

## Energy Sacrifice Faith

Wayne Waibel – 05/29/2022

Our gospel lesson this morning is generally considered to be Christ's Farewell Prayer. In the red-letter editions of the Bible it comes at the end of four full chapters of nothing but Jesus talking. It begs the question, "Would you rather have Jesus talking to you or praying for you?"

The good news is that we don't have to make that choice. This is Jesus' call for unity within the new church. He spells out precisely what is expected of His disciples and all who by extension hear His words through them. He anticipates the challenges and difficulties that will plague them and us along the way. It is His final effort to reinforce the living of a life of love.

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In a fractured and broken world, the only real hope is unity. This is no less true for us today than it was for the disciples when Christ walked among them. And Jesus understood the trials they would endure with His imminent departure. How were they going to spread the good news of the gospel after Jesus was gone?

It was difficult enough to understand the magnitude of His ministry while He was with them. How much more difficult for someone who did not have a firsthand encounter with Jesus to grasp the depth of meaning? His answer – unity. His prayer – that His disciples hold the love of God within themselves just as He felt the Father in Him.

Our call to worship gives us a glimpse into the type of love Jesus is talking about to His chosen. It is a most powerful love. Even while God’s lightning illuminates the entire sky, the one lighted candle held by one faithful soul has the power to make all the difference in the world – however much the hand that holds it may tremble.

When Jesus prays that the love with which God loves Him be in them and He in them, His prayer is all consuming. Understand this – this type of love is completely selfless. There is no thought of reward, and certainly no expectation of ease. The love of Christ was a love that forgave the people who nailed Him to the cross - while He was hanging from it.

There is no promise of an effortless transition from sinner to reconciliation. It takes energy, sacrifice, and faith. In fact – nowhere in the book of Revelation is there divine assurance of ultimate salvation. And that’s the book we traditionally look to for future hope!

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We need to listen to and for God, most particularly on cloudy days when the glory of the Lord is not shown round about. How we do on bright sunny days is one thing – when the ravages of an angry planet manifest themselves – that’s another matter entirely.

And that is part and parcel the reality of ministry in the twenty first century. However you want to characterize it – nose to the grindstone – shoulder to the wheel – money where your mouth is – the fact remains – this is a call to ministry, not a ticketed invitation to sit in a stadium to watch a spectacle. The challenge of living faithfully is not only a call to personal goodness; it is a call to let our lives invite others to follow Jesus.

We are to participate fully in this life, and not just when all the aspects line up for us - during the trying times as well. “I in them,” what a wonderful way Jesus has to bridging the gap between His death on the cross, and the Holy Spirit filling the hearts of His disciples.

There is a wondrous continuity at play here that transcends both time and place. The Father loves the world. He loves the world so much that He gives His only Son as ransom for all the world’s sin.

And the Son, in turn, loves His disciples so much that He prays they will have Him in them as the Father is in Him. Further, He extends that prayer to include all who hear His words through them.

This is a prayer for unity. "I in them and You in Me." A failure to live in unity is usually a failure of reciprocity. The hard truth is that all too often an act of love is not returned in kind.

In the corporate world it can actually be viewed as weakness to reciprocate a kind gesture, to say nothing of a loving action. And we as Christians have an obligation to do something about that. The deepest moments of life are those when our hearts and habits are wide enough to include others.

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We sort of take that for granted because we see it played out with one another on a regular basis. There is never any shortage of folks stepping up and/or stepping in around here. The size of the congregation has nothing to do with the collective heart of the congregants.

God's intention is that we may be one. That deliberate act of oneness is in itself an act of liberation. The work of the Spirit brings freedom to all who are captive. The unnamed slave girl with the gift of divination was freed by Paul, who was simply annoyed by her until he called out the spirit that possessed her.

She was of no more use to her masters, so Paul's annoyance had the unintended consequence of liberating her while provoking the ire of her masters toward Paul and Silas, who in turn put them into captivity.

This then gave rise for divine intervention to liberate all the prisoners who were jailed with them, and subsequently the jailor himself to hear the good news, which set him and his entire household free. All of this takes place under the umbrella of unity. One in the Spirit.

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And this is why we gather together on any given Sunday. Worship is a time to clarify our values and motives, and to see all we do and all we are in light of the gospel message. This is not only our weekly reminder of what matters really in this world. It's a time to embrace the oneness of a faith that holds the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as though we are in them, as they are in us.

In light of the brutality visited upon our brothers and sisters in Texas last week, it is all the more reason to recognize the importance of unity among believers, knowing that such oneness leads the world to believe.

Since that which is good and that which is evil are often hard to distinguish from one another, we must move passionately into the places where the Word and the world intersect.

I know it's hard to appreciate the global impact a single concept can have on a world gone mad, but I can say with absolute certainty that our moments of unity with God and with our neighbors allow us hope for the eventual reconciliation and unity of all humankind. The secret is that Jesus Christ is saving us.

Revelation assures us that justice prevails. The apostles conquered the mighty Roman Empire through many, diverse and relentless acts of love. We have countless examples stretching from antiquity to a future beyond our vision that display the wonder and triumph of a life of love in unity with our Father, whose only Son prevails upon Him that He be in us. That's right – Christ Himself prays that He will be in us as the Father is in Him.

In the face of such unity, how can there be anything but love in our future? And it is ours by the grace of God who freely gives – whether we ask for it or not. Deserve really has nothing to do with it. We are all unworthy, but the good news is we have a Savior whose most fervent desire is to be in us. All we have to do is let Him in. Amen.