

I know a lot of people, none present I am sure,

that tend to brag about their children or grandchildren.

I am sure each one of you with kids and grand kids

have the smartest, brightest, cutest, most talented,

most well behaved children ever.

I don't doubt that for a second.

I don't happen to have any bright, cute, well behaved children of my own,

but – I do have amazing nieces and nephews.

Now, my husband and I do our best to not play favorites,

but at times there is a certain nephew that tends to steal our hearts.

Just occasionally.

Well one day, we were all gathered for dinner

and my sister-in-law was having a heck of a time

getting my adorable, sweet nephew to eat his dinner.

I believe my nephew had just turned three at the time.

He had recently figured out how to bargain with his parents.

So his mom says to him,

“If you eat two more bites of your chicken,

you can have one of Aunt Sara's cookies or some ice cream.”

Hearing the offer, he leaned over to his mom and whispered, “Or both.”

Or both.

I love it.

It's still a frequent saying in my household.

And I love that it was said by a three year-old.

I think often times we get stuck in a rut of one thing or the other.

It's either this or that.

How many times do we hear

– there are two kinds of people in this world –
whatever the issue is at hand which may have two opinions.

You know, I think there are two kinds of people in this world.

Those who think there are two kinds of people
and those who can see the big picture.

The challenge before us today is to not be limited by categories
and thinking that we have to find the only way forward.

Or we have to fit into the one correct category,
but to rest on God's healing promises
and God's guidance in the midst of choices and change.

This is a lesson immediately before us today in both of the lessons,
and especially the gospel text.

Many of you may recognize the gospel lesson
as Jesus' prayer immediately before his arrest.

Jesus was with his disciples just prior to his betrayal, trial and death.

This was his last chance to pass on
everything that his Father sent him to do.

This is the end, the completion, of his ministry.

In John's gospel story four chapters,

beginning at chapter 13 are dedicated
to making an account of this last evening they shared.

In this account, chapter 17, the entire chapter is a prayer.

This is Jesus' great High Priestly Prayer
that he offers immediately before being handed over to death.

What we have before us today,

verses 20 through 26, are the closing petitions in this prayer.

Jesus is finalizing this phase of ministry with his disciples.

He is preparing them for his departure.

And he does this in expanding circles of relationships.

First, Jesus has prayed for the completion of his own mission.

Then he prays for these disciples that he has known.

Finally, he prays for those that have yet to believe.

Now, I think it's easy to get lost in this passage.

If you had your Bibles open and were following along

maybe you can see what I mean by that.

Throughout chapter 17, it almost seems like a word puzzle for us to figure out.

Jesus prays for all believers to be one,

as the Father is in him and he is in the Father.

And then we hear that the glory given to Jesus

has been passed on to the disciples

so that they may be one as he and the Father are one.

Completely one, so that the world may know

that the Father has sent Jesus and have loved them

just as the Father loved him.

This is a chapter where it is easy for us to get caught up in the words

and totally lose the message.

Like so many other passages of scripture,

we can get hung up in the words,

get through it and then just be pleased as punch

that we read it,

without stopping to consider what God is up to.

In this passage, there is a lot of repetition.

Typically, when words are repeated it is to get our attention.

And in this passage, it is no different.

Here, we get a window

into the deeply intimate relationship between Father and Son.

No part of this passage is directed

toward those of us that are reading it.

Jesus is directing every word to the Father.

But, we get to listen in.

And as we listen in, we get drawn into the life and love that they share.

Through the relationship between Father and Son,

we are pulled closer,

drawn together and made a part of the community of faith.

And it is my belief that this outcome is intended.

In these words, Jesus prays for unity.

Jesus prays for specific unity built on the relationship

that he has with the Father.

This unity is built on the foundation of love that they share.

Through that unity,

Jesus prays for the people that he has discipled

and then asks for God to care for all future disciples.

Jesus knows that if his mission is going to take hold of the world,

if his ministry is going to make an impact,

it will only be through the care and guidance of the Father.

If any of his work will have a lasting impact

it will only be because of the Father's guidance and the Father's will.

Jesus has been obedient during his entire life.

The glory he has been given - he has shared and through that,

his prayer becomes quite bold and confident.

