May 12, 2013

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Today's Gospel is the end of what is known as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. For three chapters, in the part of John I talked about a couple of weeks ago called the Farewell Discourse, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for his death and resurrection, showing them the role they are to follow, and promising them the comfort of the Holy Spirit. In this final section of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus turns his face heavenward and prays to his Father.

This whole section of John's Gospel is kind of like an aria in opera or a song in musical theater. In most cases, the action stops for however long the song takes, then picks up after it's done. The entire Farewell Discourse takes place between the end of the Last Supper and his departure for the Garden of Gethsemane. And nothing reflects that feeling of being caught out of time more than this final prayer.

Just like our Prayers of the People, Jesus' prayer is divided up into petitions. He first prays for the glorification that is to follow the completion of his work on earth. Remember he said after Judas leaves, that the hour has come for him to be glorified? He was talking about his upcoming death and resurrection.

Next he prays for his disciples, for their preservation and sanctification in the world as the followers given him by the Father.

And finally we come to the section we heard today, where Jesus prays for unity. He prays for the unity of his followers with each other, and with all of those who will come to believe through their witness. And he prays for their unity with him in heaven, and their knowledge of God's eternal love for them.

Since this is at the very end of this special section in the Gospel of John, I think it's safe to say that John felt that it was pretty important. This is also reinforced by the repetitive language. Phrases like "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us…" and "…so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one…" seem to be repetitive, but it is a repetition of emphasis. And the emphasis here is upon unity. In fact, these really aren't petitions at all, in the usual sense of the word. Jesus isn't asking God to make us unified. He's asking US to make us unified.

This part of the prayer describes a series of relationships. They start with Jesus' relationship to his Father, followed by that relationship being duplicated with his disciples, and finally extended to the whole world. It's like a series of concentric circles with God in the center.

So what would the world look like if it were truly God-centered, and if everyone lived in unity? First of all, there would be no "isms." No racism, no sexism, no ageism, no classism, or the others that don't end in ism, like homophobia and gender violence. Isms are the result of disunity, not its cause. They are the result of a life where God is not at the center.

A life where, in fact, we ourselves are in the center in place of God.

If we truly were one in the way God and Jesus are one, as the prayer says, how can the color of one's skin get in the way of that. Jesus is talking about all humanity here, not just a chosen few. The word for world throughout this passage is *kosmos*, and it means the universe and its inhabitants. It's all inclusive.

If we were truly one, we wouldn't lump entire groups of people together in order to dismiss them. We wouldn't take the actions of a few of a group and assume them to be universal. And above all, we wouldn't remove the humanity of a group of people in order to be able to discriminate against them.

But isn't this what happens all the time? Don't we apply labels to groups every day in order to avoid their individual humanity? The Poor. The Illegals. The Native Americans. The Gays. The Muslims. And once a group has been labeled, it's an easy step to then ascribe actions and motivations to the entire group. The Poor don't really want to work – all they want is a government handout. The Illegals come into this country and take away our jobs. All Native Americans are drunks. The Gays have an agenda. All Muslims are terrorists. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Us and them. Doesn't sound very unified, does it?

There's a very important conjunction in Greek. It's *hina*. It means "so that" or "therefore" and it always expresses purpose and causality between the clause before *hina* and the one after it. This conjunction appears many times in this passage. For example:

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus has established that he and the Father are completely unified. Because of this, he is inviting the disciples, and by extension any who believe through their actions, or in other words, US, to be unified with the Father and Son, with the result that we all will be unified with each other. And as a consequence of everyone being unified, the entire world – the *kosmos* – will know that God loves them as much as he loves his own son.

That's the sequence – be one with God, be one with each other, and the world will know the love of God through those actions. And the opposite is true. If God is not the center of our lives, and/or if we are divided from one another, God's love is hidden from the world. Suddenly, being casually (or not so casually) dismissive of a group of people takes on a whole new significance.

The other thread that is woven through this prayer is God's immense love for us, which took on human form in the person of Jesus. Two weeks ago, we heard Jesus say in John 13:34, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Today his prayer ends with the sentence, "…so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

These two passages bracket Jesus' entire Farewell Discourse. This is a common rhetorical device in both the old and new testaments called an *inclusio*. It's often used to define a theme or an important concept of a passage, as well as set it apart.

This thread of loving one another as God loved us is an essential component to being in unity with one another. This love, which the Father has for the Son, and which Jesus has for each of us, is HOW we can be unified with each other – the only way. Its absence makes that unity impossible. And we can only really put that love into action by first experiencing and embracing God's love for us, and this only happens, once again, when we make God the center of our lives.

It always comes down to the same thing over and over again. Love God and make him the center of our lives, and love our neighbors. TRULY love our neighbors. Love isn't just manufacturing warm fuzzy feelings for one another. Love is wanting what's best for someone else and doing whatever you can to make that happen. It's not earned, but rather freely given. This kind of love is sacred and sacrificial.

To do this, to truly love our neighbors as ourselves, we need to first carefully examine our own lives. Find all the "isms" in our lives and eradicate them. Be constantly on the watch for actions, ours or others', that are divisive or self-serving or dehumanizing and be willing to speak out against them. ESPECIALLY be willing to speak out against them. Look for ways to unite, rather than divide. Look for ways to serve rather than judge.

As you know, I spent some time in the Gulf Coast right after Hurricane Katrina. I've probably told you this story before, but it bears repeating. The person who was in charge of Camp Coast Care in Mississippi, Father Joe Robinson, sat us all down right after we arrived to let us know what we would be facing. A lot of it was practical advice like always wear a mask when gutting a house, but since he was a priest, a lot of it was spiritual, too.

One of the things he said that day had a profound impact on me. There was a clothing and food distribution area in the camp where people could come and get things they needed. Father Robinson said that, for a number of reasons, people might take more than their fair share of food or clothing. Then he said, "You have to choose. You can judge or you can serve. It's impossible to do both." That's stuck with me all these years later. You can judge or you can serve.

There is no place for judgment in God's love – at least not the kind that we are able to dole out. Judgment leads to division and separation – us or them, good guys or bad guys, conservative or liberal, hard-working or lazy. It neatly separates the world in two and squashes any possible hope of the unity that Jesus so fervently prays for.

But, if we open ourselves up to God's love, and in turn let that love flow through us, we CAN all be one. I believe it IS possible. Not easy, but possible.

Maybe what John Lennon said is true – all we need is Love. Could it really be that simple? Could the evils of the world – the hatred, the division, the war, the dehumanization – actually be eradicated by this one simple, radical idea?

Well, I guess that's up to us.

Amen.