

Introductory

This material, the end of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, is exclusive to John. It is not found in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, this text is appointed to be read on Easter 7C. The seventeenth chapter of John is always read on Easter 7 on all years in both LW and LSB. Verses 1-11 are read during Year A, verses 11b-19 are read in year B, and in year C, verses 20 – 26 are read.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus told and showed His disciples how and for what to pray. In His longest recorded prayer, the Son spends the seventeenth chapter of John praying to the Father. In the reading for Series A, He prays that the Father would be glorified through Him. In the reading for B, He prays for The Apostles. In the reading for this year, He prays for all Christians; the Church.

Jesus has finished talking to the disciples. He now turns His attention from them to His Father, and these words of Jesus to His Father are some of His most passionate. Jesus is a normal, healthy human being, and no human being of that sort wants to die. Nor does Jesus desire to suffer, yet He knows that the hour that was not now is swiftly becoming now; suffering and death are coming.

Unlike the World, Jesus does not see the suffering and death of the Son of God as being a negative thing. Far from it, He sees it as an event that will "glorify" the Father through the glorifying of the Son. This has always been a point of contention between Christians and non-Christians, who see the crucifixion as a stumbling block, folly, and other things, and it continues to this day.

The Jewish boys I went to high school with mocked that my God died on a cross. Paul talks about that same thing early in 1 Corinthians. Increasingly, this has been a point of contention between Orthodox Christianity, which sees the Crucifixion as fundamental to the Christian religion, and liberal Christianity, which sees the same thing as an impediment and not to be talked about.

What makes this all palatable to Christians is that the story does not end with the crucifixion. Holy Week must always be seen in its entirety. The Ascension and the Second Coming finish the story off. Jesus suffered and died, but He rose again from the dead. Paul points out the practical as well as the theological importance of the resurrection in the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians.

These things need to be pointed out anew to the Christian of the 21st Century, especially to us Baby Boomers, who often wonder why the Pastor is making such a big deal all the time about doctrine. With the generation that went before us, the doctor tells them what pill to take and when to take it and they'll take the pill. It's the same thing when it comes to weather, the economy, or theology.

You tell the previous generations what to believe and by golly, for the most part, they'll believe it. Our generation wants to know *why* I should take this pill and why not another pill and maybe I don't need any pills at all. When it comes to religion, we want to know *why* this doctrine and not

that doctrine – even the virgin birth and resurrection – and maybe we don’t need doctrine at all.

It’s very likely that the one thing the hearer of this text hears is that Jesus wants us to be one, and that we aren’t, and that’s really nothing new. You may want to note the distinction between descriptive language and prescriptive language. You may want to note further that we want things all the time – many of them good things – but that doesn’t mean that it’s going to happen.

You may want to tell them why we are not one, and the number of reasons is legion. Different churches have different ways of dealing with the lack of oneness, and you may want to point out some of those ways. We are different, and we might as well get used to that. We seek unity in the keeping the Word of God pure and unadulterated, which is how Jesus told us to do that.

Textual Notes

20. He prays that the Father be glorified, then He prays for the Apostles at that time and beyond, and now He says that “Οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον – not only for these do I make petition,” meaning that He has been making petitions for them, “ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ – but also for those who believe in me through their Word,” for Christians.

We noted last week that the disciples wanted to talk about asking for things and being given them, which is not a bad thing, but Jesus is more concerned about theology, understanding truth. That’s the way of things, isn’t it? The prayers of the natural man are that God would give him things or do things for him, and Christians will often pray like that, especially when they are not in church.

And how many people do you know who have never darkened any door to any church and are theologically illiterate, but when he really need help will pray to whatever god is listening, asking for help in winning the lottery, getting a job, or having good weather. The importance of things like those pales in comparison to that one great need, the one that has lasting, eternal consequences.

We talked last week about the verbs “αἰτέω” and “ἐρωτάω,” both of which are rendered “ask” in the RSV. The verb that Jesus uses here in v. 20 is “ἐρωτάω,” a word often in John connected with the pursuit of theological truth. When the Levites came from Jerusalem to question John B about his identity, as well as why he baptizes, they “ἐρωτάω” him (1:19, 21, 25) those questions.

When Jesus heals at Bethesda, the Jews “ἐρωτάω” the man who healed him (5:12). When the woman is caught in adultery, Jesus “ἐρωτάω” her accusers which of them, being without sin, will cast the first stone (8:7). The verb appears five times in the Blind Man incident (9:1-23), where the Council is interrogating the man about his blindness and his claim that Jesus made him see.

