



This morning we come to our final message in our series on the Upper Room Discourse. Last week we saw how Jesus taught His disciples about praying in His name. But as we come to John 17, Jesus isn't teaching them about prayer but rather He's praying for them. This has often been called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. The book of Hebrews says Jesus is our great high priest who lives to intercede for us (that's what priests do). Well, here we get to eavesdrop on Him doing just that.

This has always been considered some of the most sacred ground of scripture. Augustine said of this prayer "It is a stream wherein the lamb may wade and the elephant may swim." Philip Melancthon, a colleague of Martin Luther's said, "There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or on earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than the prayer offered up by the Son of God himself." Martyn Lloyd Jones, a pastor at Westminster Chapel in London preached 48 sermons on this one prayer alone. I won't be doing that! Instead, I have about 25 more minutes! But what an amazing privilege to listen in on this prayer.

This great prayer can be divided into three parts: In verses 1–5 Jesus prayed that He Himself would be glorified. He begins in v. 1 and says, "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.*" Jesus was thinking about the cross and He saw the cross as a revelation of glory; the glory of self-giving love. We don't think of the cross that way but that's what it is.

Then in verses 6–19 He prayed for His disciples. Up until that time He'd been able to protect them but now He's leaving them in the world and so He prays for their protection. He prays in v. 11, "*I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you, Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.*"

Then finally in verses 20–26 He prayed for all those who would believe through the message of those disciples. He says in v. 20, "*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*" By the way, that's us. Have you stopped to consider the fact that Jesus prayed for you? I so appreciate it when someone tells me they're praying for me. Sometimes we just say that but we never get around to doing it. But here we see Jesus did it. He prayed for you; He prayed for me.

What do you think Jesus prayed for? What would He think was important enough to pray for you and for me the night of His arrest? This morning we're not going to try to cover the entire

prayer. We're going to focus on this last section where Jesus prayed specifically for us.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will 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. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—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. 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. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 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 (verses 20–26).

The Importance of Unity.

You can see the one idea that dominates His prayer is that we as His followers would be one. He prays for our unity. He prays for the quality of our life together. That's so interesting. Is that what you would have prayed for? I can think of so many other things to pray for. "Father, bless their ministry." "Father, keep them really close to you." "Father, provide for them." But for some reason this is what concerned Him most. I guess as a parent I can understand. If I were on the threshold of my own death and I knew I'd never see my kids again—at least until heaven—one of the things I'd want is for them is to stay close to each other.

I can also understand because it fits with what I know about how we're created as human beings. God created us to be in relationship with others. He said to Adam, "It's not good for man to be alone." That's not just talking about marriage. That's why people crave connection with others. Lynn and I experienced this on my sabbatical. We appreciate how many of you tried to leave us alone. But I saw people in the grocery store that would spot us and run the other way. "Oh, we're not supposed to talk to Mark and Lynn." But after awhile we felt kind of lonely. I'm an introvert, but even introverts crave relationships. Why? Because God created us that way. We shouldn't be surprised the quality of our life together was such a high priority for Jesus. Even here

in the upper room discourse Jesus said back in chapter 15, **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”** (v. 13).

In light of this, we might be quite discouraged over the current condition of the Christian church as a whole. We seem to be so divided. We can't even keep track of all the different denominations. We hear about churches splitting all the time. And while many churches don't split they're still a cesspool of gossip, resentment, competition and anger. Someone once said Christians are the only ones who shoot their wounded, and sometimes it's true. It's no wonder the world looks on and says, “Why would I want to be one of you guys?”

The Nature of Unity.

So how do we fix this? One of the ways Christians have tried to remedy this is by forcing a kind of outward unity. There have been many attempts to bring all churches together in one great outward organization, but it's never worked and it never will. That's not what Jesus had in mind. Someone once said that no arrangement of bad eggs make a good omelet. That's true. You can't fix this problem on an organizational level because you're just rearranging sinful people.

