

PERFECTLY ONE**John 17:20-26**

Intro: There's nothing like a group of people working in unity! I'll never forget the Sunday afternoon back in 2016 when we put out the call to gather here in this room to clear all the chairs and pews out (we still had pews down both sides) and prep the room for the renovation that would begin the next day. We were supposed gather at 4 PM, but as you might recall, if you got here at 4:15 – you missed the fun. The job was done! Everything was cleared out. It wasn't just because we had a huge turnout (which we did, and it proved the adage, "Many hands make light work.") but also because we worked with joy, enthusiasm and great cooperation. There's nothing a group of people who are perfectly one. It's something that is a strength for us ABC but we mustn't rest on our laurels. We must maintain our unity and spread it around. The world is watching and they look on with sick fascination as they see what they perceive is infighting and disunity in the church. We need to be building one another up and Jesus prayed fervently for that to happen to us in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yes, he was praying for US. Just listen:

(Read John 17:20-26)

He is praying for those who WILL believe

- Jesus was praying in this High Priestly prayer for his followers who's lives were going to be turned upside down in the next 24 hours as he would be tried, tortured and crucified. They slept just a few yards from him as he prayed completely clueless to what was going to happen. But he knew. He knew they would weather the storm and come out strong and bold and infused with the Holy Spirit and spreading the good news of abundant life in Christ and eternal life to come.
- And they did. Pentecost came and Peter preached and thousands of people received Christ and the Church was born with an explosion of growth. Jesus had prayed for those who would *believe in me through their word* (v. 20) and it happened. And it's been happening ever since. Obedient Christ Followers have shared the Gospel and hurting souls have responded and the Church has flourished. They have been drawn by the oneness of the Body of Christ.
- That's why when disharmony happens it's so heartbreaking to see the damage that is done to the Church and its witness. We need to build one another up since, as he prayed . . .

There was nothing short of complete unity in Jesus's mind

- Floyd Filson points out that "*Jesus looks forward to the people who will believe in him through the witness of his disciples. As this witness spreads and the church grows, it may be increasingly difficult for his followers to be one in spirit and mutual love. So he prays for the unity of the entire Church and not for a merely lukewarm or formal unity, but for a vital unity as real and close as that which exists between the Father and the Son, a mutual indwelling and which each lives in the other and both are one.*"
- It's the real deal. A false or contrived unity shows its weaknesses very quickly. That's why our model for oneness is what we see in the Father and the Son. Christian unity is not a human invention and so Jesus prayed for his Father's direction as he asked that *they may become perfectly one.* (v. 23). Perfectly one is by heavenly design and it's just not some pipe dream. If Jesus had it in mind then it is more than just a possibility for his Church – it's a requirement.
- Leon Morris writes, "*This does not mean that the unity between the Father and the Son is the same as that between believers and God, but it does mean that there is an analogy. The Father is in the Son and does his work. The Son is in the Father. The two are one yet are distinct. So in measure it is with believers. Without losing their identity they are to be in the Father and the Son. Apart from the Son they can do nothing. In other words the unity for which he prays is to lead to a fuller experience of the Father and the Son. And this in turn will have the further consequences that the world may believe.*" There you have it again. As we are unified – it is a witness to the world.
- It's a beautiful cycle . . .

Faith leads to unity which leads others to faith

- The disciples spent 3 years with Jesus and they learned a lot. They were changed men from what they were when Jesus first told them they would be fishers of men. But there were still bugs to be worked out of this motley crew. They still jockeyed for the most favored spot with Jesus. In Matthew 20 you can find the account

of the mother of James and John coming to Jesus and asking that her boys be the ones on each side of him when he became King. And the other ten disciples were angry about it – but really they were just wishing there Jewish mothers would make the same request. They were still selfish people with a lot to learn. Selfishness is a huge deterrent to unity. Selfishness does not build up.

- The disciples eventually got it and the rest is history – just read Acts. They built the Church together. The needs of everyone was cared for. Even when issues cropped up – like the controversy over the care of Greek widows and orphans in Acts 6, the church worked out a God ordained solution and we read, *And what they said pleased the whole gathering*, Acts 6:5.
- It's no accident what will happen with unity. Listen, *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.* Acts 2:46-47. They were TOGETHER. And the Lord added to their number DAY BY DAY! The world sees Jesus in our unity.
- So, going back to our text in John 17 we see that Jesus makes clear that the oneness of his followers must be clearly evident to the world so that the world may recognize its source – Jesus Christ.
- Our genuine and united front has an irresistible attractiveness to a divided world. People come to Christ when they see him in us.

Conclusion: G. Campbell Morgan calls this passage among the most sacred in already the most sacred pages. And he says this, *“Here for his whole church he (Jesus) expressed two desires, and one determination. The first desire was that they may be one, not only that first group, but the continuity of believing souls through their ministry, that they all may be one in the same way. What for? That the world may believe. We have often quoted that and I think perhaps permissively, in order to show that if Christianity is divided up into all sorts of sections we cannot expect the world to believe. I am quite sure that the division of Christendom into sects and parties has hindered, when the divisions have created bitterness and separation in the spirit. The main thought again, however is that of being one in vital relationship with each other, because having vital relationship with the Father and the Son. One, that is in life and light and love. It is the unity, and the manifestation of light and life and love according to the Divine, that brings conviction and belief to the world.”*

Being perfectly one exhibits life and light and love and that draws a world that needs all three.

Eugene Peterson's Message renders Jesus's prayer for us this way at the beginning of our text in an almost poetic way. Listen,

I'm praying not only for them

But also for those who will believe in me

Because of them and their witness about me.

The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—

Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,

So they might be one heart and mind with us. John 17:20-21 (The Message)

It is goal of the Father and the Son that we, their Church be perfectly one. Let's continually strive to be that ABC. Amen.