When Jesus is talking to the disciples in John 14 about the coming Holy Spirit, He says in v. 16 that “I will ἐρωτάω the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive...” Finally, note in the text before us what Jesus has been talking about previous to v. 20, where He talks to the Apostles about truth.

He’s been talking to them about truth in a way that would lead us to believe that truth is a good thing to have, and it’s important, a concept that is variously foreign to various individuals of the modern man, including a lot of Americans. I have witnessed the erosion from knowing and even memorizing true things to having an opinion, and that’s where most discussions happen these days.

He has earlier prayed that the Apostles who are His contemporaries would know the truth. He now prays that the Christians who come after them, those who believe in Him through the word of them – and they wrote it down – would in the same way know the truth. The word of the Apostles is both The Word proclaimed and The Word written by them under inspiration, the Bible.

We must never forget that The Word (sometimes attached to visible elements) is the means, the only means, and there are none other, by which belief and understanding of truth come. It is very difficult for one to become a “believer” in Christianity if one does not know what Christianity considers to be the truth. If there is no truth, no object of belief, then what does belief matter?

When I say “they wrote it down” – and I say that a lot – I’m speaking, of course, about the Bible, written mostly by Apostles, the original twelve, and Paul, who came late to the party, nevertheless wrote thirteen epistles that made it into the NT Canon. In that way, the teachings of the Apostles, who are all dead, which came from the Son, who got it from the Father, comes to us in this day.

When we find the Apostolic Church post-Pentecost dedicating themselves to the same three things that we do on Sunday morning; the Apostles teaching, prayer, and the Sacrament of the Altar, which is fellowship, they did not yet have the NT books. But the same people who were preaching the Word then are the self-same people who wrote those NT books. It’s the same teaching.

21. His prayer for the Church is “ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὧσιν, καθὼς σύ, Πατήρ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ γὼ ἐν σοί – that all should be one, as you, Father, are one with me and I with you.” The bond and the unity of this Father and this Son is complete and perfect; the will of the Father and the will of the Son are identical, and Jesus never became a teen-ager; He never rebelled against His father like they do.

Descriptively, this is what Jesus desires, “ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὧσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας – that they (we) should be one, so that the world believes that you sent Me.” The prayer is that our doctrine would be pure, and that we would all have the same teaching, and that our proclamation of the Word would be the same. It never has been, but it’s worse now than ever.

The problem with our culture is that people believe in a lot of things, many of which purport to be “Christian,” but not many believe rightly because they haven’t been taught the truth but have been taught falsehood – some worse than others – instead. There is a lot of falsehood out there, and some of it is more false than other, and in many churches the false stands beside biblical truth.

We agree with Rome and a few other churches on things like life issues and that marriage is between one man and one woman. But we don't agree with Rome on Justification, and we find the synergism of even the conservative Reformed a thing to be avoided like the plague. And the like. Those divisions over doctrine (teaching) are not a good thing, and also to be avoided.

And just how are you going to achieve that, Christians? Post-Reformation, the Europeans fought the Thirty Years' War, with the issue of whose brand of Christianity was to prevail at the center of the causes of and reasons for that bloodbath. That did not work. Oneness was not achieved. The Age of Orthodoxy moved the battlefield to books and classrooms, a significant improvement.

Theologian lined up against theologian, quoting from Bible and Fathers in an effort to win over the hearts and minds of Christians. Franz Pieper was still battling the deceased Charles Hodge well into the last century, and somewhere along the line the Christians got tired of all the fighting. Then Christians fought Christians twice in what Pat Buchanan calls the Great Christian Civil War.

By then liberal theology had mostly taken over most of the mainline denominations, and the idea that the Fathers or even the Bible were authoritative had waned. Hal Lindsell talks about that in his 1976 book *The Battle for the Bible*. He says that the LCMS was one of the few major church bodies in which the Bible won, and it turns out that he was right, but it was a bit of a nail-biter.

While the rest were seeking unity by downplaying or ignoring doctrinal differences, the LCMS kept the faith, and that's our approach to the oneness of which Jesus speaks as a good and desirable thing. If you look at the context of that expressed desire, it comes after He has spoken at length of how the Word needs to be "guarded," (not kept) by the Apostles as you would guard a treasure.

In fact, Jesus and the writers of the Bible pound on that all the time, so often in fact that I begin to sound like a broken record from the pulpit and in these notes. How often, on the other hand, do we find Jesus and those writers admonish the reader to compromise or change His teachings (doctrine?). Never, and that's a slippery slope and you get to the bottom very quickly.

