

Praying with Jesus — Part 3

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to echo James's welcome. It's wonderful to have you gather together in the Lord's name, and especially if you're new with us, it's great to have you here. We're ending a sermon series, a short sermon series, on the Gospel of John.

And we've been doing three, this is the third of three parts, on an incredible prayer, which is John 17, where Jesus prayed for himself, he prayed for his disciples.

And now, in this passage, he turns to another subject. And I wonder, as we look at this chapter, on page 903, who in your life prays for you?

Are there people that you know of that hold you up in prayer regularly? And it might be a parent, it might be a spouse, it might be a good friend.

It might be somebody who is in your Bible study group. People that may not even know you are praying for you. I have found that many people that I know that have become Christians have found out that there were people praying for them long before they became Christian.

[1 : 15] In fact, my belief is that it's through their prayers that God worked in their hearts to give them the gift of faith. And here, in this third part of Jesus' prayer, Jesus says, I pray for you.

So there is one other for each one of you that is praying for you. And it is Jesus Christ, it is the living Lord, the one who has died for you and risen in great power and is in glory, that prays for you today. And the amazing thing is that Jesus prayed this prayer 2,000 years ago and he said, I'm going to continue praying for you. It is a continuous prayer interceding for you with the Father.

It's part of the life of God. And the thing that he prays for, and I think for me it was a bit of a surprise when I went into this, is that the big thing he prays for, for you and for me, is unity with other Christians.

That's the big thing he prays for. And I wonder if that's what you'd have thought of first when you think of what is Jesus praying for me. And it is a unique kind of unity.

[2 : 31] And he spells it out for us. It's different from the unity that is experienced in the world. And there are types of unity. Unity is often in very short supply.

If you look at our current situation in politics, if you're following the U.S. election, you see lots of disunity. But there are places where we see unity. If there is perhaps at a concert that you go to or a hockey game or there's a club that you're part of, you see a certain unity there.

I went with a friend of mine who was a rabid college football fan. He's got a university in Southern California that he follows. And on his 50th birthday, he invited me to come down and go to games with him.

So we went to a game, two games, one on a Thursday night. That happened to be the arch rival of the team that he follows was playing another team. And he went to that game with me wearing the arch rival's sweatshirt very boldly.

And I got to tell you, there was a strong sense of disunity when we went there. Lots of hostility. I was a little bit fearful as I walked with him and asked him very politely to turn his sweatshirt inside out.

[3 : 43] I don't think he did that. But two days later, we went to another game. And it was the home game, homecoming game for the team that he follows. And he was decked out in all the regalia of his team.

And I tell you, it was like coming to long lost friends, to a massive extended family of 80,000 people who just, you know, loved us. And it was a wonderful experience just to be together.

But the thing with that unity is it was a unity that lasted for about two hours. People that we didn't know seemed like fast friends. But it is a shallow and short-term unity.

The unity that Jesus is talking about is much different. It is a unity that is really supernatural. It is a unity that goes into eternity.

And I wonder if you have experienced that unity with other Christians. We do in our local congregation. But I think that it is often surprising or it is really highlighted when you meet people of different cultures or a different language or a very different background from you.

[4 : 54] Perhaps it is a different Christian sort of tradition. And you meet them. And immediately you see that there is a deep connection. That you realize, and I think it comes from realizing that that person has been saved, loved by God, brought into fellowship with a Heavenly Father, in just the way that I have been saved, that I have been loved and brought into fellowship with a Father.

We have the same Father, God the Father. And there is a deep, deep connection that is immediate. Despite many differences, even of language, and you cannot communicate by words, there is this sense that this is my brother, this is my sister in Jesus Christ.

And that gives you a good sense that there is something very unique about the unity that Jesus is praying for here. It is a deep blessing.

And it is important for us to see what Jesus says about it. What does he pray for? And there is three things that he points out, at least, that I want to bring up this morning.

It is in John 17, 20-26. And in that we hear about the source of that unity. Where does it come from? And then we hear about the essence of it.

[6 : 15] What is that unity that he is talking about? And then he talks about the effect of that unity on the world. So let's look briefly at the source.

