

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 05/29/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, May 29th

John 17:20-26

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Jesus prays for us

The lectionary reading for the Seventh Sunday of Easter involves an excerpt from what is commonly referred to as the High Priestly Prayer (17:1-26) which makes up the last part of the Farewell Discourse (Chapters 13-17). After Jesus has finished addressing His disciples, He makes the longest of His prayers recorded in the New Testament. He prays first for Himself (17:1-5), His disciples (17:6-19) and then for the disciples yet to come which is this week's lectionary text (17:20-26). A key part of this prayer is Jesus' intercession for the unity of the future Church. Why did Jesus need to pray for unity? What are the implications of such unity in our day?

John 17:20-26

The first part of the text is Jesus praying for the unity of His future disciples (vv. 20-23):

²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

"These also" refers to the disciples who are present with Jesus in this scene. "Those who will believe" clearly refers to His future followers. How future followers will come to believe is also clear - "through their word." This is foretelling of the nature of evangelism and how future believers will hear about Christ. The indwelling of Christ is the great bond of union that connects all Christians in all times with the Father. Jesus' love for His disciples is patterned after the love He has for the Father. This love and unity will be so perfect that even the world will recognize it. The unity of believers has evangelistic outcomes. The glory in v. 22 refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit which enables disciples in all ages to live in fellowship with each other and in fellowship with the Father and the Son. The perfect tense is used (*dedōkas*), meaning "I have given them." A future event is spoken of as a past event to illustrate the certainty of its fulfillment.

The second part of the text is Jesus' intercession for both His disciples made during His earthly ministry and for the disciples yet to come and focuses on their future life beyond this world (vv. 24):

²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Jesus prays that His disciples will be where He is. In other words, Jesus prays that His disciples will be in His Father's house (14:1-3) so that they may behold His glory. This time glory refers to His status.

The final part is the prayer's conclusion (vv.25-26):

²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

"O righteous Father" signals the conclusion of the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus summarizes His ministry (vv. 25-26a). Jesus revealed God. Unlike the world, Jesus' disciples believe in Jesus as the divine presence in the world. Jesus then recommits to the mission and goal (26b) which involves His glorification and the sending of the Holy Spirit (14:26).

Reflections

The unity of believers is both ontological (i.e., a status, we are all one in Christ) and spiritual (i.e., involves participation in the fellowship of the Father and Son, v. 21). If such unity has a spiritual root, then it stands to reason that disunity among the church also has a spiritual root. A good example of the spiritual root of disunity is the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. The human inability to communicate stemmed from the sin of pride. If disunity has a spiritual root, then it also must have a spiritual cure. We see how the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-21 (which we celebrate next Sunday) enables the reversal of Babel. Disunity becomes unity. It is spiritual warfare that enables the Church to resist division (Ephesians 6:10-20).

So, the Christian model for unity is Jesus and the Father. This unity and the love that we have for one another is a key part of how the Gospel is proclaimed and lived out in the world. Unfortunately, unity is hardly the word that comes to mind to describe the fractured visible church today. How much time, effort and resources have been wasted over the centuries over such division and disunity? The root cause of such disunity is spiritual. As Christians look on and see the institutionalized church continue to decline in the West, this may actually be a strategic advantage in the eventual victory we are assured: Christians are now free to be in unity in the type of community envisioned and experienced by John. This is a community described as a flock (10:1-30) or a vine (15:1-6) that is attached to Jesus. We are all one flock and have one Shepherd (10:16). We are no longer strangers and aliens, but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:11-22). We are free to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world today.



For feedback or to be added or removed from the mailing list, please e-mail david.r.lyons@gmail.com