

Unity

5-12-2013

John 17:20-26

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. 23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Today is Mother's Day and I want to take just a moment to wish all the mothers out there a Happy Mother's Day. I'm not going to do a sermon on the day as it is not a religious holiday. I know mothers are sacred so maybe it should be a religious holiday, but so far it isn't. Nevertheless, I'll just say Happy Mother's Day and move on. I genuinely hope each of you ladies have a wonderful day. You deserve it.

Today is my last official day as your interim pastor. Tomorrow, Kara Swartz begins as your new interim. I plan to come in and spend most of the morning schooling her on the congregation. I plan to go through the roll person by person and let Kara know who she can count on, who she can't count on; who is good, who is bad; who comes to church on a regular basis and who doesn't come very often; who is going to talk about her behind her back and who is going to be her friend. Don't you think that's a good thing for me to do? That should shorten the learning curve for her. That should help her settle in just a little quicker. So, OK, maybe I won't do that.

Actually, that would be 100% opposite of today's message, which is on oneness and unity. The entire seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John is a prayer from Jesus Christ on the night before His crucifixion. In verses one thru five, Jesus is praying for Himself. He knew what was about to take place, He knew He was going to die. In verses four and five we read, **I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.** In other words, take Me to be with you, I am ready. In verses six thru nineteen, He is praying for the disciples. Jesus knows the trials they are about to face and prays in verse fifteen, **My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.** Jesus cares deeply for the disciples and was specifically asking God for their protection. Now we come to today's scripture lesson where Christ is praying for us in verses 20 thru 26. In verses 20 and 21 we read, **My prayer is not for them alone.** (Here Christ is speaking about the disciples.) **My prayer is not for the disciples 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.** In other words, let us be one in the body of Christ. Did you know that Jesus Christ specifically prayed for you? He did; **I pray also for those who will believe in me** For those who will; that is future tense. If you believe in Jesus Christ, He specifically prayed for you.

As Christ prayed, He said **that all of them may be one.** Does that mean that we should all be just alike? Personally I don't think so. I have made this statement on numerous occasions; "that thank God everyone on this earth isn't just like me. If they were, this would be one screwed up place to live." I don't believe that Jesus prayed that we would all be exactly alike. He prayed that we would be one body of believers in Him. He said that prayer in an effort to bring all those who will believe in Him together to form one body of believers. Somehow I think we have failed Jesus miserably.

In his book [A GENTLE THUNDER](#), on p. 139, 140 Max Lucado, tells the following story. It is a perfect example of what I am trying to say.

Some time ago I came upon a fellow on a trip who was carrying a Bible.

"Are you a believer?" I asked him. "Yes," he said excitedly.

I've learned you can't be too careful. "Virgin birth?" I asked.

"I accept it." "Deity of Jesus?" "No doubt." "Death of Christ on the cross?" He died for all people."

Could it be that I was face to face with a Christian? Perhaps. Nonetheless, I continued my checklist.

"Status of man." "Sinner in need of grace."

"Definition of grace." "God doing for man what man can't do."

"Return of Christ?" "Imminent."

"Bible?" "Inspired."

"The Church?" "The Body of Christ."

I started getting excited. "Conservative or liberal?" He was getting interested too. "Conservative."

My heart began to beat faster. "Heritage?"

"Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God Dispensationalist Triune Convention."

That was mine! "Branch?"

"Pre-millennial, post-trib, noncharismatic, King James, one-cup communion."

My eyes misted. I had only one other question. "Is your pulpit wooden or fiberglass?"

"Fiberglass," he responded. I withdrew my hand and stiffened my neck. "Heretic!" I said and walked away.

