

It has been an amazing evening. You worry this may be one of the last meals you share with Jesus. He has spoken about how to survive when he will no longer be around. He has been open and direct. You have had the opportunity to ask questions you have had for years. You asked the really important questions. The others can be asked another time. Jesus stops speaking. You realize what a sacred time this is. He begins praying and you listen. You realize he is praying for you. The occasion is almost a sacrament; there are such important things happening; there is such power and mystery.

The disciples are quiet as they listen. You all know Jesus has taught truths about God's kingdom with parables and sermons and even with ministry to people who needed kindness and healing. You have witnessed Jesus' doing things no other human being can do. You know he has been patient in ways rabbis would never be. You have laughed at his humor and been moved by his vision. Almost every one of you believes he is God's Messiah; though none of you know what this means yet. You wonder what is going to happen. Jesus wonders what will happen too. You realize he is giving everything he has and now he prays.

For Jesus to pray is to admit life is not a "fait accompli," not a "done-deal" without God doing something new. For Jesus to pray is to recognize the outcome of all his teaching and ministry and work is up to God. For Jesus to pray is to affirm there is a great intangible even he cannot affect. God can work in ways Jesus can only imagine. For Jesus to pray is to understand all he does is not enough; God is the One who completes this, finishes this, perfects this work, this ministry, these disciples. God is the One who takes these disciples and makes them one, helps them believe, empowers them to be a community who influences others to believe in the good news of God.

Consider with me for a moment what it means for the Savior of the world to pray for you and for the church.

First of all, Jesus prays for his disciples to be completely one.

Unity is a critical theme in Jesus' prayer. He prays for unity. He is not talking to disciples. He is speaking to God. He must realize he cannot make his followers one in mind and spirit. So he prays. He sees their petty ambitions. He knows of their conflict. He gives them all he can and realizes it is not enough. So he prays not just for the people in the room. He prays for everyone who is affected by their ministry in the future. He prays **"they will be one."** (v. 21) He speaks of the glory God has given him. He gives this glory to these disciples **"so that they may be one, as we are one."** (v. 22) He explains to God **"I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one."** (v. 23) Clearly there are ways he sees God in his disciples. There are ways they have experienced God's grace and love and care. They show it. But whatever they are, they are not completely one in spirit. He prays for them to be completely one. Do you see this? Do you hear this?

Completely one. He prays there would be no innuendo going on among them. Completely one. He prays they would drop their petty differences. He prays they would be united in their desire to do ministry together, to love people together, to go together into the world and share together good news and heal people and show God's compassion and hope and joy and peace. Completely one. No one knows as well as he how divided they are. He knows they cannot share what they do not have. He prays they would be completely one.

We sing the line, "Though with a scornful wonder This world sees her oppressed, By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed, Yet saints their watch are keeping; Their cry goes up: "How long?" And soon the night of weeping Shall be the morn of song." Jesus prays

for this “morn of song.” He prays his disciples and those who are affected by their ministry would be completely one.

Secondly, he prays for his disciples to be filled with the Spirit of God. He prays for a kind of intimacy with God. He prays not only for belief; he prays for conviction and knowledge and experience and passion. How else can we understand these words? **“As you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us...”**. (v. 21) Surely Jesus knows there are questions his disciples still have. He knows just how well they believe or do not believe. Now he prays for them to be in him and in God. **“In in them and you in me...”**. (v. 23) Jesus tells God he has made known God’s name to his disciples. Jesus recognizes he will do this again in the future for a reason. He says the reason is **“so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**

Jesus prays not only will his disciples be one; he also prays they would be in him and God would be in them. One scholar believes this can be misunderstood as some kind of personal mysticism or spiritual formation. “Jesus words are addressed to the community. If there is any mysticism in John’s Gospel, it is a community-oriented mysticism, not mysticism for the individual believer.” (543, Herzog)

Jesus is praying his people together would experience his presence, his grace and love. Examples abound. Any of us could offer experiences by which we are touched. At the end of the “I have a dream” speech, Dr. King spoke of a day when white boys and girls would hold the hands of black boys and girls and they would be judged not be their skin but by their character. I thought of that dream later as I remembered our own boys and girls holding the hands of young people from the First United Church. We are not there yet, but we have young people holding hands and praying together. Go ahead and choose any moment when God’s presence,

when what God is doing fills your imagination and wonder with me about these kinds of moments.

