

ONE WITH THE FATHER AND WITH EACH OTHER
A Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 16, 2010
Text: John 17:20-26

“I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one . . .”

On the Seventh Sunday of Easter every year, we examine a part of chapter 17 of John—what we commonly refer to as Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer.” We call it that because there Jesus intercedes with the Father in heaven, on behalf of his friends on earth. Each year of our three-year cycle of readings, we look at one third of chapter 17. Today, we read the final third, the conclusion.

Although it is composed of simple words, this is a potent prayer. Jesus prays here for the whole world, asking that the love with which the Father loved him might also be ours, and that through us the Father’s love might be evident to the world. That is what Jesus *died* for as well; this prayer is not just words. The prayer puts into words the mission of Jesus, the project of Jesus. You could say that Jesus’ giving himself to die for us was the embodiment of these intercessions; and his resurrection embodied the Father’s answer to that prayer.

As wonderful as the world is, how much more wonderful it would be, if people were not always finding ways to be against each other, and instead labored only for each other’s good.

I caught a glimpse of the beauty of global cooperation this past week on the internet. The New York Times published a project online called “A Moment in Time.” Have any of you looked at it?

Readers all over the world were invited to photograph whatever they were looking at precisely at 11 AM Sunday, May 2, our time. They sent those in, and the result was a huge gallery of photos covering the globe—at that moment. When you open the feature, you see a picture of a globe with stacks of photos on it. You pick a category, and open a stack, and you can browse the thousands of photos, every one from a different photographer.

What a marvelous way to represent the fact that, although we are in many different places, some in daylight some at night, some on the water and some on land, speaking many different languages, and so on, we *are* one world.

So I clicked on one of the stacks of photos. The album opened, and I began to look through it.

I was **astonished** when the *sixth photo I saw* was a picture taken at an ELCA church service, at Peace Lutheran church in Gahanna, Ohio. I was there once. I was visiting because they were sponsoring our work in Papua New Guinea. A cousin of mine is a member there. Looking at the photo, my connection to this world of photos suddenly became personal and palpable.

What a joy, to be one with others, in our “small world.”

Yet the world remains sadly divided. And the divisions are not only at national borders. Every expression of our society is subject to fragmentation, through a shortage of love.

Jesus envisions, and works through us to create, the unity of people with God and of people with one another. This unity is grounded in the love of the Father, which he has shown us through his Son Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Jesus does not only pray for his disciples, but also for those who would come to believe in him through their word, “that they may *all* be one.” He prays for his disciples, and for his grand-disciples, great-grand-disciples, and all generations to come. He would have us be one, and he would have us invite others to join that unity, to live in that same love. As we receive and live in that love, we actualize a unity that doesn’t just give us the kind of thrill I got from seeing a familiar place in a photo; but gives us peace, and gives God glory. Which is a challenge in our world.

There is a song which speaks to the difficulty we have in this world, of loving one another. Even though it is a “love song” and is clearly about romantic attachment, what it says applies to a lot of other kinds of caring. Part of what makes it difficult to care about others is that they may not care about us. Or they hurt us. And we never start with a level playing field; there is too much history of hurt. So we become resistant to the idea of getting to know each other, investing in each other, caring for each other, trusting each other, loving each other.

The song goes like this:

When I fall in love it will be forever
Or I'll never fall in love.
In a restless world like this is,
Love is ended before it's begun;
And too many moonlight kisses
Seem to cool in the warmth of the sun

When I give my heart it will be completely,
Or I'll never give my heart.
And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too
Is when I fall in love with you.

I’m not sure it should be called a love song so much as a “not love” song! The poet says that he will not settle for anything less than unconditional, total, love forever. Without that, he feels, it is best not to fall in love. I suspect that if the poet truly meant those words, he never did fall in love. Think of it. He places only one condition on the other—that she love him without condition! Because the truth is, that moonlight kisses cool in the warmth of the sun because in the daylight we see each other’s humanity, each other’s faults. And there’s the rub, with conditional love.

So what if God waited for us to love him unconditionally, sincerely and faithfully, before he loved us? Would he ever love us? No, and this is the point of 1 Corinthians 5:8, “While we

were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.” If God wanted fellowship only with the perfect, he would not have extended his love to us in Jesus Christ, who looked squarely at people’s sin, and only loved them more.

What makes this a restless world might be the conflict between our desire to be loved completely and unconditionally, and our inability to love our friends that way, much less our enemies. No wonder “love is ended before it’s begun”! St. Augustine identifies the proper antidote to that restlessness when he says that God has made us for himself—and therefore our hearts are restless until they rest in God. That is what Jesus is praying for in John 17—that we be restored to God, and rest in his love. His prayer knits and purls and knits and purls, pulling us together: “I in them,” he says to the Father, “and you in me, that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” Here is a love that is not “ended before it’s begun.”

When we are in this love, “it will be forever,” because our love for God is produced by God’s love for us. And the globe, the real globe, is covered right now with people who as they commune are rejoicing at their unity with you and me. They know us, and they also know the love you and I celebrate, and we are one. Amen.

