

“Unity in Christ” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Easter 7 – June 1, 2025

- I. **John 17:22-23** – 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.
- II. **Our Gospel lesson is known as the “High Priestly Prayer”.**
 - a. Jesus told His disciples many things leading up to this prayer, and He’s preparing them for the time ahead.
 - i. In a little while from this point, the group would head to the Garden of Gethsemane where Judas Iscariot would turn Jesus over to the authorities.
 - ii. All the teaching, traveling, and connection that Jesus had with His disciples was about to change... and the road ahead would be very difficult.
 - iii. The prayer, which is all of John 17, can be challenging to follow, but its central focus is Jesus’ desire that His followers... and all who come after... would know Him and, through Him, be united with the Father.
 - iv. Jesus is not saying that through faith we become one with God (as though we become God), but He is saying our unity will have the relationship restored that was broken by sin and God will dwell in us.
 - v. I imagine this prayer as very somber and heartfelt with the love that Jesus has for His disciples... but it’s about more than them, He even prays for all those in the future who will come to faith! (v 20)
 - vi. The unity and connection that Jesus seeks as an answer to His prayer is the very thing the world is so stubbornly against.
 - b. No matter how many years have passed since Jesus came to earth to set things straight, the world and sin will always struggle against the unity of Spirit and coming together around God’s Word.
 - i. Jesus makes it clear that He’s not praying about the world, but about His followers... yet He knows that they will not be taken out of the world to live in heaven, so they must remain connected... unified with God and with each other.
 - ii. The sad thing is that the Church has often reflected the world and its division far more than the prayer that Jesus prays in our Gospel today.
 - iii. Paul begins his letter to the Corinthian church saying, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.” (1 Cor. 1:10)

1. Early in the church, people struggled to be of the same mind and judgment, along with coming together for the common good rather than selfish reasons.
- c. I suppose it makes sense that the world's divisions might rub off on the church, as it's reflective of the broken relationships, the sin, and the lack of harmony we see all around us.
 - i. It's hard to find good examples of unity and godliness in the church because it's a foreign concept to the average person.
 1. It's far more common for people to grow up knowing how to hate their neighbor than love them selflessly.
 2. The average person rarely wants to admit sin and seek forgiveness and reconciliation, but would rather harbor resentments, gossip and lie about the other person, or just break off any connection whatsoever.
 3. We grow up seeing people glorified for being independent, standing out as different, and going against the crowd.
 - a. In other words, how can I separate myself from all the other "sheep" out there so I can stand out.
 - b. Being a part of something is not nearly as appealing as being successful without depending on others to get there.
 - ii. When we bring these attitudes into the church, it becomes more of a reflection of the world than God's desire for us to unify around the Word and live as witnesses for Him.
 1. Sometimes people want the spotlight rather than doing what God has uniquely gifted them for... and it becomes more about being puffed up than glorifying God.
 2. Others divide by always looking for the trouble they perceive to have happened... and let me tell you, if you are looking for trouble, you will find it.
 3. Still others think that unity means everyone looks and acts the same as me, and I'm not interested in including other cultures.
- d. If this High Priestly Prayer is the desire of Jesus' heart poured out to the Father before He is executed on the cross for our sins, I hope we consider what He wants.
 - i. Unity in Christ means we have died to self and are now connected by something much bigger than our desires or independence – we are a part of the Body of Christ.
 - ii. The Bible says that we cannot expect our own bodies to operate normally if the parts don't work together... so in unity we work together for the common good.

III. **Our Savior Jesus died on the cross** and rose again for the common good.

- a. His great love for people who are lost to sin was the motivation to set His face toward the worst imaginable experience...
 - i. It wasn't done with all kinds of support and encouragement... He was abandoned to face it all alone... as He was betrayed by Judas... disowned by Peter... and for a period time, forsaken by the Father.
 - ii. The sinful division between God and humanity... the division between each of us as people... was all paid for on the cross.
 - iii. It was the greatest price to pay with the greatest love, all so that we might be forgiven and live in the unity of the Spirit... unity in Christ.
- b. With that amazing gift of forgiveness and life, we can come together with a very different pattern than the world.
 - i. Rather than selfishness and building ourselves up, the love of Christ in us builds others up.
 - ii. Instead of looking for trouble, gossiping, and breaking others down, we put the best construction on things, and as the Bible says in Colossians 3:13 – “bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”
 - iii. As a world of cultures and people are constantly in our midst, we don't reject these differences but gladly remember the charge of Christ to make disciples of ALL nations.
- c. The cross... the forgiveness of our sins... and the faith we were given transform us into different people – the Body of Christ in unity.
 - i. I read an illustration from A.W. Tozer who says that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same tuning fork are automatically tuned to each other.
 - 1. They are not connected because they are tuned to each other... they are tuned to an outside standard rather than how they want sound or be different.
 - 2. In the same way, one hundred worshipers who believe in Christ and are guided by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit are closer to one another than is humanly possible.¹
 - ii. In a similar way, when I discuss marriage with engaged couples, I explain that as each of the individuals get closer to Christ, like a triangle with Jesus at the top, the two people cannot help but get closer together.
- d. Our connection and unity in Christ are clearly not of this world – because the world gets unity all wrong.
 - i. Though the world divides and the Church often stumbles, Jesus prays... and even dies... for our unity in Him.
 - ii. In His death and resurrection, He has reconciled us to the Father... and to one another, forming us into one Body by grace.

- iii. As Christ is in us, we now live in unity... not by preference... not by doing all the right things... and not by our own power... but through the love and forgiveness of Christ – who lives and reigns with the Father... and in our hearts to this very day. Amen.

¹ Source: A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Simon & Brown, reprint 2018), p. 63