

The night before his Crucifixion, Jesus prayed. He prayed for his disciples and for you and me. This prayer is recorded in its entirety in John's Gospel, chapter 17. It's called "The High Priestly Prayer."

Jesus prayed that everyone who believes in him would be preserved by God's Word, and he prayed that believers would share a singleness of heart just as he and his Father did through his Word. This morning we're going to talk about what this means for our day to day walk with the Lord and with one another.

## OPENING PRAYER

### JOHN 17:20-26

Jesus prayed, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> so that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so that they also may be in us, in order that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, so that they may be one just as we are one,<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, so that they may become perfectly one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.<sup>24</sup> Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.<sup>25</sup> O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.<sup>26</sup> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Jesus prayed, John 17:20-21, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> so that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so that they also may be in us, in order that the world may believe that you have sent me.

When Jesus prayed, "for those who will believe in me through their word," he was praying that others would believe in him through the work of his original disciples after his resurrection.

Jesus had a plan. He had created a community of faith, a community bound together by his teachings, and now he prays that as this community goes forth following his work on the Cross it will grow, that others who hear God's Word will become a part of the whole.

I'm thinking of a winning basketball team. It has been said that a good team can go to the playoffs but only a great team finishes first. A great team thinks and acts as a single unit. There are stars, the second team, support personnel, and so forth. Everyone has his part to play, but there's a singleness of spirit and heart which pervades the team from the top to the bottom, a spirit which is greater than any one personality or position. There's a mutual sense of respect and support which isn't unraveled by interpersonal conflicts.

Earlier in this prayer Jesus prayed, **John 17:11b, "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, so that they may be one, even as we are one."**

There's power in a name. To continue the ball team analogy, if you were a Laker in the days of Kobe Bryant, you mattered even if you weren't Kobe Bryant. Because everyone from the coach to the bench sitters, from Kobe himself to the waterboy played their part, and each one bore the name "Laker" with pride.

St. Paul wrote, **1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."**

If Kobe Bryant had lost faith in his team, if he believed that it was all just about making money, that basketball was just a game, that his issues with the coach or another player overshadowed the welfare of the team itself, then there would never have been the championships, there would've been no fans, and there never would've been a reason to celebrate.

A singleness of heart among believers is what unites us. Jesus gives us his relationship with the Father as a model for our one-ness, that's what he meant when he prayed, **"Father, (you) are in me, and I (am) in you, so that they may also be in us."**

There is only one God, but he is 3-persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So too, we are many members but Jesus our Lord has bound us together in heart and mind, as a single body with a single of mission.

Jesus provided the mission when he said that he was going to fulfill his journey to the Cross **“in order that the world may believe that (the Father has) sent me.”**

And then he also prayed, **John 17:22, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, so that they may be one just as we are one....”**

The key word here is **“glory.”** Indeed, he began this prayer with, **John 17:1, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you.”**

Other words for **“glory”** are “honor” and “praise.” The Holy Trinity is a mutual admiration society! There is no jealousy, or envy, or rivalry. But there’s only love in the heart of God. Again, Jesus prayed, **“The glory that you have given me I have given to them.”**

There’s no room for pride in the body of Christ. The goal is one-ness not one-upmanship, mutual encouragement not mutual disparagement. Jesus emphasized the importance of this mutuality when he prayed, **“The glory that you have given me, I have given them... so that they may BECOME perfectly one.”**

This is a process. That’s why the Lord prayed **“that they may BECOME perfectly one.”** We are becoming whole; we are being transformed into the image of God; we are becoming like Jesus.

According to the Bible, on the one hand there’s the church, and on the other hand there’s the world, and never the twain shall meet. The church and the world are at opposite poles. The world is our enemy, by definition, for in the world there is temptation, mockery, and direct persecution of believers.

However, our greatest challenge in the church is not the attacks of the world. Our greatest challenge is our own sanctity as we live and work with one another! I remember the comic strip, Pogo, and his greatest line, **“We have met the enemy,”**

and he is us"! If you don't believe me, just ask THE WORLD! The world will remind you of how we eat our young.

Jesus anticipated our self-destruction, and that's why he prayed, that we may **"become perfectly one... that the world may know that (the Father sent him)."**

This is how the world is overcome, through the singleness of heart and mission of the Christian church. Our call is to be faithful witnesses to God's love in us by building up the body of Christ, working together to make this Word real among ourselves.

Perhaps there's a special person in your life now or at another time, a person who had the power to lift you up and to encourage you, to bolster your sense of self-esteem. Perhaps they encouraged you when you were discouraged and felt alone. And after they lifted you up, you felt like you were ready to conquer the world.

That's what Jesus is doing. He's saying, "You're forgiven! You're a child of the King! You're much-loved. The Lord has embraced you as his own; you are perfect in his sight."

Now he wants you to see your brothers and sisters in the same way as he sees you.

Jesus finished his prayer with this petition: **John 17:26, "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."**

God's name is that name that is above all others, it's the name of the one who created heaven and earth, it's the name of the one who redeemed you and me on the Cross, it's the name of the one who made you and me whole, healed our hearts and filled us with his love.

What do we have to offer the world if not the love of God? We can't out-entertain the Hollywood; we can't out-play the rock bands; and we can't out-profit big business. BUT we can out-love the world any day of the week!

This week let us reflect on how great the love of the Father is for us; it's so great that he gave us his only son, Jesus.

This week let us embrace this love as the guiding force of our work as a church.

And this week let us take the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.