

“That We Might be One”

John 17: 1-21

7th Sunday of Easter – May 17, 2015

Pastor Deborah Birkeland – Christ the King
Lutheran Church

Today, we read part of the prayer that Jesus prayed for his followers just before he was crucified, died and ascended into heaven.

Jesus prays that God might unify all believers. He asks His Heavenly Father to make us holy in truth and to protect us from the evil one, for he knows that humanity is so vulnerable to Satan's lies.

Every day as tragedies and evil fills the news, I find it comforting that in the face of all the lies and falsehoods that the world offers, we are protected by the truth that God loves us and sent Jesus to die for us so that we might serve him now and live with him forever.

This past Mother's day week-end, I had the joy of having my 4 year old grandson and my daughter up with us on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Our daughter is a single mom, and so as a mother's day gift to her, I gave her several hours of rest and relaxation while Cooper and I played with legos and painted rocks into superheroes like Spider Man and the Hulk. We also went down to the lake to toss rocks into the water.

Now Cooper is filled with energy and loves to pretend he is one of his superheros. I had to negotiate his safety on the rocky shoreline with lots of persuasive words☺ to Keep Cooper safe.

Words have tremendous power. I watched my daughter her use what she calls “Love and Logic” parenting skills with Cooper. She calms, encourages and guides Cooper to be both brave and safe. She teaches him manners and what is right and what is wrong. And helps him understand the

choices he makes. I was amazed! When Cooper is tired, he puts himself down for a nap! When upset or sad, he asks his mom to hold him and comfort him. Their joy in snuggling; singing silly songs; reading books and rough housing like two superhero's makes Cooper squeal with delight. And he often leans in to Dale and I for a hug and said, "I love you Nana and Papa."

What a freeing gift life is when mature, intentional love guides us. WE ALL need significant modes to believe that God is our perfect parent and friend who helps us live in unity and joy as His people.

In contrast, a young woman told a different story about her childhood. She endured a painful relationship with an emotionally distant and demanding father. She came to believe that she was flawed, and tried to please her father, and other's in authority. But could never measure up. His harsh words belittled her. All her life, she carried a desperate need to gain her father's favor

but rarely experienced affirmation or even a smile or tender touch from him,. As she grew up she found herself in relationships that were destructive and happiness always evaporated into despair. She said, "*It doesn't matter how old you get, the wounds inside are terribly hard to heal.*"

Parental words are meant to ring with the authority of truth, and the grace of Love. The LAW...but also, the GOSPEL...the good news that no matter what, you are blessed to be a blessing! That's why words can either build up, inspire and set their child's gifts free, or they can tear down, stifle, and even cripple us to never fully know who we truly are or can we are meant to become.

But Jesus says, "Come to me...I will help carry ANY load." Healing can come. It's hard. But doing it God's way...by forgiving and embracing life His way, we realize that negative, hurtful, demeaning words are not truth, but a deception. When those wounded continue to wound others; the sins

of one generation are passed along and diminish life. Oh, how the father of lies loves this kind of power over God's children!

But God in Christ cares too much to let lies be our reality. Jesus went to a cross to show us a different way to reverse soul destruction and death. He invites us to live in unity with Him, and with the Father whose heart loves AS WE ARE, and NOT AS WE SHOULD BE.

Jesus' prayer reveals that God's truth has the greatest power of all to protect...to heal...and to set free for abundant life, and joy, EVEN if relationships on this earth are NOT fixable, or resolved in this life.

I think it is revealing that Jesus' last prayers on earth were not for himself, but to ask the Father to give US what we need most... FORGIVENESS and SANCTIFICATION [the power and promise of newness of life] in His TRUTH!

There are many things from which God's people need protection. We could name them easily. But perhaps the most sinister threats that ALL of us face as Christians are lies about *who WE are and who our LORD JESUS is.*

Lies are all around us. Advertisers on television count on us believing that we can never be thin enough, or have enough possessions, or be fulfilled and happy without their product. Movies and reality shows teach us that we must have plenty of excitement, competition, sex, or power to be an ultimate winner, or to create a life that is fully alive. Political voices tell us that impulsive, selfish behavior has no public consequences, even as families are torn apart, and innocents are victimized. God's people need to be wise about these messages for they do not give us or our children an accurate picture of who we are as beloved children of God, or for what purpose God has given us life within relationships with one another. Many of the

messages we hear or read every single day have seeds of deceit within them. They tear at the fabric of God's holy temple within each human heart.

Yet these messages are seductively powerful because in our sinfulness, we humans are in bondage to sin. We hear from 1 John: *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...but if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:8)

It seems to me then, that like Jesus; we must be intentional in our prayers for unity within the church universal, for the world can and does distort what unity looks like. Let me give you some examples:

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus.

"These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?" [Charles Schultz.]

Or imagine if you tied two cats together by their tails, what would happen? It sure wouldn't be quiet or pretty!

The world is like that sometimes, tying angry countries together and horrified when innocent people are hurt, and killed in wars over power and control. The world doesn't choose Jesus' prayer for REAL unity, does it?

But the truth that Christ gives reveals a better way. Listen to these quotes: **There are two ways of being united -- one is by being frozen together, and the other is by being melted together. What Christians need is to**

be melted in grace and united in brotherly love, and then they may expect to have power. [[Moody's Anecdotes, p. 53.](#)]

A.W. Tozer, in his book, The Pursuit of God, writes this:

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow.

So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away [from themselves] to Christ, are in heart of God's Power and can birth unity in this world.

And, finally, this wonderful little quote: Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together. [[Vesta Kelly](#)]

My friends in Christ, there are many diverse ways that Christ's church has shaped

doctrine, outreach, ministry and worship....but we all have ONE LORD. ONE BAPTISM, ONE FAITH. Let us pray this day and always, that we might be ONE IN CHRIST as Jesus and His Father in Heaven are one, and that the Holy Spirit might give to us the protection of the TRUTH, that **"God so loved the world...that he gave his only beloved son...that who so ever believeth in him might not perish...or be deceived, but have everlasting life."** Amen!