

“Being One in Jesus”

Isaiah 45:1-7

Psalm 21:1-17

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

Live into Jesus’ prayer for unity. Following Jesus has suffering, persecution, injustice, and division occurring as a part of Christian discipleship. Os Guinness relates the following story:

One of the greatest Christian leaders of the last century was John R. W. Stott, rector of All Souls Langham Place in London and a peerless preacher, Bible teacher, evangelist, author, global leader and friend to many. I knew him over many decades, but I will never forget my last visit to his bedside three weeks before he died. After an unforgettable hour and more of sharing many memories over many years, I asked him how he would like me to pray for him. Lying weakly on his back and barely able to speak, he answered in a hoarse whisper, “Pray that I will be faithful to Jesus until my last breath.” Would that such a prayer be the passion of our generation too.¹

Isaiah 45:1-7, Psalm 21:1-17, 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11, and John 17:1-11 re-soundly declare that “being one in Jesus” is knowing that our sense of self and sense of self-worth is rooted in Jesus’s identity. Ongoing conversion, rebirth, is making our union, our oneness in Jesus, more and more apparent as we are restored, supported, strengthened, and established in Jesus.

John 17:1-11 is Jesus’ prayer for his disciples. The text makes three points for our consideration regarding how to receive glory in the context of crucifixion, that is, suffering. First, we know the Father’s name. When we look at Jesus, we see God. And we experience God. Jesus claimed to be one with the Father. Jesus is the I am. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world.” And God’s name is, “I am who I am.” Second, Jesus gives us knowledge of

¹Os Guinness, *Impossible People* (IVP Books, 2016).

the truth. That is, when we worship the “I am who I am,” we are encountered by and encounter the Truth. We experience the presence of God. When we learn about the “I am who I am” in our study of the Bible and connect with others in fellowship, we are encountered by and encounter the Truth. We experience the presence of God. When we serve others and give generously of our finances, we are encountered by and encounter the “I am who I am.” We experience the presence of God. And third, Jesus promises us protection. Jesus lives his purposes in and through us, all the while protecting us by the Holy Spirit. The “I am who I am” emboldens us to accomplish God’s good will and pleasure. We experience the presence of God. Jesus makes these three things known: the name of the Father, knowledge of the truth, and the promise of protection. Why? For Christians to experience unity. Christians are to be one just as Jesus and the Father are one. Christians are to be “one” just as Jesus is one with the Father. We can have unity without uniformity.²

Might you agree that disunity has become the leading mark of the Church? We have the Roman Catholic Church; the Orthodox Church; many Protestant denominations; and a plethora of independent churches. The Church argues over non-essentials, as if they were essentials. We argue about the sanctity of life, sexual orientation, gender identity, women in ministry, alliances with this group or that group, the relationship between church and state, and how the church is to participate in the issues and matters of the world. Linda Lee Clader, Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor of Homiletics at Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California writes, “Do we trust that God does hear prayers and does answer them? Do we also trust that

²In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Bradley E. Schmeling, Jennifer L. Lord, Gail Ramshaw, Greg Cootsona, Heidi Haverkamp, Martha C. Highsmith, and Kira Schlesinger as found in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 302-304, 304-305, 306-308, 309-311, 311-313, 314-316, and 316-317.

God heard Jesus' prayer that we all might be one? If we do, then our problem may be with our own assumptions of what unity is. We may need to think differently somehow, when we think about Christians 'being one.'³ If we trust Jesus, then we must let go of our need for uniformity and focus on unity. We would do well to consider a saying attributed to Rupertus Meldenius, an undistinguished German Lutheran theologian of the early seventeenth century: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."⁴

Love wins. Death loses. There is glory in crucifixion, that is, suffering; redemption in brokenness; and hope, peace, joy, and love for real people, who live in a real world, who have real needs. "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."⁵ We receive assurance and certainty in Jesus' prayer...being one in Jesus. Amen!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 21 May 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh
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³Linda Lee Clader in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, 541, 543.

⁴I thank Ligonier Ministries for this information.

⁵Ibid.