...” (John 17:21-23)

Oneness is created by God. Just as God the Father is one with his Son, all who believe are made one with the Father and the Son when they believe in the Son – and – all who believe are members of the one body of Christ, and are attached to each other. This oneness is created and given by God by means of baptizing and teaching all that Jesus has commanded, the truth of God’s Word. Oneness is created by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, reconciling all mankind to God. You were once an enemy of God but, by faith, for the sake of Jesus, you are part of God’s family. St Paul calls it:

“... the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:2-6)

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we gather in the divine service for Word and Sacrament. We hear the truth of God’s Word and partake of Jesus body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. When we commune together, we confess our oneness in faith and our oneness in Christ Jesus. St Paul writes:

***“¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?
¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

Oneness is a gracious gift of God who desires that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Our God is not a God who is far off. Our God is not a God who left His Church as orphans.

“⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Yesterday, Jesus left the glory of heaven so that He could do the will of the Father in His work of salvation, that that we may be one with Him. ***Today***, He comes to you in Word and Sacrament, giving you forgiveness, life, and salvation – and giving you oneness with your brothers and sister in the whole Christian Church. ***Tomorrow***, that day that is coming soon, He comes to take all who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb into His heavenly Kingdom:

“³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:3-5)

You have Jesus’ promise. He says:

“Surely I am coming soon.”

... and to that we say:

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.