Notice the kind of unity Jesus talks about here. There are two things I want you to see. The first is just an observation that's easy to overlook. Jesus says in v. 20 He's praying **“not just for them alone,”** that is, the disciples, but **“for those who believe in me through their message.”** Those words “believe in me” are key. There's a unity of belief or what we call faith in Jesus. Our common faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord unites us. There can't be unity apart from our shared allegiance to Him. There are a lot of peripheral issues we as believers might disagree on, but this isn't one of them. We believe Jesus is Lord. We're a Christ-centered community. As with a wheel, He's the hub. He holds it all together. The spokes are important but they're not the hub.

The second thing about the kind of unity this is can be seen several times in this prayer as Jesus mentions the unity and the fellowship that takes place between Him and the Father. In v. 21 He asks **“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”** Later in v. 24 and v. 26 He talks about the love the Father has had for Him since before the creation of the world. It's clear there's been this wonderful unity, fellowship and love between the Father and the Son throughout eternity. Throughout eternity God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have been hanging out together, enjoying each other. It's like they're having a party; a party of love.

What Jesus prays here is that we, His followers, would be included in that party. In a way, He's inviting us to that party. Have you ever been invited into someone's home where there was just so much love flowing between your hosts? You come and you're welcomed into that home and their love just kind of enfolds you.

Well, get this: the Triune God welcomes us into this eternal fellowship of love.

By the way, He can do that because of what Jesus was about to do on the cross. We're all sinners, flawed, broken, and rebellious. God is holy. He's the rightful judge of sin. How can God invite us into this fellowship with all this sin in our lives? That's where the cross comes in. God the Father sent God the Son to earth. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. He paid the price for our sin so we could be reconciled to the Father.

That's what Jesus means when He turns to His Father and says in v. 21, **“...just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us.”** Then in v. 23, **“I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.”** Just as God the Father is in God the Son, and God the Son is in God the Father, **we** are in them. So the Triune God isn't just with us, He's **in** us and we're **in** Him! The beauty of the Christian life isn't just that we believe in Jesus but we're **in** Jesus and He's **in** us. Remember that's what He said back in chapter 14:23, **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”**

Lynn and I moved into a new home this summer. It's like little by little, we're taking that place over; we're making it our own. We're filling it not just with furniture but hopefully with love. When you become a believer, Father, Son and Holy Spirit move in and make their home in you. And it's a loving home. It's a welcoming home. That's what He means in v. 22 when He prays, **“I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one.”** What's that glory? It's the glory of love. The Father loved the Son. That was the Son's glory. Jesus says that same love He's given to us that we may be one.

Do you know what this means? It means we don't create unity. There is a unity already there. God the Father and God the Son live in the perfect unity of love, and we live in them and they live in us, and it's as we abide in that relationship with them that we find unity with one another. It's not by human effort, it's not by effective organization, it's not by outward conformity to a dress code or a set of rules, but by living “in” the Father and the Son. The more we abide in Him the more **His** love will flow between **us** as His followers.

This summer we didn't come to church here but we did go to church. We went to a very traditional church in Illinois. We attended a megachurch in Kentucky and a hip church in Nashville. We went to a African American church as well as a wealthy Presbyterian church here on the Peninsula. Then two Sundays ago I attended a church of about 50 people in Niger. But as we traveled around and met people from different traditions, different skin colors and different income levels, the minute we

met, there was a connection because I knew we shared an inward life; an inward fellowship with God.

The church in Niger had a greeting time just like we have and sitting next to me were two lepers. One of them was blind. Their fingers were stubs. Their noses were caved in, but when we greeted one another I saw saw the love of Jesus on their faces and we embraced. There was a connection because together we shared in the life of the Triune God.

The Purpose of Unity.

But notice Jesus says there is something more at stake here. He's talked about our relationship with the world throughout this prayer. Up in v. 9 He said, **“I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me...”** That sounds kind of harsh. Doesn't Jesus care for the world? He also said even though He's leaving them in the world they're not of the world and the world will hate them.

