

One  
Texts: Acts 1:6-14, John 17:1-11  
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – May 24, 2020  
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Over 50 years ago, the musical group *Three Dog Night* had success with their recording of the song One. The familiar lyrics go like this, “One is the loneliest number that you will ever do.” I am pretty sure that I can see some of you singing it in your heads right now. The essence of that song – of being alone – is really poignant during these days of quarantine and social distancing. We were created by God to be in relationship with others, so being alone – being one can indeed be a lonely state. And even in these times, we have to find ways to interact with other people – through the phone, on platforms like Zoom, Facetime, and others.

This morning, we are going to talk about one, but not in the isolated or alone sense. Our focus will be Jesus’ prayer from the Gospel of John, chapter 17. In this part of John’s story, Jesus is getting ready to leave the disciples. For three years, they have lived together, worked together, studied and prayed together. The disciples and the women have been led by Jesus – He has taught them and cared for them.

And yes, for as good as things have been for all of them these past three years, there have also been challenges. Jesus has seen how they have acted and behaved at times – the disciples who have wanted to be the greatest, how He had to tell one to “get behind Me, Satan!” Jesus would also see in the not too distant future how they would fall asleep in the garden, and when they would deny, betray, and scatter. This prayer in John 17 may have come from His own questioning. Can they do it? Can they stick together and further the Kingdom I have ushered in? Can they come together for the sake of their faith in the God of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Here, Jesus is almost like a parent who prays for their children – to make the right decisions in life, to stick together, and to remember what they have learned. “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 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, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.”

Such a powerful prayer by our Savior for His closest friends – His dearest followers. To pray God’s protection over them. To pray that they may be one in the same way that God, Jesus and the (coming) Holy Spirit are one. Could they come together and be one, as Jesus has prayed?

Today, how do we respond to Jesus’ prayer that they may be one, as Jesus is one with the Father? We are told that we should not be one – that we cannot be one. If you do not believe the exact way that I believe, then we cannot even be friends, let alone being one. Think about that. Friendships have ended. Families have been torn apart over the division in our country. To the point that we have been given guides on how to endure family gatherings at the holidays. Is that REALLY what we have become? Is that really what this world has come to?

We have been told to paint in very broad strokes. Everyone who believes or supports this is this – put them in a box, never to be touched or associated with. Everyone who believes or supports is that – no question. Period. End of discussion. These differences in philosophy or politics or theology did not seem to be nearly as divisive five or ten years ago.

Add to all of that the current state of affairs with trying to figure out what to do regarding the virus. As the state and country considers a strategy to reopen, I am afraid that it is getting worse. We are becoming more and more divided, something I did not think was even possible.

How can we live out – in today’s climate – Jesus’ prayer that we may be one? How do we come together, at this moment of time, and show the light and love of Christ in a way that unites instead of divides?

The most important thing that Jesus modeled was prayer. In verse 9, He states that, “I pray for them.” Jesus, throughout His life and ministry, was an example of Someone who prayed. He often stole away from the crowds to spend His quiet time with prayer. Prayer was the go-to for Jesus. He prays for those He knows – the disciples whom He is leaving behind. These are also the people He did not always agree with. And His prayer is that they will be one – that they will carry on His legacy and His ministry.

In the first Scripture reading for today, which Roger read, Jesus is saying His final goodbyes to His followers and then ascends into heaven. He reminds them that the Holy Spirit is coming (we will hear all about that next Sunday). And Jesus is gone into heaven. “Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying...They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

Jesus prayed. The apostles prayed. The women, Mary, Jesus’ mother, and His brothers prayed. Jesus’ prayer was answered. The disciples and the women, His family would be okay. They would be one. Sure, there would be disagreements, some of which we read about in the New Testament, but they shared the bond of the love of Christ in common with one another. And this bond would make them one. They lived out their one-ness because of that bond.

Dear friends, we need to be one, regardless of where we might differ. Our society, our churches cannot survive being divided. The importance of prayer will be our guide. Prayer

changes things. Prayer changes us – it changes our hearts. Each of us should be committed to praying that we might be one, that we might come together under the common bond of Christ. In our church family, we do not agree on everything. There are differences amongst us, whether you realize it or not. Yet, we have a lot more in common than what divides us. And we have to work and commit to live with our differences. Doing so will make us one.

Our bond in Christ is what brings us together as one – as a church family, across cyberspace and the states. It is that bond – and Christ’s prayer – that will help guide us toward our own one-ness, one that will show our society that we can live among and with one another despite those things on which we may disagree.

Let us each pray God’s protection on our oneness, on our state, on our nation. And let us show our world – by our thoughts, our words, and our deeds – that we love Christ and one another. Period. Let us pray...

Triune God, we thank You for Jesus’ prayer today – a prayer that was prayed out of genuine love and caring for His followers. Help us, we pray, as Your Church, to be one – to leave aside whatever differences we might have and come together under the uniting bond of Jesus Christ. Let us be one in love and fellowship so that we might show Christ’s light to our world. In His name we pray, Amen.