Jesus prays his disciples will be completely one. He also prays they would be in him and God in them. Notice this final insight. **Jesus prays for unity and for divine intimacy so that the world may believe.** **“I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”** (v. 23)

In 1973, the Presbyterian Church in the United States sponsored “Key ’73.” It was an evangelism training effort aimed at helping people in the church share the gospel. Invite your neighbor. Have covered dish dinners. Talk about who Jesus is for us. Sometime later, Presbyterian seminaries created positions for Professors of Evangelism. Classes were taught; models were considered. Evangelism was the “in idea.” In the early 1980s, the General Assembly sponsored evangelism conferences around the country. Charlie Brown offered one of the key lectures from a pastoral care perspective at a conference in Charlotte. Since then there have been renewed efforts at teaching Presbyterians how to evangelize. Walter Hogan attended a Magnetic Church workshop several months ago in Charlottesville. I attended a Saturday workshop of the Vital Church Institute, a program our presbytery is sponsoring. You know there is nothing wrong with conferences and lectures and workshops.

I hear in Jesus’ prayer a desire the church be one, a desire the church would live its life in God and God in them so that the world, so that those who do not have faith would come to faith in Jesus Christ and believe God is alive and real and at work in the world today. What if the church understood its unity as the way Jesus wants his people to influence others with faith? What if the church devoted its energy to reconciliation and encouraging one another? What if the church spent more time listening to each other and to God’s word, would we be any closer to addressing Jesus’ prayer?

You may notice there is no exhortation here in this prayer, no ought, must or should. It is Jesus praying for us and for the church everywhere. Several responses seem appropriate.

One way to respond to Jesus' prayer is 1) to expect something to happen. Look for ways God is making us "completely one." Look for ways the Spirit is filling us and empowering us to love one another and together do ministry. Another way to respond is 2) to pray as Jesus has prayed; take these prayers and make them our own. Still perhaps a more important way to respond is 3) to be at peace, stop our worrying about the church and believe God is working for good. Recently I was reminded of a way to apply this. "Work like it all depends on you; pray knowing it all depends on God."

Holy God, teach us how to pray as you pray. We ask you would make us completely one with you and with one another. Enable us to have faith in you. Fill us with an awareness of your presence and power in the world. Send us your Holy Spirit. Fill us with your Being and your Power to love and to help one another heal those who hurt in this world. Let us see you working for good. Allow us to see things we have never seen so that we may believe in you and trust you all our days.

We pray for those who hurt among us. Let your healing, caring Spirit bind us together so that we may be whole. We pray for those who hurt beyond us. There are so many people. There are so many needs. Keep empowering us to recognize the people to whom you are sending us. Help us to be faithful. So we pray, Our Father who art in heaven...

Some things gain power with age. Genuine love between two grandparents who have been together for decades is amazing to see and know. It can be simply fun to be in the presence of people who have face each other's issues for so long and come through them. Some works of literature because of their wisdom and clarity hold true years after they are written. Someone has said, "Books can be our friends. We hold on to them and go back time and again to enjoy their company." How many people visit Leonardo DaVinci's *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre in Paris year after year? They still find the artist's portrayal of one woman's smile as mysterious and compelling. I am also talking about our reading this morning. Who would think an ancient prayer gains power of age? Who would ever think it has relevance in this time in the church's history? At the end of a gospel, at the end of an evening of Jesus' time with his disciples, at the very end of his ministry as he prepares for giving his life in a way that no one can ever suspect, Jesus prays a "farewell prayer."