Because Jesus says that unity begins with faith in the authentic word, the authentic Jesus Christ that his 11 apostles preached.

So if you look at verse 20, Jesus asked the Father for all who will ever believe in him, as I said. And what he says is, he prays for those who will believe in him through their word, that they all may be one.

So you see how the message of the disciples, the apostles, come together that they may all be one. And you see what's happening here.

His prayer is for people who personally put their trust in the Lord Jesus. Because it's through that trust, that unity, true unity, comes about.

[7 : 21] We are not drawn into this real unity by just coming to church, or receiving communion, or reading our Bibles, or being part of a ministry. These are very important things.

But they are a means to the end of trusting and believing the authentic Lord Jesus. And this is the Jesus that the disciples wrote about.

And this is the problem. This is where the problem came in our relationship several years ago, and the reason we're in a different church today, in our relationship with the Diocese of New Westminster, that led to ANIC, the ANIC network in Canada, being formed.

Because what happened in this diocese is that there was a movement to no longer believe that God's word is the authority for our lives in all things moral, in all things doctrine about what we believe about God.

And instead they believed that there was one of many truths that the Bible was. And in fact, the process for this redefining of marriage was first of all to question the authority of God's word and to undermine that.

[8 : 39] It was necessary in order for them to take that step. But of course what happened is that disunity followed. They were out of step then with other Anglicans throughout the world who were faithful.

They no longer followed a biblical understanding of who Jesus is and what his word is all about. And once you do this, it's very easy to create a Jesus who is a figment of your imagination, who will support whatever movement you want him to support.

And there is disunity. But the authentic message of Jesus, the apostles' message that says this is clearly who Jesus is, is the source of true unity.

It is what now binds us together with Anglicans around the world, with Christians of many denominations, that we hold to the apostles' word, the word of God.

And so the authentic Jesus is the basis. That's why there is really an objective and there is a subjective aspect to unity. The objective aspect is that it is based on the eyewitness testimony of Jesus' disciples who were with him.

[10:01] And then there is the subjective aspect, and that is that we put our trust in that Jesus who has been preached and taught so that the authentic Jesus is the Jesus of the apostles' message.

Real unity means that unity begins in something that's apostolic and not negotiable. It means embracing that word of the apostles. So that's the source of unity.

Now the second thing he talks about is the essence of unity. unity. And Jesus reveals in his prayer that unity is about being drawn into life. And this is an amazing thing.

I think it's hard for us to fully wrap our minds around. It's in verse 21, as you keep going there. He says, I'm praying that they may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you.

It's a very intimate listening in to Jesus' prayer. Because the first thing we learn here is that our oneness is a oneness that is like the Father and the Son being united together in desire and in longing and will.

[11:17] So it shows us that our unity is all about knowing what God desires and desiring that. Wanting what God wants. longing after the things that God longs after.

This is the essence of unity. But it goes deeper than that. Because that Father-Son love, the love within the Trinity, is not just an analogy that says we should love like that.

It goes much deeper. It is actually about being brought into real life, into the spiritual reality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit loving each other and giving life.

And that's why it says in verse 21, as they go on, that they also may be in us. And then look at verse 23. I in them and you in me.

It is about becoming part of the life of God. That's what unity is about. And the reason Jesus is saying this is because he's teaching us about what the truth is at the heart of the universe.

[12:32] What the most important thing is. And that is that real love, which is God's love, an overflowing love. A couple of weeks ago, David was talking about this at the beginning of Jesus' prayer.

That from all of eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit loved each other deeply, intimately, and continue to. And the nature of that love is that it overflows.

God didn't need to create humans because he was lonely, because it would be an interesting thing to do, because God is self-sufficient. But God's love overflowed into creation of a good world.

The nature of his love is that he shares it. And it overflows into creation. And then, after the fall of humanity, it overflows into the redemption of that world.

It is a love that is shared even with sinful people, even with those separated from God. And so there's a real drama. There is a story of salvation that happens when Jesus, who is praying here, comes into a dark world and actually invades it.

[13:46] Because what's happening is that the circle of God's love is actually breaking in to the world. And Jesus calls to himself disciples who will join in that life, join into that circle of love.

