Unity June 1, 2025 (Jn 17:20-26)

“*My prayer is not for them 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.*” (Jn 17:20-21)

* About 30 yrs ago an edition of the National Geographic featured the arctic wolf. This article described how a seven-member pack had targeted several musk-oxen calves who were guarded by eleven adults. As the wolves approached their quarry, the musk-oxen bunched in an impenetrable semicircle, their deadly rear hooves facing out, and the calves remaining safe during a long standoff with the enemy.
* But then a single ox broke rank, and the herd scattered into nervous little groups. A skirmish ensued, and the adults finally fled in panic, leaving the calves to the mercy of the predators. Not a single calf survived.

2

* In Acts 20 St Paul uses the metaphor of the wolf to describe the evil and divisive forces that would attack the Church. He said that, “*savage* *wolves would come, not sparing the flock*”. (20:29)
* Wolves, in many shapes and forms continue to attack the Church today, both at the global level and at the local level, but cannot penetrate and destroy when there is unity. When believers break ranks, however, they provide easy prey.
* I guess a good question for us to ask ourselves is: “*Are we easy prey?*” “*As a Christian community,* *Are we unified, or are we divided?*” And, if we are unified, what is it that we are we unified on?
* A lot of people get confused about the unity we are called to as Christians.
* 1st, we are called to unity, not uniformity.
* There is a big difference between the

3

two. If we were in uniformity, we would all have to think alike and to do things exactly the same way. I think we all realize that that is not possible. We are all different (Thank God for that). And therefore we look at many things differently and we think differently.

* But if we are called to unity, what exactly does that unity look like?
* I believe the answer is found in today’s gospel reading.
* The reading for today is a continuation of a three-part prayer that represents the entire 17th chapter of John’s gospel.
* Jesus prayed this prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He was crucified.

1. First He prays for Himself – that He might be glorified to the honour and glory of the Father.
2. Second he prays for His disciples - that they would be sanctified by the truth and, that they would be in unity with the Father.

4

1. Then thirdly, which is today’s reading, Jesus prays for the future Church. He prays for you and me.

* Jesus begins by praying for all who believe in Him through the message of His disciples. That is you and me He was praying for, and His prayer is very specific – *that we may know unity*.
* Now there is a real joy in the fellowship of unity with Christ and with each other, and we know that Jesus wants us to know that joy because He also said: “***If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.***”(Jn.15:10-11)
* But, even more important than our personal joy, is God’s plan for the world through the Church.
* The world is unable to be drawn to a Church that is divided and full of disunity. That is why our unity is so imp

5

* Our unity in Christ is a witness to the world around us. Jesus said in verse 21: “***May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me****.*”
* The unity that Jesus calls each of us to, is a unity in Christ.
* That means that we are in total unity in our understanding and belief that:

1. Jesus is unique as the only Saviour of the world.
2. That He is not only one with the Father, but that He is the way, the truth and the life – the only way to the Father.
3. And, that you and I have no salvation apart from Jesus Christ.

* This is the unity that Jesus calls us to.
* It has to begin with these basic & essential beliefs.
* If we are unified in these areas then the rest will fall into place.
* Yet, there is often great disunity and dissention, even within the Church,

6

because of these very claims of Jesus.

* We shouldn’t be surprised at this.
* There is a rather crude saying: “You can’t suck and blow at the same time – you are either inhaling or you are exhaling – it is impossible to do both at the same time.
* Well, it’s the same thing in being in unity with Jesus.
* Two people can’t say that they are in unity with Christ when one says that Jesus is the only answer to your salvation and the other says that there are many ways to God.
* But, when we truly believe what Jesus said – when that truth is written on our souls and we have submitted our lives to Him, then I can assure you that there will be unity because to know that truth is to have grasped the greatest mystery of life – a truth that makes everything else insignificant in comparison.
* Our unity will 1st of all be within ourselves with our soul being right with

7

God.

* And then we will be in total unity with fellow believers – we will have that oneness that Jesus spoke about.
* And if we are in unity in Christ, our passion will be wanting others to know this same hope and freedom, and that essentially is the Church.
* God’s plan for the Church is really quite simple. We enter into a personal relationship with Jesus that is nurtured and expressed within a community of like-believers. And the joy and love and freedom that we experience is such that we can’t help but want to share it. That is what the Church was founded on and that is still exactly what the Church is about today – everything else is secondary.
* The jailer in today’s first reading from Acts saw that despite their persecutions, Paul & Silas presented something that he wanted and he asked them: “***Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*** and they

8

replied: “***Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”***

* I don’t believe it is an accident that today our lectionary looks at the unity of believers and next week we celebrate Pentecost Sunday – the birthday of the Church.
* God’s plan for the Church began with Jesus’ prayer: “***May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me***.” (Vs 21b)
* The purpose of our unity is that through the Church the world may know about Jesus.
* But this kind of unity cannot be faked – it is so real everyone notices it.
* And this unity is about the kingdom - it even transcends denominations.
* It is a unity that attracts rather than separates.
* Good example that jumps to my mind is when we were looking for a place to begin worshipping as Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church in

9

Moncton.

* When I came to the Wesleyan Church and met with P. Buckingham, before we even asked about worshipping here, he offered.
* He said that because we were in such unity in Christ, and because we shared such a common passion for reaching others for Christ, he **wanted** us to come here.
* He said that absolutely everything about this Wesleyan Church was focused on reaching people for Christ, and because we were Anglican, we could reach e/e that they could not. He wanted to partner in the gospel. (Wesleyan Mission Statement)
* That is the unity that Jesus calls you and me to.
* Although the Church was called together and was formed on the unity of Christ, sometimes I’m afraid that focus gets lost and we can get sidetracked.
* Jesus came to redeem the world from

10

sin and guilt. That process must begin in the Church and it can only happen when the Church is unified and focused on the central message of what it is about – that Jesus came to redeem you and me personally.

* When we know this personally in our lives, we are then able to grow as individuals and as a Christian community. Then with that focus, and God’s mighty blessing on us, we are empowered and able to reach out to a very hurting world around us.
* Where the church gets into trouble is when it attempts to interpret and apply this unity as agreement within the body.
* The church then becomes a democratic institution, and then anything is up for grabs - according to the will and vote of the members.
* This is a political unity and is not the unity that Jesus calls us to.
* The difference is that political unity is based on compromise, whereas the

11

unity Jesus calls us to is based on truth and freedom and life.

* It can only be found in Him.
* Jesus said: “***I have come so that you may have life and have it abundantly***.”
* The greatest blessing He could possibly give us is Himself.
* When you think about it, God’s plan for the redemption of the world through Jesus is pretty awesome, but it is incredible how He trusts the Church with that plan.
* I think it important however, that we must remember that the Church is His plan, not ours.
* When Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus said *that it was on that truth, on that foundation, He would build His Church and the gates of hell would not be able to overcome it.* *(Matt 16:17-18)*
* That is exactly what is happening.
* No matter where you look in the world, when the Church is in unity with Christ,

12

it is flourishing.

* When a Church earnestly seeks that unity in Christ, God will bless that Church.
* To be in Christ is the only unity that matters
* All else, whether it be about administration or whatever, is secondary.
* I believe every Christian church need to have this simple mission statement as their basis: “***To Know Christ and to Make Him Known***”.
* This statement simply means that we want to know Christ personally and are growing deeper in that knowledge and then we want others to know Him as well.
* Jesus said: ***May they (meaning you & me) also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me****.***”**