That story is such a prime example of the divisions between Christians. Fiberglass or wood; it actually makes absolutely no difference, does it. I read that there were over 38,000 different Christian denominations. Obviously we have our mainstream denominations; Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Christian (DoC), Episcopalian, Lutheran, Church of Christ, Church of God, etc. Then when you start breaking down the main denominations, you really begin to increase the numbers. There are thirty-one different sects of Catholics; forty Methodist; thirty-four Lutheran; twenty-three Presbyterian; and let's not mention all the independent denominations. Let's stop here. We don't need to list all of them; you are beginning to understand what I mean. All Christians basically believe the same thing: Jesus Christ was the son of God; He was born of the Virgin birth; He was crucified, died, and was buried; three days later He was rose from the dead; and that through belief in Him, we may have eternal life. Isn't that it pretty much in a nutshell. That's pretty simple isn't it? If it's that simple, then why do we need 38,000 different sects or denominations for Christianity? Each one has some little something that separates us from each other. Is your pulpit fiberglass or wood? What difference does it really make? Now you can begin to see what I mean when I say that we have failed Jesus miserably when He prayed for oneness.

Throughout Christian history there have been divisions in the Church. The apostle Paul rebukes the church in Corinth for its divisions. Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:10, **I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.** Even as far back as Paul, there were divisions in the church. Just because these divisions started that long ago, doesn't make it right. Yet, there are divisions within the church. I would think that the reason there are divisions, is that the church is made up of imperfect people. We are all imperfect. While there may be divisions, the sad fact is that these divisions over the centuries have not just been polite disagreements. These divisions have lead Christians to fight against other non-Christians as well as other Christians. Most of the wars waged in the world, have been over religion. Look at the Crusades; "Christians against non-Christians. The number of wars is a list too long for us to go into today and I'm not going to be a history teacher. I'm beginning to stray from our main lesson, oneness or unity in Jesus Christ.

True unity must begin with the knowledge that we are already one with Jesus Christ, one with God the Father, and one with the Holy Spirit and it is only as we recognize this unity through love, that unity with other believers can begin to take place. Jesus' prayer reminds us that our unity, our "oneness" is to be a sign to the world of God's love for us through Jesus Christ. Oneness and unity is about love. If you have ever been a part of a family, a member of a church, or a member of a community, you know that within each group there can and will be disagreements. Maggie and I, as husband and wife, love each other very much. That doesn't mean that we agree on everything. Nancy and I, as brother and sister, also love each other. That doesn't mean we agree on everything either. What it does mean, however, is that because of our love, we each seek ways to come to an understanding, even if it means we agree to disagree agreeably. We overlook each other's differences and look for common ground because of our love for each other. As members of the body of Jesus Christ, as Christians, we should do the same. Isn't that one of our obligations as a Christian, to love one another. Jesus prayed for our oneness, for our unity, that we may be one with Him.

Today we close a chapter in the history of Hooker Memorial Christian Church; I am ending my tenure as your interim minister. Tomorrow, we turn the page and open a new chapter in the history of our church. As individuals, we each have desires for our church. Those desires are not the same. Some want a shorter sermon; some want a longer one. Some members want a traditional service while others want a contemporary one, while still others would like to see a blended worship service. Some want to see more music, while some want less music. Some people don't want a choir, while others want to see our choir triple in size. Some people want communion before the sermon while others prefer communion after the sermon. Some people want the service to start at eleven o'clock while others would like to see worship start at eight and end at nine so they could have a longer day off. Some of you are content to leave our Worship Service where it is, 10:30. Each of the things I just mentioned are personal preferences and have nothing to do with the tenants of Christianity. Yet these very preferences can cause strife and angst among our congregation. Tomorrow we welcome Reverend Kara Swartz as our new interim minister. My prayer for Hooker Memorial this morning and every morning is one very similar to the one Jesus prayed when He said; **I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one,** I pray that we, myself included, will be one and stand with

Reverend Swartz in Jesus Christ. I pray that we each will show her the love of Jesus Christ. I pray that we will support her as she grows in her ministry and that with our support she will lead us in growing this church. As we turn the page on our new chapter tomorrow, let's put our personal preferences aside. Let us concentrate on the love of Jesus Christ and through our love for Him support each other and Reverend Swartz. I ask God for His blessings on this church and on each of you.

Amen