He prays for the Father to complete what he has promised.

He prays his own desire of wanting the disciples to be glorified
in the same way that he is glorified.

He prays confident of the Father's love for him and their intimate relationship.

Through his ministry, Jesus has made the Father's name known.

This means that he has shared with those closest to him
the character and nature of the Father.

Jesus has revealed God's desire for unity.

Unity based on their love for one another

and the rippling affects that has through the disciples and to the world.

Jesus prays now for the Father to fulfill what he has promised to do,
to unite those who believe

and those who will come to believe.

And it appears as though Jesus is setting up two contradictory categories.

There are the people who will come to believe
and then the people that won't.

So there are those who will be disciples

and those who are just the rest of the world.

It would seem as though we could make a clear demarcation
and put a line in the sand.

This group on one side

and that group on the other.

Or both.

Throughout the gospel of John,

“the world” has repeatedly been used
to describe those who do not believe.

Those people and entities that oppose God.

And yet, the love of God was given to the disciples
so that the world may believe.

The world is so critical to this gospel story
that it is used over five times as often
as the other three gospels combined.

Remember what I said about repetition getting our attention?

Something is going on here with John’s use of “the world.”

You see, here in this passage,

in Jesus’ prayer,

the world isn’t something to which we are called to oppose,
but something into which we are called
in order to make disciples.

The world has yet to come to believe,

but the world is eagerly waiting to believe.

The world is what has been prepared to hear of Jesus,
to repent and to believe.

And we hear this repeatedly throughout John.

In John 1:10, “[The Word] (He) was in the world,
and the world came into being through him;
yet the world did not know him.”

Again, John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish

but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

And another passage in John 12:46-47 [Jesus says,]

“I have come as light into the world,
so that everyone who believes in me
should not remain in the darkness.

I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them,
for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”

Jesus was sent for the world.

To be the light in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome.

He worked with his disciples to teach them the love
shared by him and our heavenly Father.

Through them, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
that mission continues and it isn't over yet.

At the end of his prayer, Jesus prays,

“Righteous Father, the world does not know you,
but I know you and these know that you have sent me...
I made your name known to them
and I will make it known,
so that the love with which you have loved me
may be in them.” (17:25&26)

We have been given that love.

We have been brought in and bathed in the love that Father and Son share.

And this love that has been shared with us,
it is not ours to squirrel away,
but it is ours to share.

Being baptized children of God,

We have been joined to the death and resurrection of Christ.

We have been united

with the love shared between the Father and the Son.

The love of perfect obedience that has defeated sin and death.

We have been brought into that love

which washes away our tears and satisfies all of our needs.

But having this love does not mean that our work has been completed.

It means that our work has just begun.

We have been given the chance to share it.

We have been given the great opportunity to respond to God's love.

By virtue of faith, by virtue of our life as children of God

we are no longer a part of the world.

We are disciples.

We have been brought into the unity of God.

We have been drawn into the intimate relationship

that Jesus has with the Father.

And because of that, we are called to be one.

We are called to look at Jesus' life as the example for love.

A life of obedience to God's will,

of ministry to others,

offering our gifts – everything that is ours back to God.

We are called to not see categories of us and them.

We are called to go where God is sending us,

to live in the unity and love that we have been given,
and to be witnesses to the world of that love
through our daily routines.

This may mean reprioritizing our time and our resources.

This may mean we are called to act with greater patience
and to exercise more self-control.

It may also mean that in our life together as Epiphany,
during a transition to a new building for a second campus,
we are called to rely more heavily
on God's sense of timing and direction.

Let us remember that in the midst of an intense transition,
Jesus prayed.

In that prayer, he handed over everything he cared about
to his Father.

We too, are called to pray.

To take the time to seek God's direction
knowing that we may be called
to this group of people or that group of people.
Or both.

However the path unfolds,

God's love will continue to unite us here in this place
and then send us out into the world that he loves so much.

We go, knowing that Jesus has already paved the way for us
and has already prayed for God to care for us
in the face of his own suffering and death.

We are the recipients of his grace, given freely to us, so that we can freely share it.

In whatever way possible – just look what Jesus did.