

*“United in Spirit”**George Dasher, Lay Servant**“Jesus Prays for You and Me”**October 21, 2018*

Key Texts: John 17:20-26

In the scripture just read, Jesus is praying for all future believers:

- 1) For those who **will** believe in me
- 2) That all **will** be one (as we are)
- 3) That they **will** be in complete unity
- 4) I want them to be with me (eternal life)
- 5) They don't know you (God). They only know you through me.

The primary theme of this entire prayer is Unity. Unity among his Disciples and Unity among all people of the future. Pastor Lauren and Pastor Randy have very adequately treated this idea of unity. I'll just add one additional thought; in the mathematics world, unity means one. In the context of this prayer, one means “everybody on the same page”; “not competing with each other”; “pulling together-on the same rope”; “no multiple agendas”; “one in the body of Christ”; “working together as a team”. This was Jesus' command as he departed His earthly life. The two Pastors had much more to say about this and I hope you all got to hear them.

Do you know how lucky we are? Jesus prayed for you and for me. What an awesome thing! In the last few hours of his time on earth, just hours before he will suffer torture and death he is praying for little-old-me; for little-old-you! Here's a question, if you could be in a room next to where Jesus is praying and could hear him and realize that he is praying for you, what would your reaction be? FEAR, JOY, CONCERN, ANXIETY, AWE/WONDER, AMAZEMENT What would it be? A 19th century preacher in the church of Scotland said “if I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I could not fear for a million years. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.”

Borrowing some words from Pastor Lauren's sermon two weeks ago: and I quote, “As we work our way through John 17 together, in some ways this is Jesus' last words as a free man. But this prayer isn't the words of a desperate man on his death bed. It's not a set of pleading words – they are the words of one who is about to knowingly, and willingly lay down his life for his people.” End quote. She goes on to tell us to hold on to that point as we study these scriptures. So, what could have Jesus prayed for in the final moments before his arrest? He might have prayed for his own strength, that the eleven would support him, that they would not flee from him and his teachings. Instead, His prayer was dominated by a single great thought; Unity of the disciples and of all future believers.

As we close out this series on John 17, it's important to remember the setting for this scripture. It is dark. Jesus has just finished Supper with his Disciples and has just told them that He would be leaving them. That he was depending on them to carry on with his ministry. He also told them that one of them would betray him and one would even deny that he knew him. They got into a big argument about who he was talking about. Jesus had also listened as they argued and bickered among themselves about things such as who was the greatest (Lk 22:24); who should get to sit next to Jesus in his glory(Mk10:35-45). All of these are indications that they will find it hard to work together to carry on his ministry. Yet, he was depending on them to do just that. He had spent many months leading them and teaching by example so that he could leave them to carry on the ministry. Now it appears to Jesus that they are not able to work together as a team without God's help. He is now in the

garden alone praying, not to have the torture that lies ahead lifted but for UNITY among his disciples and all future believers.

This is the third in a series of three sermons on John 17 and, I'm batting in the clean-up position! Thank you, Pastor Randy. To put this scripture into a framework, consider that earlier in His teachings Jesus gifted the world with the greatest model prayer of all time (Matt 6:9-13) THE LORD'S PRAYER and later prayed the most powerful high priestly prayer of all time (John 17). In between these two prayers are many examples of Jesus teaching us about prayer and how to pray.

This brings me to a story about an old man who found a unique way to pray in the later years of his life.

### I'll call it The Empty Chair

An old man is being cared for by his daughter who had asked the local pastor to come and pray with her father who was bedridden and nearing the end of his life. When the pastor arrived, she found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The Pastor assumed that the old fellow had been informed of her visit. "I guess you were expecting me" she said.

"No, who are you?" I'm Pastor Lauren, the new associate pastor at the local Methodist church", the pastor replied. When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was coming. Oh yeah, the chair, said the bedridden man. Would mind closing the door? Puzzled, pastor Lauren shut the door.

I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter, said the man. But, all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head.

I abandoned any attempt at prayer, the old man continued, until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down in a chair, put an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus in the chair. It's not spooky because Jesus promised, "I'll be with you always". Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now. So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple hours every day. I'm careful though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm. The pastor was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on his journey. Then she prayed with him and returned to the church.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon. Did he seem to die in peace, she asked? Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange. In fact, beyond strange; it was kinda weird. Apparently, just before daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed!

