

"That the World May Believe"

Thomas Robinson, May 30, 2010

John 17: 15-26

¹⁵ "My prayer is not that you take them out of the **world** but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ **Sanctify** them in the **truth**; your **word** is **truth**. ¹⁸ As you **sent me** into the world, I have **sent them** into the world. ¹⁹ For them I **sanctify** myself, that they too may be **sanctified in truth**."

²⁰ My prayer is not for them alone.

a I pray also for **those who will believe in me through their message** (word),

b ²¹ that **all of them may be one**,

c just as **you, Father, are in me and I am in you**.

d May they also **be in us**

e so that the **world may believe** that **you have sent me**.

a ²² **I have given them the glory** that you gave me,

b that **they may be one**

c just as **we are one** – ²³ **I in them and you in me** –

d so that they may be **brought to complete unity** (full completeness into one).

e Then the **world will know** that **you sent me**

and have **loved them** even as **you have loved me**.

²⁴ Father, I want those **you have given me** to be **with me where I am**,

and to **see my glory, the glory you have given me**

because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ Righteous Father, though the world does not know you,

I know you, and they know that you have sent me.

²⁶ I have made **known your name** to them,

and will **continue to make you known**

in order that the love you have for me may be in them

and that I myself may be in them."

John 13:34-35

³⁴ "A **new command** I give you: **Love one another**. As **I have loved you**, so you must love one another. ³⁵ **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples**, if you love one another."

John 17:3, 11

³ Now **this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ**, whom you have sent.

¹¹ Holy Father, **keep them in your name**, which you have given me, **that they may be one, even as we are one**.

Ephesians 4:1-6

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live **a life worthy of the calling you have received**. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace**. ⁴ There is **one body and one Spirit**, just as you were called to **one hope** when you were called; ⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism**; ⁶ **one God and Father of all**, who is over all and through all and in all.

Galatians 3:26-28

²⁶ In Christ Jesus **you are all children of God through faith**, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have **clothed yourselves with Christ**. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus**.

Jesus' Prayer Before Dying

These verses conclude Jesus' time of teaching and praying with his disciples.

Immediately ahead: arrest, trial, crucifixion. Jesus enters dialogue with the Father and draws the disciples with him – to overhear the deep meaning of his life.

He looks back before the world's creation into the nature and reality of divine life.

He prays for the disciples around him. He looks to future believers – to us.

He centers on God's purposes in the whole human story– why he came and died.

Divine Love – Source and Aim

His final petition/purpose reaches back before the beginning: May the love that is the core of God's own life (the Trinity) be in us humans– through Jesus living in us now.

God made us beings who could share that eternal life – knowing God – as an expression of his own love (v 23): He loved us already as the Father loves the Son.

Jesus is about to be “Glorified”– in his crucifixion – to embody the reality of God's self-giving love by taking all our sin, brokenness, alienation, death into the death of God.

In himself he unites humanity with God, so that we can be given God's own life.

The World's Situation – Separation and Ignorance

“The World” expresses all the ways we humans build our lives without God, with our own little gods. We choose not to know God, and miss the truth of our own lives.

We reject God and are trapped in our separation. God still loves each one of us.

Jesus came so that people may know God by knowing Jesus– this is his ongoing work.

Jesus prays for future believers so that the world may become believers – free.

A New Kind of Life – God's Unity of Love

Jesus prays twice for believers to begin to experience the kind of life in the Trinity. (20-3)

We struggle to understand One God in three persons – distinct but one reality.

We live in a world of separate individuals who are never “inside” each other.

But as we receive the Word of the Cross/Glory, and believe/trust in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit comes to us, a new reality comes into being. A bit of that Trinitarian life of God comes into reality in us. We start to share in a new kind of life – united in love.

We are each united to Jesus and therefore united to each other. We don't lose our individuality but come to full completeness in the one who made that individuality.

That the World May Believe

The unity Jesus describes is not man-made or institutional. Our institutions more often define disunity. Through the ages the church often tried to enforce unity externally.

Jesus prays for a unity like that in the Trinity. It is a unity the Spirit creates/gives.

But we are called to “keep” it, live it, bear testimony to it to the world. It breaks down barriers. We're all broken; all receive grace. We are clothed with Christ/Jesus in us.

Thus the early believers created impossible communities: slave and free, rich and poor together; pagan and Jew together; women with freedom never before experienced.

Jesus prays that we will experience God's life in that impossible community of love.