All this sounds rather negative, like it's us against the world, but then He says something very interesting in v. 18, **“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”** Hmm... Why did God the Father send His Son into the world? To judge the world? No! To save the world; to bring salvation to a lost and dark world. And now Jesus says, “I'm sending you into the world just as the Father sent me; not to judge it but to bear witness to the love I have for them.”

And how do you do that? Look again at v. 21, **“May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”** Then v. 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.”** So our ability to hang out together in love will determine the impact we have on the world around us.

Consider this: God doesn't save us for ourselves. He saves us for one another; to be a people who reflect the love that's forever taking place within the Trinity. He saves to be together with Jesus worshippers from every tribe, tongue and nation and through that to impact the world. Ask yourself this: How well do I hang out with other believers? This isn't optional; this isn't an elective. You can't say, “Well, I'm good at giving or singing or fixing stuff. I'll show up on Sunday mornings, but I'm just not into this whole lovey-dovey thing.”

For us to really experience the fellowship of God in our life together two things are necessary.

The Commitment to Unity.

Commit to be together

The first is a commitment just to be together; to share time and space together. Read the book of Acts and you get the sense the early church loved being together, sharing time and space. They didn't “go to church.” You never find that phrase in the Bible.

That's because church for them wasn't something you went to; it was something you lived and were a part of from day to day. But it takes a commitment to show up. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews said, **“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching”** (Heb. 10:24–25).

I'm Italian and Italians have a saying, *la dolce de far niente*. It means “the sweetness of doing nothing.” Other people call it hanging out together. But it requires a commitment to just be together and enjoy it. There's doesn't have to be any big agenda. What was God doing before He created the world? God existed in a fellowship of love from all eternity, and He enjoyed it. Some of us have a hard time doing that. Honestly, I'm not very good at it. I don't just hang out well. I want to get stuff done. I've got my list and hanging out isn't on it. For many of us, busyness is a higher priority than togetherness. So even though relationships are a crucial part of our life in Christ, we'd rather talk on our cell phone, rush down the freeway, or race to the next appointment.

Commit to stay engaged when things get messy

Here's a second commitment: commit to stay engaged with one another when things get messy. It's so easy to disengage from the body of Christ when things get hard. You join a small group and it's wonderful for a few weeks but then reality hits. That person talks too much. That person is a mooch. That person never opens up. That person always thinks they have the right answer. Relationships are messy, complicated and risky. You can get hurt. People can be so petty—unlike me! People can do such stupid things and be so insensitive—unlike me! Most of us could share stories of hurt and rejection. And so often in the church in America when this happens we just go find another church.

Sometimes we respond to our hurts by hurting others. We punish them by lashing out or just disengaging. We vow to not let ourselves be hurt again. But when we do that we forget the goal of the Christian life is to be conformed to the image of Christ. How did He handle His hurts? “Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.” So who gave us the right to disengage from those for whom Christ died?

Think of how members of the Trinity relate to each another. There is no competition, inferiority, power struggles, or hurt feelings. Jesus didn't walk around saying, “Hey, look at me; I'm the Son of God.” He said, “I came not to be served but to serve.” He told His Father, “Not my will but yours be done.” How about God the Father? He honored the Son at His baptism saying, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” He doesn't say, “Hey, I want you all to listen to me.” The Spirit bears witness to Jesus and glorifying Him. God is a community of three in one who honor and serve one another.

Some of us need a change in our heart: "God, I've held on to my anger, my bitterness, my judgmental spirit, my hurt, too long. I've pulled away. I've seen the sin of everyone else, but now I want to deal with my sin. So I commit to stay engaged with your people if things get messy."

You know here at CPC we're passionate about reaching this community. But let's not make the mistake in communicating this

passion at the expense of, or in place of, our life together. We need to hang out together, and we need to do it well. And we can do it well because the life and love of the Triune God is in us and we're in Him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.