

“Coming Together As One” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Easter 7 – May 29, 2022

- I. **John 17:21** – As Jesus prays for the future Church: “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.”
- II. **Unity is hard to achieve.**
 - a. In the word itself is “uni” or one.
 - b. We all have these aspirations or desires that humanity can come together as one... but we also know that evil and brokenness are right there with us.
 - c. Even in the places we would think that unity might be achieved, the Church especially, sin and pride get in the way on so many levels.
 - d. I read about an example of coming together as a team from an author and musician named Sandra McCracken –
 - i. She said she played softball in a community league when she was a teenager, and this team didn’t know each other when they stepped out under the lights of the field for the first time.
 1. They were a bunch of strangers in gray polyester uniforms and orange baseball caps.
 - ii. At the start of their opening game, a feeling of possibility came over them all... her teammates were talented, and the coach was tough.
 1. As he took time to watch them throughout the season, he positioned and repositioned them in different roles, playing to their individual strengths.
 2. As each player lived into her giftedness, there was more synergy and success.
 - iii. And yet today, instead of feeling like a single team with diverse gifts in each player, we find ourselves in a time and place where it often feels we’re on different teams altogether.
 1. Of course it’s true in society at large, but worse, it seems just as true inside the church.
 - iv. But that’s not always how it’s been... consider the first disciples when then got started out – it says that... “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit... All the believers were together and had everything in common,” (Acts 2:4, 42, 44).¹
 1. In fact, God has something to say about unity in our reading today as Jesus prays for the future Church, “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.” (John 17:21).
 - v. Do you think Jesus considered this unity in Christians to be no big deal... that being a team and using the best in all of us would be easy?

1. No, Jesus knows the sinful human condition better than anyone – because He would end up on the cross in just a few hours from this prayer.
2. Unity is so hard to achieve because the sin in us will not listen to the leading of the Word... sin causes pride to well up, always trying to be right and first... and sin causes us to be selfish rather than seek the higher good...
3. When we stop to think about it, why did the softball team do well?
 - a. They had leadership they listened to...
 - b. They allowed for changes based on need – and moved to whatever position was needed to help the team...
 - c. And they let the goal be greater than themselves.
- e. And what is the higher good... the greater goal for us as Christians?
 - i. That the world may believe in Jesus Christ their Savior... sent by the Father to redeem them from their sins!
 - ii. May we have unity, says Jesus... SO THAT the world may know Me!
- f. When we go off on our own without the Word leading us – when we pridefully cannot work with anyone else because we're always right – when we are too selfish to see the higher good of sharing Jesus... we sin.
 - i. Unity becomes all but impossible in the Church – and you know what?
 1. That's exactly what world expects of us – failure and brokenness – rather than unity and bringing glory to God.

III. **In our Gospel lesson, Jesus goes to His Father in prayer.**

- a. You see, Jesus goes to His Father in submission, not because He is not God, but because He gives us the perfect example of what people should do – always seeking the will of the Father.
 - i. This prayer is known as the High Priestly Prayer – and it takes up the entire chapter of John 17.
 - ii. It starts by commending the disciples to the Father to watch over and care for them – to help them to be in unity and strong for the work ahead.
 - iii. But then, Jesus transitions in verse 20 - I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through [the disciples passing on the] word.
 - iv. Jesus is lifting up you and me – and all future believers that will come by the lives of the disciples sharing His name.
- b. May the future believers have unity, Father...
 - i. Unity cannot be achieved when we ignore the Word
 - ii. Unity cannot be achieved when we lack humility
 - iii. Unity cannot be achieved when we forget the greater goal of sharing Christ with the lost

c. And this, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is the tall order that Jesus prays for in His High Priestly Prayer – Unity so that people may know that Jesus is real, He was sent by the Father, and all things are possible with God!

IV. **Jesus gives us such a beautiful picture of unity.**

a. You see, He's not asking us to do something foreign to who we are in Christ...

- i. He always listened to the Father and obeyed the Word
- ii. He was humble and did what the Father directed
- iii. He knew the greater goal was salvation for the whole world
- iv. In all these things Jesus was in unity with His Father and the Holy Spirit to carry out God's work...

b. It seems that St. Paul's words from Philippians 2 fit so well in describing Jesus...and Jesus' prayer for us... "2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:2-8)

- i. Our Lord Jesus was the perfect team player, and our salvation and unity was so important that He gave up all glory and honor to be born into the world... to suffer and be crucified... and die a criminal's death
 - ii. When we see the price that was paid, it makes it all the easier to dig deeply into the Word and the Father's will, to humbly seek the best place for our gifts, and to always remember the greater goal... that people come to know Jesus!
- c. In our church here at Ascension, that is who we are... seeking to come together as God's team... in unity...
- i. Each of us using our talents for the greater good
 - ii. Encouraging one another to keep going
 - iii. Participating in the life of the Church
 - iv. Communing together (a great place of unity)
 - v. And always keeping in mind that our unity shows the world that Jesus is real... Jesus works through our unity to accomplish His goal
- d. By God's grace you and I were called to a team... to show the world that Jesus is the Savior – praise be to God that He put us on the winning team!
Amen

¹ Source: Sandra McCracken, "We Really Are on the Same Team," CT magazine (October, 2021), p. 28