

“Resurrection Life: Jesus Makes Us One”

Psalm 68:5-10; John 17:1-11

A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

Prayer: Holy God, this morning we come into the mystery of prayer, of your Son’s prayer for your people. Bless us in this time to receive your Word for us today. Open our ears that we might hear and our eyes that we might see the wonders of your love poured out for us in Jesus. More than this, Lord, open our spiritual senses to receive your word of blessing, your word of encouragement, your word of certain hope; for you have done what you purposed through Jesus Christ; and through Jesus Christ, we pray we may be made one in heart and in mind and in divine purpose for you. May the meditations of all our hearts be in accordance with your divine love this day. Amen.

This morning’s message is called: “Jesus Makes Us One.” Herein lies a mystery, though not a new one for God. The oneness language of this passage points to the divine purposes and work of God.

- In the beginning, the eternal triune God called forth from nothing a Creation—heavens, earth, sky and sea, and living things.
- The Lord said: “Let us make man in our image” ; here the three-personed God spoke as one.
- God made Man, and when God saw the Man was lonely, God created Woman, “and the two became one flesh.” Two people, joined together as one. Oneness is part of God’s purpose for Creation.
- On the eve of his departure from earth, nearing the end of the incarnation that began with a cry in a cradle at Bethlehem, Jesus prays earnestly for his disciples, for their future, for them to be one as he and God the Father are one.

Oneness is part of God’s purpose for Creation.

This scene we have before us in the gospel of John is not unique to the Bible or the literature of the biblical world. Leaders often left the scene with a message for their followers.

One of the best examples is probably that of Moses. As the end of his life neared, he offered the people of Israel a choice: they could follow the ways of God, which lead to blessing, or they could choose their own ways, which would lead to disaster.¹

Today’s scene is Jesus’ moment to bid farewell to his followers. Here they are: chosen people, gathered together. They’ve shared a meal. Jesus has washed their feet, as an example of how they are to love and serve each other. He’s explained, as best he can, about how he is returning to God, but not leaving them orphaned, and how the Holy Spirit will come to be with them. They finally get it.

“See, now you are speaking plainly and without figures of speech,” his disciples tell him, just before Jesus begins his prayer. “Now we understand that you know all things and that you have no need for anyone to question you. Because of this, we believe that you came from God” (John 16:29-30)

And now, it is time. Jesus says farewell to his beloved friends. What would he say? How would you say goodbye to your friends? What would you want for them once you were gone?

A Pastor told a story about a young mother who was dying of cancer in a hospital. She was growing weak, but she found purpose and energy enough to prepare a videotaped message for her preschool daughters. Her hope, her prayer, was that when they are old enough to understand, they would listen to the tape and learn what their mother hoped would guide their lives. It was important for this woman to impart words of motherly care for her daughters to receive. Even though she would not be able to speak to them in person, she wanted the videotape to keep her memory accessible for her children.²

Jesus would no longer be with his followers. He gives them something, the Holy Spirit, so that they would remember him and his hopes and dreams for them once he is gone. The Holy Spirit will do more than simply keep the memory of Jesus accessible for the disciples—the Spirit brings the living presence of Jesus into our lives.

¹ See Deuteronomy 32.

² Nancy J. Ramsay, “John 17:1-11, Pastoral Perspective,” in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2, Lent Through Eastertide*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 538.

This morning, we are in a privileged position. We get to overhear Jesus praying for his disciples. Not just for the 11 disciples in the room that night, but for all Jesus' disciples everywhere and in all times. This is Jesus praying for us. How will we respond? With thanksgiving and prayer and praise.

Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed:

“Father, it’s time. Display the bright splendor of your Son so the Son in turn may show your bright splendor.

You put him in charge of everything human so he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge. And this is the real and eternal life: That they know you, the one and only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent” (John 17:1-3).

