

“Engaging the Calling”

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

John 17:20-26

On this Seventh Sunday of Easter, the psalmist declares in Psalm 97:11-12, “Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!” Light penetrates darkness. Live focused on the future for then we are participating with God setting things right.

It is one day at a time leaning into Geneva’s new future. At least it’s supposed to be. Competing orthodoxies about Christianity seem to pit us against one another as opposed to bring us together. I find op-ed columnist David Brooks’ comment insightful, “So long as you believe that you are the captain of your own life, you will be drifting farther and farther from the truth.”¹ The individual is not to be front and center in living as a follower of Jesus. Jesus is to be in that place.

Jesus is the foundation of the Church, but which Jesus? If Jesus is a private figure doling out salvation one person at a time, then our “followership” is highly individualistic. This Jesus provides us a pathway to heaven. However, if Jesus came to create a new community, a community that is about the collective whole and its betterment, we want to learn from him on this new way of living. And that is the focus of the last segment in John 17:20-26. In John 17 we have the extended version of the Lord’s Prayer. But it gets lost in the very appropriate shorter version of the Lord’s Prayer.

Regarding the conclusion of the entire prayer in John 17:20-26, F. Scott Spencer writes,

¹David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (New York City, New York: Random House, 2015), 198-199.

“[It].... caps off the entire prayer, reinforcing three key elements: the primary theme of unity with supporting points of familiarity and glory.”² Unity is not the familiar expression of Christians worldwide. And with that being the case, others do not see the glory of God as profoundly as the prayer indicates others seeing Jesus in us is to be.

Dividing Jesus into two weakens the foundation and distorts God’s mission. “Mission is not what we do for God, but what God is doing through us in the world.”³ It is the community of Jesus followers, the Church, the believers at Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church and Geneva Presbyterian Church that God uses to love others into the kingdom of God. As believers we are individuals, but most importantly a community with one another and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By faith, Jesus lives his life through us. In John 17:21 Jesus says, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

Unity in the Godhead is essential for the foundation and mission of the Church. Notice John 17 verses 20-21 and verses 22-23. Each block consists of three *hina* clauses with a *kathos* clause separating the first and second. The first and second *hina* clause in each block involves the oneness of the believers while the third involves the effect on the world. The *kathos* clause in each block holds up for believers the model of the unity of Jesus and the Father. That they all may be one (21a). Just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you (21b). That they also may be one in us (21c). Thus, the world may believe that you sent me (21d). That they may be one (22b). Just as we are one, I in them and you in

²F. Scott Spencer in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 313.

³Jennifer Haddox, “Whose mission?” in *Presbyterians Today*, June/July 2012, 4.

me (22c-23a). That they may be brought to completion as one (23b). Thus, the world may come to know that you sent me (23c).⁴

The foundation of the Church is Jesus. Not a particular set of beliefs or practices. Jesus spoke of peace, reconciliation, and wholeness. Remembering, telling, and living the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble is most critical. The book of Revelation is clear in this regard. Our faithfulness will be rewarded; Christ's enduring presence is with us. Yes, salvation is now but not yet. Justice will be fulfilled. Grace, unmerited favor, is a gift. Revelation 22:13 reads, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Everything in life that ultimately matters begins and ends with Jesus.

Unity, with brothers and sisters in Christ who have different interpretations of the Scriptures, is a fundamental principle in the Reformed tradition. Can we come to the place that our unity in Jesus Christ, the one who was obedient, suffered, died, raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, for humanity to know new life in him, is the common ground on which we stand?

Union in Christ led Paul and Silas in the Acts text to deal with three types of captivities to demonstrate that there is only one. Paul and Silas were captive to the most high God. The slave girl was captive to a spirit of divination. And the jailer was captive to "duty."⁵ Jesus' prayer demonstrates that we are bound, that is captive, to God. Jesus prayed in John 17:22-23, "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one." Unity is the higher value.

⁴Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI* (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 769.

Jesus is not divided. He is both private figure and living Teacher. The Gospel has two legs: personal faith and social justice. Progressive Christianity seems to rely most heavily on the leg of social justice whereas conservative Christianity the leg of personal faith. As followers of Jesus, we are called to make disciples of Jesus. That means we must stand on both legs! “Jesus taught us to do some really difficult things: forgive seventy-seven times, feed the hungry, renounce violence, love our enemies, suffer for what is right.”⁶ Like the psalmist, let’s embrace God’s sovereignty and unmask idols of consumption and warfare, turn away from what is expedient, seek to do justice, and live life in gratitude.⁷

Jesus is the foundation of the Church. Jesus saves individuals, builds a human community, and ends injustice by making all things new. Remembering, telling, and living the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble is not “a method of guaranteeing salvation” but “the acknowledgment and proclamation of astonishingly good news.”⁸ It’s all about Jesus. And it is through our unity in Christ and one another, the collective whole, that the good news of the gospel declares boldly that love wins. Love triumphs over hate. Geneva’s new future participates with God setting things right. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
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⁶Todd Friesen, *The Christian Century*, August 22, 2012, 32.

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⁸John M. Buchanan, “Grace before anything” in *Christian Century*, June 27, 2012, 3.