That love shines very powerfully in his dying on a cross for us, as that wonderful hymn that we just sang said, for us, this all happens.

He rises in power. The Son returns to the Father, and then he sends his Holy Spirit to be with his disciples. And through them, Jesus continues the work of bringing people into the circle of God's love.

It is through them. And that circle of God, those who are part of that life, grows immeasurably until it spreads, and many are brought into that love.

That's why the book of Revelation talks about myriad and myriad, which is countless people, who are worshiping God, who are knowing his love, are sharing his glory. The love of God overflows in that way.

[14:52] So, real Christian unity comes from being brought into that love. That's what it's about. It is a spiritual thing. It's not something that humans can engineer, or that we can have a working document and see, you know, how do we foster unity here?

No, God gives it powerfully in a real spiritual way. He brings people into that circle of his love. And any structures that are put into place are only useful if they help people to know Jesus, to draw close to him in trust.

Maybe the best way of doing that, I've heard, of illustrating this, is to think of spokes on a wheel. Or maybe a Ferris wheel is better. I've been on a big Ferris wheel in Disneyland, and I think of, when I think of spokes, I think of that, because they're bright neon going out to the ends.

And on the ride of a Ferris wheel, you are right at the end of the spoke on the rim of the wheel. So think of that. And when you're out there, you're quite far apart from the other spokes.

So think of people in our church who, and in the world, who are far apart that way. As you go down the spoke towards the hub that is the middle, imagine that the hub is God's life, his love, the truth of who he is, the reality of Jesus Christ.

[16:16] and imagine that you go down towards that hub because of the fact that you are drawing close to him, because you are desiring what he desires, that you want to live out the life that he gives.

As you go down that spoke with other people, you get closer and closer to God, but you become closer and closer to one another as well. That is the movement of unity.

It is the glory of unity. And often that action of moving towards God involves obeying God in acts of service, in acts of self-sacrificial giving.

That is the glory of unity. You know, verse 22, if you look at it, it is something that is a bit puzzling. We do not know for sure. Commentators wrote lots about it, but it says that the glory that you have given me, Jesus says, I have also given to them.

We do not know for sure what this glory is, but we know it has, it has got to do with knowing God as Jesus has revealed him and serving him.

[17:25] Because we know that the cross is the glory of Jesus. And in the cross, the love of God, the power of God, the intentions of God to save sinful people is made clear.

And the glory of that also is that Jesus obeys the Father even to death on a cross for us sinners for our eternal life. And I think we're seeing glory when we hear Jesus, we see Jesus wash his disciples' feet and say, now I want you to wash one another's feet.

If I, your Lord, and your teacher have done this, you also ought to wash one another's feet. This is a clue to glory that he has given to us because glory is to teach what Jesus has taught and given to us.

It is to serve as the Lord has served you because you have seen the Father by seeing Jesus. That is what draws us deep into the life of God together.

It's the essence of unity. Well, what's the purpose of unity? And this is the third part of what he prays for.

[18:38] What is the purpose? And when I looked at this, I was surprised at what it said. Jesus reveals that our unity together actually is for the sake of the world.

It shows the world that Jesus is who he said he is. So look at the end of verse 21. It says, Jesus prays for oneness so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

And just so that we understand that, Jesus prays it again in verse 23. So that the world will know that you sent me and loved them, loved his people, even as you loved me.

And really the logic is this, that real Christian unity is a miracle. It's not natural for people to be united in forgiveness, in forbearance, in love, and sacrificial concern for each other.

There is something different about it that the world sees. You see, what is natural for people who gather together is that they have a common interest.

[19:44] One class gathers with its own class. Languages and cultures gather with each other.

There is a shared self-interest and when that doesn't happen, there's conflict. But if in this world there suddenly appears this society that has different ages, that has different social groups within it, that have different cultures and backgrounds, there's very different interests, and they are loving each other, sacrificing for each other because of the fact that God loves them.

And in fact, reaching out to the world without any desire for a return on what they're giving, the world is going to look and say, this is very, very odd.

What a strange group. I can't imagine what they see in each other. They're very different, yet they are united in love. And this is so different from the thinking of the world because the world thinks that church is another club.

