

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today we hear the words of the High Priestly Prayer. The prayer that is the end of Jesus' Farewell Discourse that we've been exploring the last couple weeks. Directly after this chapter, Jesus will be betrayed by Judas, he will be crucified, and he will rise. We know this because we are still in the Easter season and on this day we continue to boldly proclaim "Alleluia! Christ is Risen" "Christ is Risen indeed! Alleluia!" The repetition of this Easter Proclamation has been, for me, balm for the journey as I have navigated these last couple months. A time where we haven't been able to be in our church building, decorated in white paraments and easter lilies. A time where we haven't been able to do Wicker Park Lutheran's favorite thing - to welcome those into the Body of Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism. And so today, I am grateful for these resurrection words that begin our service *and* for Jesus' prayer on the disciple's behalf - on *our* behalf - in today's Gospel.

Now, yes, in typical Johannine fashion, these words are cloaked in mystery. If you're like me, perhaps you had a bit of difficulty following them. It seems as the repetition meant to further explain in fact makes it more confusing, and they, in a way, go in circles. So let's dive further into these. One commentator suggests that this passage can be divided into three sections:

First, Jesus declares that he has completed his work and can now return back to God the Parent. In the Gospel of John, this mission on which Jesus is sent is primarily to reveal God the Parent to the world. In doing so, Jesus is able to show that eternal life is here and now - a present reality available to all. As we will see in the following season of Pentecost, Jesus reveals God through word and deed, creating opportunities for people to know God.

The second part of this passage, Jesus offers the disciples belief and subsequent actions as proof of their understanding of who Jesus is and, thus, who God is.

And, finally, Jesus requests that God continue to protect those whom he loves as he prepares to face his execution, resurrection, and ascension. This

protection will most notably come from the Spirit, whom we heard of last week and who we will hear even more from next week on Pentecost Sunday.

So, to boil down this complicated passage, Jesus is saying here that he was sent into the world to reveal God to them. Which, if we follow the Johannine arc, we know who God is...God is love. So Jesus was sent into the world to reveal the God of infinite love to his disciples, a love that they believe *and are called to imitate*, a love that never ceases, even upon the death of the one who came to teach it.

And *even more* precisely, Jesus' mission was to invite the world to participate in the life of the Trinity - a life inherently relational and whose purpose and identity is *love*. And yet it is an invitation to participate in that *love*, trusting in the presence of God in all times and all places.

And, in the final verse of this passage for today, we see how what that love looks like in the world - unity. Unity with God and unity with one another, just as Jesus is One with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This oneness - this unity...is through love. That is what Jesus calls us into and strengthens us for.

And yet, when I think of unity, I think of presence. I think of the unity of a wedding, I think about uniting hands with friends or family during times of grief, I think of us in our church building. I think of people gathered physically together in one space for a common goal of love and comfort.

But so we probably have to admit that, right now, unity is a difficult thing to talk about as we are in our 64th day of our stay-at-home order here in Chicago. At this point you may feel like me - that unity is perhaps an abstract concept.

But is unity not more than being physically present to one another? Is not unity, as taught to us by Jesus in this very passage, about the presence of a deep abiding love within and among individuals and God?

If the force that forms unity between the members of the Trinity is that force of life-giving love then what makes us become united as one body is that same love. Sure, how we show love together as this community...looks

differently now. How we showed love were hugs and handshakes during passing of the peace, how we showed love was checking in with people during fellowship hour, how we showed our love was by giving the each other the body of Christ shed "*for you*" ...and now, those ways of being united, of loving one another, are not possible.

And yet, perhaps they are. Perhaps the hugs are replaced with waves and bowing towards another on the street, in our homes, and on our zoom calls - recognizing the divine love within them and between you. Perhaps our face-to-face fellowship hour around tables are replaced by phone calls and zoom fellowship hour. Perhaps the words of the body and blood of Christ given *for you* that Pastor Jason will speak in just a little bit, can be spoken by those next to you right now or through the soft yet fierce whisper of the Spirit.

The people of God gathered together as Wicker Park Lutheran know deeply how to share love. I have seen it in your welcoming statements, I have seen it shared during fellowship hour, I have seen it in your support of various missions throughout the city and the world, I have seen it in your dedication to being a teaching congregation. And though we can't embody that unity the way we once did, the love is still ever-present, y'all. Folks calling one another

to check in, offering to grocery shop for others, making masks to send to each other, showing up in radical love that is different yet abiding.

It looks like staying home, it looks like wearing a mask, it looks like wedding, funeral, and graduation zoom ceremonies, it looks like picking up the phone to remind someone of their beloved-ness, it looks like handwritten letters, it looks like appreciation baskets for our UPS workers...

...And it looks like not returning to our sanctuary just yet.

And just maybe, this is a blessing. Perhaps the gift of this time away from our building has been the opportunity to see God working in new and mysterious ways in the ordinary days of our lives... the opportunity to live out God's mission of love in new ways, proclaiming not only our unity with God, but all of creation's unity with God *and each other*, through word and deed. The opportunity to grow deeper and wider in our understanding of being One with our loving God.

Jesus' prayer does not end with today's passage. He goes on another 15 verses and ends with what I believe we need to take away today. Jesus says,

“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, and I in them.” (v. 26)

May you always remember that the love of God is in *you*. The love of God is in *us*. We are one with our loving God and it is *this* love that surrounds, protects, and unites us this day and always.