Let us pray:

God who is the home of Jesus, the home of all who believe in you, we pour out praise upon praise and worship upon worship to you. You have revealed yourself in love through your Son Jesus Christ. You have shown the light that is beyond all other light, the glory that comes from you. The light shined on us, and we have been saved by the light of your love that shines through your Son. Thank you, Father God, for showing yourself to us through Jesus. Because of Jesus, we have come to know you and the life that truly is abundant in love and mercy and grace. Thank you, Heavenly One, for the gift of eternal life.

Jesus prayed:

“I spelled out your character in detail to the men and women you gave me. They were yours in the first place; then you gave them to me, and they have now done what you said.

They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that everything you gave me is firsthand from you, for the message you gave me, I gave them; and they took it, and were convinced that I came from you. They believed that you sent me” (John 17:6-8).

We belong to God. This is Good News. Let us join together in responsive prayer:

L: Holy God, we are yours.

P: Thank you, God, for making us yours, and yours alone.

L: You have called us out of the confusion and chaos that is life on planet earth.

P: You did not call us because we were wiser, stronger, or more faithful than others. You called us because you love us.

L: Through your Son, Jesus Christ, you have made us a new people.

P: Forgiven by your mercy, led by your grace, serving your world by and through your love.

L: Lord, we believe in you.

P: You alone are God.

L: Lord, we believe in your Son, Jesus Christ.

P: Who came from you, who returned to you, who will come again to shine in your glory.

L: Lord, we believe in your Holy Spirit.

P: Who came at Pentecost and who lives in your Church, guiding and sustaining, reigning in us now and forever.

L: World without end.

P: World without end.

All: Amen.

Jesus prayed:

“I pray for them. I’m not praying for the God-rejecting world but for those you gave me, for they are yours by right.

Do not think for a moment in this part of Jesus’ prayer that Jesus cared only for his own disciples and rejected the rest of the world. Jesus did, and does, care for the rest. It’s just that this is the moment Jesus prays for his own. Fast forward to verse 20 and we find Jesus praying for the whole world;

“I am not asking on behalf of them alone, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you.” (John 17:9).

There is an order of precedence here: Jesus prays for his followers, to be one as he and the Father are one; and then, Jesus prays that his followers will carry on his work so that others will hear this as an invitation, and believe, so that all may be one.

Let us pray for the world Jesus loves:

Great Redeemer, when you sent your Son into the world, you did not have your mind set on saving a handful of people but a multitude, as numerous as the grains of sand on the beach and the stars in the skies. We pray for your world. We pray for your love to be made known through all the earth. Guide us, by your grace, to share the love of Christ. Lord, you have given us the witness of your mercy and your love. Empower us to be bearers of the good news, messengers of your grace, the ones who live by hope and in hope of your love that spans the globe, penetrates the soul, and changes lives. Lord, we pray for your world and all who are in it. Amen.

And Jesus prayed:

“Everything mine is yours, and yours mine, and my life is on display in them.

For I’m no longer going to be visible in the world. They’ll continue in the world while I return to you.

Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life that you conferred as a gift through me, so they can be one heart and mind as we are one heart and mind” (John 17:10-11).

The final words of Jesus are not last-minute instructions about what we are to do. They are words of commendation, of turning over, of placing the future of the community of faith into the hands of God. Jesus commends us to God’s care in a prayer that tells us who we are:

- We are God’s.
- We depend on God.
- Our life is rooted in Jesus Christ, the one who perfectly reveals God as a God of mercy, grace, peace, and love.

Jesus prayed for us, for all of us. That is what we have heard this morning. We are the people Jesus prays for. Our future is in God’s hands, brothers and sisters. I cannot think of more comforting news this morning than this. Let us pray together:

Holy God, we honor you with our prayers and our praise. As you are one with your Son, Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit, we pray that we too may be one in you. As we follow you in our time, we pray the mind of Christ may be formed in us, so that we may live and move and have our very being flow from the tri-unity that is your love. We pray, too, to have your heart, the heart that overflows with love for your good Creation, so that we may show forth your mercy and grace to all people, and that we may be agents of your redeeming work. Lord, we bless you today with all that is in our hearts. May your name be praised, now and forever. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.