

Sermon Draft

Text: John 17:20–26

Sermon: “We Are One”

The message of the Seventh Sunday of Easter vibrates with excitement and with power. Remember that the Word of the Lord which comes to us today comes from the one who is seated at the right hand of the Father. The ascended Lord Jesus is speaking! All must hear and know that he who speaks does so with all authority and power. It follows that the preacher will approach the people of God with an attitude and posture that indicate this excitement, power, and conviction.

How is it when we pray to God? Do we like to have other people standing by, listening to every word? There is a time when we pray as individuals in public, but more often our prayers are private, meant only for the gracious ears of God and not for anyone else!

But today, we have the privilege of listening as Jesus prays. Jesus’ prayer is to his Father, addressed to him, not to us! It is as if we are eavesdropping!

Have you experienced a situation where someone is talking about you and you overhear? If it's a bad word about you, it hurts. But if it's a good word, or a word that speaks of a glorious purpose for your life and an unspeakably wonderful future, then you probably listen intently.

That is what happens today as we hear the words of Jesus. In his prayer to the Father, he talks about you and me! He speaks to the Father about our purpose in life and our future with him and with one another. His prayer for you and me and people of all times speaks beautifully about the unity he desires us to experience. This unity is from God. It is a miraculous gift given by God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is a unity that comes to people who hear and believe the message of the Gospel. And Jesus states that we are the ones who have been given the privilege of sharing that Gospel!

For that reason, it is not hard to understand that you and I, through the evangelist John, are given the privilege to listen to the hopes and aspirations Jesus has for us!

Jesus prays about the faithful and effective witness that we will give to others! Jesus prays to the Father about our witness as he speaks of “those who will believe in me through their message!”

I am encouraged to hear that Jesus simply assumes that I will be a messenger! For he who states this has the power to make it happen! That we are the “*their*” in the above phase is a word of grace and Gospel. Even though we are nothing but clay pots, Jesus gives us the privilege of being the vessels by whom the Word, which brings unity with God and with one another, can come! But this shouldn’t surprise us because God most always works through weakness to show his strength!

Jesus prays to the Father about our witness as he speaks of those ***“who will believe in me through their message.”***

The Good News of the Gospel, which brings unity, will be heard and believed! We laity and clergy probably don’t think of ourselves as great evangelists and preachers, but Jesus encourages us by stating that people will believe through our message! The power is in the Gospel we proclaim.

It is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). It draws the hearts of people to God, who will bring them to the unity of his eternal kingdom!

This word of Jesus about the effectiveness of our witness encourages us to think positively about our congregation. Too often we hear pessimistic words about the church. And while what is wrong with the church can always be traced to us, what's right with the church is always because of the effectiveness of the Word we share! The message of the Revelation, so often used to strike terror, is really a book about the victory of Christ Jesus and the church. The Second Lesson for today points that out beautifully!

Jesus rejoices in the unity that comes to us through the Word! The unity about which Jesus speaks is a miracle and a mystery! Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that unity is tied to divinity. It is a gift from above. The unity for which he prays emanates from the relationship of the Father and the Son: ***“You are in me and I am in you.”*** The mystery of the oneness yet distinctiveness of the persons of the Holy Trinity is beyond our understanding.

The language of the Athanasian Creed suggests this! And yet Jesus wants us to participate in this divine attribute! He makes it possible.

Disunity, however, is always at hand! It first reared its ugly head in that ancient Garden of Eden. Satanic disunity embodied in the serpent writhes its way into the brains and blood of Adam and Eve. ***“We were afraid when we heard you woman you gave me. . . . The serpent you put into the garden”*** (Genesis 3; paraphrase). And now disunity is unbridled in our tragic world: man against woman and woman against man, husband against wife and wife against husband, parent against child and child against parent, nation against nation. Only a miracle will destroy this disunity and bring about God’s perfect unity.

Here is the miracle: the Lord Jesus Christ! In Eden it was said, ***“He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel”*** (Genesis 3:15). We remember the many times the demons, when confronted by Jesus, shouted out words such as ***“What have you to do with us? You have come before your time”*** (Matthew 8:29; Mark 5:7).

The demons who tore men and woman away from their Father knew that in Jesus that breach would be healed. Through him unity with the Father would again become a reality. So, they fought against him. Jesus came to deliver the crushing blow to the head of the satanic power of disunity, which shows itself in our separation from the Father, a separation caused by our sin. Jesus comes to fix it!

And that is what happened on the cross! There the sin-caused fracture between God and his creation is healed! On the cross the very Son of God, who is one with the Father from all eternity, is in some astounding way separated from his Father. The Son of God, even Jesus, who is one with the Father, experiences on our behalf a terrible disunity with the Father, so that we might be brought back into unity with the Father! Now we are reconciled to God through Christ again and forever.

And we are one, now and forever. The oneness we have with the Father and with Jesus is a present reality!

Our oneness is a given because it comes to us through the grace of God in Christ Jesus. It is not something that is acquired by means of agreeing to be different or something similar. It is a here and now reality! It is hidden from the eye too often, but nevertheless it is reality! Paul in Romans 6 lifts up our Baptism as that which unites us forever into the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Nothing can separate us from the God to whom we are forever united (Romans 8). It is our privilege to live out this unity so that others will know that Jesus and his message are true!

How sobering! Jesus prays fervently for this! ***“[Father,] may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you have sent me”*** (17:23b). Disunity in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ flies in the face of God’s gracious will and Jesus’ fervent prayer! We may not be able to bring about perfect unity in the visible church, but we can start with our personal relationships within family and church! Then the world will know that Jesus is the one sent by the Father to bring salvation and reconciliation to all people!

And in unity with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we will be united forever in glory!

“I want [them] . . . to see my glory, [Father,] the glory that you have given me . . . before the creation of the world.” How

wonderful to know that the Father has from eternity held in his great heart a plan to give fallen and separated humanity a way to come home! How wonderful to be reminded that Jesus, even as he is facing the cross, wants to give us the eternal experience of the glory of heaven!

How wonderful to know that all Jesus prayed for us has become reality! How wonderful to know that while we have the experience of unity with God and with each other even now through Word and Sacrament, one day we will experience that perfectly with Jesus and with all of God’s unified people in heavenly glory!

And so we have heard Jesus praying for us. With humility we thank him for his goodness.

With all our being, empowered by his Spirit, we will show the world the unity we have with him and with each other, and others will be drawn to him and also become one with him and with us!

Amen