

**17**

May

## So That They May Be One

Stories That Matter

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A

Jesus prays for our unity and glorification in him. This service invites creative engagement with what it means to live as answers to Christ's prayer for oneness in the world.

### REFERENCES

Isaiah 45:1-7

Psalm 21:1-7

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

### COLORS

White

There are so many threads in this tapestry that the picture might be a bit obscured. To spend the time picking them all apart is beyond the realm of these notes.

We could extend the verses a little bit and talk about that sanctify request. He says don't take them out of the world but protect them. Help them; help us live in the world as though we belong to him. Jesus calls on the Spirit of protection so that we could be made fit for God's purposes. Jesus hands us over to God and asks God to let us live and work in this world, but as signs of God's presence, pointing beyond the world in which we work. We could talk about what this protection means and what it doesn't mean.

Or we could talk about unity, one of my favorite themes. That's what I'm supposed to talk about. It fits the title, "so that they may be one." Jesus prays that we (that's you and I and everyone else) would be one as "we are one." We are to be as close as Jesus and God. We are called to function as

parts of the Trinity, aspects of the same thing, different, but one in essence and in hope. That is what community really means. It doesn't mean individuality is lost; differences make the whole what it is. But it does mean that we acknowledge our need for the other and acknowledge that we are somehow incomplete without the other. How can we fight amongst ourselves? How can we hate and cast stones at one another when we are part of the same whole? We are hating and casting stones at ourselves. The church is many things, but in this prayer, it is clear that the church is called to be one.

Or we could talk about that "in the world" and "out of the world" language in the prayer. Yes, on one level, it is Jesus' farewell address. He is on his way out of the world. But then we also believe that Jesus is in the world, still today. Just as we live in this world, but we don't belong to the world. Our eyes are on eternity; our true home is in the kingdom, which might have embassies here in this world, which might break through, which might peek around the edges, but it isn't here. At least not yet.

Or we could talk about the hundreds of other things that I haven't figured out yet. Maybe you saw something or wonder something or figured something out from this prayer that you didn't know before or that confirmed something inside of you. Or maybe we could simply talk about what it is like to know that Jesus is praying for us, what a blessing that is, even when we don't always know what is in that prayer, even when we don't know how to respond to that prayer, or what we should be looking for. Just knowing about the prayer means something. In a week, it will be May 24, known as Aldersgate Day, the day we remember John Wesley and his heart strangely warmed experience, as he finally understood that Jesus' love and salvation was a gift for him too.

But instead of all that, the words that jumped out at me were those in verse ten: "All mine are yours and yours are mine and I have been glorified in them." I know that really says more about who Jesus is than it does about us. But it also speaks deeply of relationships and of community. Peterson translates the last part of the verse like this: "my life is on display in them" (*John 17:10 The Message*<sup>[1]</sup>). How we live and love in this world is the presentation of Christ to those who don't know him yet. How we share and give does not just reflect on us, but on Jesus. How we treat one another, honor one another, and celebrate one another and the commitments we have made is part of our faith. Christ is glorified by the way we live in community. Unity matters, in other words. It is part of our witness, part of our telling the story that matters. Disunity is a denial of the very content we claim to want to present. To belong to him, to belong to the story that matters, is to be in partnership with the whole church.

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