There is so much that we can take away from this story to apply to today's scripture. First, Jesus is in that empty chair in front of us. It is not empty! Just as He prayed for us 2000 years ago in the Garden, He prays for us today from His seat on the throne. Just as he prayed for us 2000 years in verse 24 "I want those you (God) have given me to be with me where I am" He is guaranteeing us eternal life.

As we think more about Jesus' prayer it's easy to make the mistake that he is focused on us as a church family and not the world. Twice in the six verses we read today he refers to the "world"( Vs 21). "...so that the world may believe that you have sent me"( Vs 23). Jesus had only traveled a small area of the world but in unity with God He knew that the focus had to be on a much greater area; the entire world. There were no geographic boundaries or borders; just one beautiful world. As a side note, our American Astronauts made the same observation as they looked back at the earth from the moon. One of the Astronauts wrote a song about his experience and feelings. He called it "Moon Rider" and I'd like to share the lyrics with you:

The painter tries to paint it, the poet tries to say it, the philosopher tries to convey the meaning to your mind.

But here I am a quarter million miles away, one human being – one human seeing it for the first time.

I can see the white of snow-capped mountains. The blues and turquoise of the oceans blend.

Australia and Asia coming around the corner. And I can't tell where one country starts and the other ends.

The sun is setting on the Pacific, they're just getting up in Rome.

I don't see the lights of my city, all I can see is home.

I saw the world without any borders, without any fighting, without any fear.

So Captain give the order, we're going to cross the next frontier.

I know this view won't last forever, soon I'll be back to reality.

But isn't it the way we perceive things that makes them what they will be?

I saw the world without any borders ....

Gene Cernan, Apollo XVII (the last man on the moon)

This song describes a peaceful Kingdom: a World without any borders, without any fighting, without any fear; A pristine planet, a people whose sins are forgiven, no longer under threat of God's wrath, a people living with Hope, United in the Spirit.

Isn't this Jesus' prayer?

At the conclusion of his prayer, Jesus left with the disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. It is here that he is arrested.

Final thoughts: (Note: As pilots in our flying community, we often like to end a flight with what we call buzzing the runway or making a high-speed pass.) To close out this series of sermons on John 17, let's make a high-speed pass. This entire chapter is Jesus praying.

The prayer is broken into three parts:

- 1) Jesus prays for himself
- 2) Jesus prays for his Disciples
- 3) Jesus prays for future believers

And, so in faith, now imagine God in the "empty chair" and Jesus having a conversation with Him.

Father, it's time. You put me in charge of everything human so that I could give them eternal life. And the real eternal life is that they know you, the one and only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.

Father, I glorified you on earth by completing everything down to the last detail that you assigned me to do. Now Father, glorify me.

I pray Father that these Disciples whom I leave behind to carry on my ministry will be unified in spirit just as you and I are unified. Father protect them by the power of your name so that they may be one just as you and I are one. And, protect them from the evil one.

I'm also praying for those who will, in the future, believe in me and the goal is for all of them to be unified in the spirit just as you and I are unified. Righteous Father, though they do not know you, I know you and they know me. And, I have made you known to them.

God, I know that you are all powerful and have seen you answer many prayers. It's with that confidence that I pray this, my final prayer on earth. Amen

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, what an amazing gift you've given the world with this prayer. To think that you said this prayer to God, your Father, in the last hours of your life on the earth tells us so much about your love for us. That you would focus this prayer on continuing your mission of making disciples of all humankind and not on the agony you were facing is an example for all of us to follow. Too often, Lord Jesus, we get so caught up in our own misery that we lose sight of the mission you have laid on us to carry forward. Thank you, Lord, for this beautiful prayer and thank you for your unconditional love. AMEN

Closing Hymn: I'm taking a chance here because I have never heard "Jesus Loves Me" sung as a congregational hymn but it just seemed like the right one to close out my thoughts today.

Vs 1 I know Jesus loves me, the Bible (John 17:20-26) tells me so

Vs 2 I know Jesus loves me as he did so long ago (by praying for me)

Vs 3 I know he loves me still today (I am one of the future believers He was praying for)

Stand and sing!