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"*THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE*"
John 17:1-26

The last two weeks we've explored portions of Jesus' "farewell discourse" given the night before he died. Immediately after that farewell speech is the longest of all Jesus' recorded prayers. Because during most of the prayer Jesus is interceding, praying for others, some have called this Jesus' "high priestly prayer."

The prayer has three sections. Jesus prays for himself (v.1-5), then for the disciples who are at table with him (v.6-19), and finally for those who will believe in him because of the witness of the first Christians (v.10-24). The prayer closes with a declaration and a promise (v.25-26). The prayer gives us a window into Jesus' heart and mind as his execution draws near. Read John 17:1-26 on p.111 in the pew Bibles.

I want to focus attention on one aspect of Jesus' prayer for his followers and those who will become his followers in the future - that we would be one. Jesus prays in v.11, "Holy Father,

protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." Jesus prays that the unity he enjoys with God his Father would be the kind of unity, the sense of oneness we have with one another.

Jesus picks up on that same theme of unity among his followers later in v.20-23 when he prays for future Christians. "I ask not only on behalf of these (his current followers), but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, 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. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely (or perfectly) one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Jesus reiterates his request that God grant a unity among Jesus' followers akin to the unity and oneness he has with God the Father, but also adds a second ingredient. It is a prayer for unity, that Jesus' followers may be one "so that the world may

believe that you have sent me." It is so important that Jesus repeats that thought in almost identical words just 2 verses later.

So the way we relate to other followers of Jesus has an impact on our mission to the world. Our unity has the power to validate the gospel!

In this great prayer Jesus also asks that God give us a "complete or perfect oneness" so that the world "may know that you have sent me and have loved them, even as you have loved me." Our unity will help people see and experience the reality of God's love for us and for all people, for the whole world in Jesus Christ! Our love for one another will show those outside that we are followers of Jesus, the Lord of love.

That's a tall order! Most of us feel a natural affection for the denominational tradition in which we reside and sometimes tend to feel superior to others. But the truth is there is no perfect church! The classic light bulb joke illustrates that. How many people from certain Christian denominations does it take to change a lightbulb?

How many Charismatics? Only 1, hands already in the air.

How many Roman Catholics? None. They use candles only.

How many Pentecostals? 10 - One to change the bulb, and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness.

How many Baptists? At least 15, one to change the light bulb, and three committees to approve the change and decide who brings the potato salad and fried chicken.

How many Methodists? An Undetermined number. Whether your light is bright, dull, or completely out, you are loved. You can be a light bulb, turnip bulb, or tulip bulb. Bring a bulb of your choice to the Sunday lighting service along with a casserole to share.

How many Lutherans? None, they don't believe in change.

How many Amish? What's a light bulb?

And finally, how many Presbyterians does it take to change a lightbulb? None, the lights will go on and off at predestined times.

What can we do to work toward greater unity among Christians? The first thing we must do is differentiate between essential and non-essential tenets of our faith. I think there are

at least two basic essentials of the Christian faith. One is our conviction that JC is fully divine and fully human, God's unique Son, our Lord and Savior. A second essential is that salvation is by Christ's grace which we receive by faith. We should acknowledge all such groups as legitimate members of the body of Christ. By that standard all 3 major branches of the church - Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant are included. There are some sectarian groups who reject one or both of the above tenets and who claim they alone have the truth. Such groups include Mormons, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

One of the failures, maybe the chief failure within the Protestant family of denominations is our lack of unity, our tendency to fracture, to split, to begin a new denomination when there is disagreement. Evidence of that is that there are currently over 33,000 denominations worldwide, 94% of which are Protestant. That is, we don't make up 94% of the Christians worldwide, but 94% of the different denominations are Protestant. We split at an alarming rate!

For example, our own Presbyterian Church has had a number of splits. In 1861 the Presbyterian Church split north and south because of the impending Civil War. And shamefully it took us 122 years – until 1983, to reunite. This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our reunion!

Speaking of disunity in the church, I love the following story! I was walking across the Golden Gate Bridge one day when I saw a man standing on the railing about to jump to his death below. I ran over and said, “Stop, don’t do it!”

“Why shouldn’t I,” he answered. I said, “Well, there’s so much to live for!”

He said, “Like what?” I said, “Well . . . are you religious or an atheist?”

He said, “Religious.” I said, “Me too! Are you a Christian or a Buddhist?”

He said, “A Christian.” I said, “Me too! Are you a Roman Catholic or a Protestant?”

He said, “A Protestant.” I said, “Me too! Are you a Presbyterian or Baptist?”

He said, "A Baptist." I said, "Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?"

He said, "Baptist Church of God." I said, "Me too! Are you Original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?"

He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God." I said, "Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?"

He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915." "Die, heretic scum!" I shouted and pushed him off!

What can we do as Presbyterian Christians to promote greater Christian unity? As a denomination we can participate wholeheartedly in ongoing ecumenical conversations which we are doing! From Calvin's time to the present, Presbyterians have been active in ecumenical affairs, helping found the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, as well as the National Council of Churches of Christ, as well as the World Council of Churches. Just a year ago more than 300 worshipers gathered at Pasadena Presbyterian Church to inaugurate the most diverse ecumenical

gathering in U.S. history. Christian Churches Together (CCT) has among its 36 member organizations representatives of Roman Catholic, evangelical and Pentecostal, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox and historical racial ethnic churches participating.

As a congregation, what can we do? We already share in regular meetings and other ecumenical activities with other Novato area congregations through the Novato Ministerial Association. We can be open to new ways to cooperate with Christian sisters and brothers in common ministry to the Novato community and the world.

What can we do as individuals to work toward greater Christian unity? Three things. First, we could intentionally study another Christian tradition, especially Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or perhaps Pentecostalism, a way of being Christian distinctly different from our own.

Second, we could make an effort to befriend a Christians from that Christian tradition to see the faith through their eyes.

Third, we could decide to forever stop criticizing other Christian Churches and denominations. Such remarks tell the

unchurched that Christians have little respect or concern for one another and such words clearly contradict Jesus' prayer that we might be one, caring deeply for one another as brothers and sisters together in the Christian Church Universal.

What will you do to help fulfill Jesus' prayer – that all Christians might be one?

Let us pray: Lord God, we ask that You would help us maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Forgive our fractious and prideful ways which have led to disagreements, splits and schisms. Guide us into a deeper unity, a mutual respect and caring so that we might be one in mission to the world, and so that the world might come to believe in Christ Your Son, in Whose Name we pray. Amen.