

May 24, 2020 Sermon

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

Have you ever watched a marching band during half-time of a football game? Most likely, if you did, you were there in person, as marching bands rarely get tv time. The band marches onto the field with the same step, using the same foot at the same time, with beautiful straight lines, and suddenly, those straight lines are transformed into objects we recognize.

One time, I watched a band create a robot which actually moved across the field as a robot would. And being from Ohio, I am *always* mesmerized by the OSU band, as it spells out the famous "Script Ohio." Or how about those times when the band does circles within circles, and they go in opposite directions?

I bring this up, because in order for there to be precision in doing the band shows, there must be unity. There must be a sense of working together to create what is needed. Working together, patience, and the ability to understand your part is needed, if you're one of the band members.

Halftime shows do not magically happen. The magic comes after hours of rehearsals; magic comes after learning to read and figure out where you need to be in how many steps and, oh yeah, you do *all* this while playing your instrument, in a heavy uniform, sometimes in 80-or-more degree heat.

In most cases, band members have their very own set of instructions, moving a different number of steps, or marching in a different direction, in order to create this magnificent show, but the differences in the parts and the movements, eventually *all* come together in one unified half-time show. In taking those steps, there will be those who only have to take a small amount of steps, while others will have to take more, or they'll have to take bigger steps, but that's one way to make a unified show.

Again, this doesn't happen easily. It takes lots of rehearsal time, both with the music that is played and with the band on a practice field. It's hard work, and it's frustrating at times, but the band continues to work together until the show is ready for viewing.

All of this happens with a band director, probably some student directors, some section leaders (bands are most often divided into instrumental sections to aid in rehearsals), and the general idea that if you want something to be good, there must be a lot of patience and collaboration with one another to make a unified group of people.

What I'm trying to say in the above illustration is that it takes *more* than *one* person to make this half-time show work (well, unless you're dotting the *I* in script Ohio). This is *not* about *one* band member, but about how *one* band member *works* to fit in with *all* the *others*.

It's not simply about ME, but about WE. How are WE going to work together in UNITY as individuals to make the best half-time show, ever? Do we *complain* about a few who need only to take fewer steps to accomplish their goal for the group? Or do we *support* one another in our individual set of goals?

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus, in this High Priestly Prayer, entrusts the community of disciples to God's care, in asking God to make himself visible through the love people have in community with one another.

Jesus, as God incarnate, has created an opportunity for people to know God, as Jesus says, "*And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.*"

Jesus then shifts his prayer to pray for the disciples, and the disciples get to *overhear* Jesus in his *prayer* for them. I have to wonder what they were thinking about during this prayer. Were they *humbled* by it? I am *often* brought to tears when I'm included in a prayer. I count prayer as one of the *best gifts* one can offer another. Praying for someone shows not only how much YOU care, but also shows that *you* know how much GOD cares. It is, to me, a *huge* act of love. *Prayer*, in itself, can be *quite* unifying.

So, the disciples get to receive this *precious* gift of *hearing* Jesus pray for them. "God, I told you about these people, these hard-working followers who have listened, and learned and yes, they've complained and asked questions along the way, but they are good. You gave them to me, and I managed, somehow, to teach them everything that you taught me, and they *believed* I was your Son. I *pray* for them, dear Father, they are *yours*; you have given them to *me*. All I have is *yours* and all *you* have is *mine*, and I have been *glorified* by the love that has been shown from you and passed on to my disciples.

And *I* know that, although I am *leaving* the world, the *disciples* are here to pass on the teachings of *love* and *kindness* shown to them. I ask that *you* would protect them, that they would be one, as we are one."

Jesus prays for *us*, just as he prayed for the *disciples*. Jesus calls us into unity with God, the Father. *We* are called into relationship with God through the *promise* of the *resurrection*. And *in* that calling, we are to *love each other* with every *fiber* of our *being*. *We glorify* God...we make God *visible*...when we show love to one another by offering the same grace that was granted to *us*.

We make God visible to others when we are the hands and feet of Jesus, doing acts of mercy and showing hospitality to all.

Jesus has asked God to make his followers *one with another*...to *work* together and be *unified*, but that's hard work for *all* of us, and we know that, by just looking around at our world, lately.

We *all* seem to have a different idea of what it means to *show* love and what it *means* to be *unified*. Maybe it's possible that we're placing too many *worldly* ideas in what we should consider to be *Christian unity*. We have lots of different groups claiming to be working for the *good* of the people, and **your** take on things may *vary* from *another* person's, but...We...ALL of US have a lot of work to do when it comes to Christian unity.

We need to start realizing that it's *not* them against *us* or *us* against *them*, but that we have different instruments to play, different amounts of steps to take in between the yard lines. We are *all* playing different instruments, but if we *follow* our music, and the chart that was handed us (remember those 10 commandments?) it's a step *closer* to being one unit.

Remember that Paul tells us the body of Christ is made up of many parts...*some* play brass, *others* play woodwinds, and still *others* play the drums. Those instruments aren't even necessarily played in the same key, but somehow, they manage to make one *beautiful* piece of music.

But we have to know and *accept* that it's *okay* for someone else to play a *different* instrument. We should know that it's *okay* to *encourage* others and *support* them! We also have to allow the director (in this case it would have to be God in Christ) to have some *input*, as well.

We should prayerfully support other Christians, knowing that *they* may not see things the way *we* see them, and knowing there *will be* pain and struggle in getting everything to work together as it should. But *once* we make it through all the pain and struggle, we find God's *glory*, and the fact that God was *with* us all along. We find the *love* and *mercy*, and the *grace* that was given to us through Jesus' death on the cross.

Let's continue to *work* together in *all* we do, knowing we are *all* created differently, with different instruments placed in our hands; and yet, created in the image of God. Let us, together, place our trust in the prayer that Jesus prayed so earnestly for his *disciples*...and for *us*. May God in Christ continue to wrap us in his eternal love. Amen.