You know, we're interested in maybe going biking on Sunday morning or playing video games with other people, joining lawn bowling, whatever it is. And people on Sunday morning, they like religious things, and that's what draws them together as well.

But if they see people who by nature would not be in fellowship with each other and that they are loving each other and serving the world with no return expected, they take notice. It is a miracle.

[21 : 11] It must be natural work. It is a witness to the world that we can spoil. We know this. We spoil it by selfishness, by ambition, by quarreling about secondary things.

It happens by party spirit and self-interest. Just read the New Testament and you'll see it all worked out for us. And it's because we are sinners. We can see this in our own church.

But unity does not mean agreeing on everything together. Instead, unity will mean repentance when we react against one another.

It will mean forgiveness for those who sin against us. Forgiveness as Jesus has forgiven us. There is work involved in the life of unity.

And that's why Paul says that unity is something to be maintained, like maintaining a car or maintaining a garden or a home. He says, I therefore a prisoner of the Lord in Ephesians.

[22 : 15] He says, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

peace. And I think that those attributes that he is talking about with forgiveness and love that comes against sin is itself a witness to the world because it speaks of a unity that needs to be maintained. It's not a fairy tale. It's real life. So God calls us as a diverse church family to be eager about maintaining our unity in the Holy Spirit.

He wants us to be a visual aid to the world of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel of grace that is brought into every situation. And the world sees that.

It draws people into belief in Jesus because he sees that we are sinners that God actually redeems by grace. And we live that out. And so he makes us a community of grace reflecting the life of God and inviting the world into it.

[23 : 28] So I want to end in looking at Jesus' prayer by looking at what Jesus says he will do with this unity.

There's two things he says. He calls on God the Father twice, you'll notice, at the end of the prayer. The first thing that he says is he says, Father, I desire that they, in verse 24, whom you've given me, may be with me, may be with me, where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world.

You see, Jesus is saying what he's going to do with that unity is to bring us together to be with him. And that is the point of everything. It is simply because of his overwhelming love for us that he brings us into unity so that he can be with us and we with him together.

to have a day, one day, when that unity is made absolutely perfect. His great desire is to see us, is to be with us in his glory.

And you know, he gives that desire to every Christian. I think the thing that is unique within us as Christians is that we want to see Jesus' face. We want to see him in all his glory.

[24 : 53] This is the great desire of our hearts if you believe and follow Jesus. You want to see him. And this is the amazing thing that all his work, his sacrifice, his power, is directed so that we might be with him where he is in his glory.

It's amazing, extravagant love that has flourished for eternity. And we're beginning to know that love in our unity today.

Now, the second thing Jesus prays for at the very end in verse 25 is he promises in this age that many will be brought to know the Father through our unity.

Many will be brought to know him. And so he prays, O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, and that's how Jesus defines the world, it's those who do not know him yet. He says, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 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.

[26 : 05] Well, what a marvelous way for this prayer to end, because the work that he has been delighting to do, what Jesus is all about, is to make the Father known to us together.

together. He loves to do this through the work of the Holy Spirit in each of us, and he's doing this all the time in your life if you will let him. And I want you to notice that it is done together, that we are knowing God.

Jesus is bringing us to know God every day, more and more, in our relationship with one another. We are together, people in whom the Holy Spirit is working in this way.

And the result of that work, Jesus says, of knowing God, is that the very love of the Father for Jesus comes into your life so that your relationships in the church and outside the church are steeped in that love and formed and shaped by that love.

There is a unity that comes to the church and curiosity in the world around when people see that. The world says, who are these people?

[27 : 13] Why are they different? It is because they are knowing God and shaped by his love. And so as we leave this passage, it is so important for us to know that Jesus makes himself known not so that we might be solitary believers, but so that we are a community of believers who are set apart, sanctified in the truth, so that we are helping one another to know God for the sake of the world.

and we need to pray that this fellowship of St. John's, our diocese of Anic, the Anglican Communion, all of the denominations in this world are united in and through that truth.

We're set apart to be a blessing to the world by together living out that very distinctive love for the living Lord Jesus because this is a supernatural unity.

It is Jesus' clear message to the world. So pray for one another that this Christian fellowship will be what Jesus has prayed for it and for you.

Amen.