If you've already heard about our encounter in Erfurt, then skip this paragraph. We stayed at Luther's Augustinian Monastery and went to church at 5:00 with three Germans. They noted the Americans and approached us. My wife introduced me as a "Lutheran Pastor," and one of the Germans said, "You call yourself a Lutheran. You don't compromise. We are Protestants.

We compromise all the time." And that says it all about the state of the Church in Germany.

Mother Church has been good to me and to my family, and more to the point we are genuinely one of the few church bodies left on the entire planet that seeks the "oneness" of which Jesus speaks desirously by holding on to the Truth of The Word, not by compromising. It's why we're fighting all the time. It's always theological. Especially when somebody says, "it's not theological."

Let's take a look at some numbers. There are roughly 6,000,000,000 people in the world. Of those people, 74,000,000 claim to be "Lutheran." Of those Lutherans, between 5,000,000 and 10,000,000 (including several hundred Frenchmen, 30,000 Germans, and roughly 20,000 each of

Swedes, Finns, and Norwegians claim to be members of “confessional” Lutheran church bodies.

Of those “confessional” church bodies, the LCMS is by far the largest, with about 1,800,000 members, down from 2,400,000. The rest of the confessional Lutheran world looks to us in much the same way as the free world has for the last century or so looked to the United States for leadership. It is important work that you do, contending for unity based on the Truth of the Word.

22. Continuing along the oneness line, He says, “καὶ γὰρ τὴν δόξαν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι δέδωκα αὐτοῖς, ἵνα ὧσιν ἐν καθῶς ἡμεῖς ἓν – the glory you have given to me, I give to them, so that they may be one, as We are one.” But before He can ascend gloriously into heaven, He will have to die and rise again. Likewise, we will one day die and rise again, to then ascend to the glory of heaven.

23. When that happens, and only when that happens, “ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν – I with them and you with me, so that they might be completely one.” The translations all render “ἐν” as “in,” and exactly what does that mean? What does it mean for Jesus to be located inside of us, and for the Father to be located inside of the Son? It’s nonsensical.

The preposition “ἐν” can and often does mean “with,” and when it’s used with a noun in the dative case, it means “with.” See Voelz FGG for that reference. It makes perfect sense to talk about Jesus to be located “with” (not “in”) us, and for the Father to be located with the Son. That will happen when we all join up in heaven, after death, then resurrection, then finally ascension.

The verb here “τετελειωμένοι – they are complete” is the cognate verb of the adjective used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:48), where Jesus commands His listeners to “be perfect, as I am perfect.” It’s the same verb and same perfect tense – past action with results that continue into the future – used when He is on the cross, and He declares that “it is finished.”

In that Sermon, He commands completion. Here He speaks of the time when that completion (perfect oneness) will be brought about by God, where all will once again be one, like before the Fall, “ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας – so that the world should know that You sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

The place of that perfect oneness is heaven, and on the judgment day the entire world will know of the perfect righteousness of God, and of His glory in saving His creation. The world will see the love of God in coming into the world and sacrificing Himself so as to save us from our sin. In Baptism, He marked each of us to be His, and gave us a picture of our deaths and risings again.

24. He wants us to be one, and “Πατήρ, ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, θέλω ἵνα ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ κακεῖνοι ὧσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ – Father, I desire that those you have given me where I am, they may also be with me.” I think maybe the reason why the translators went with “in,” not “with” for “ἐν” above is because the word “μετ – with” occurs here and if John wanted to say “with,” he would have used that word.

Not necessarily. Writers will often use synonymous words that are different but mean the same thing just because. As for the Bible translators, who can know the mind of those cryptologists of sacred Scripture. Here, the Son is telling the Father that He wants the Christians to be with Him where He is, currently on the earth but especially when He leaves The Planet and returns to heaven.

The reason why He wants us there is “ἵνα θεωρῶσιν τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἐμὴν, ἣν δέδωκάς μοι ὅτι ἡγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου – in order to behold my glory, which was given to me because of Your love before the foundation of the earth.” The uncreated and eternal God the Son recognizes that the glory He possesses is from the uncreated and eternal Son and is equal to it.

He almost sounds like a man who is in possession of something that is very cool, and He wants to share it with His friends. Indeed, heaven is very cool, and Jesus cannot wait to share it with us! It’s a good thing to talk about heaven, and to describe it, and to make people not wait to get there. During this Easter Season, including this Sunday, John has talked a lot about it in his Revelation.

25. The world’s hatred of Him and us has roots, He says in their hatred of the Father, “Πατὴρ δίκαιε, καὶ ὁ κόσμος σε οὐκ ἔγνω, ἐγὼ δέ σε ἔγνω – Righteous Father, the world also has not known you, but I have known you,” from eternity, and speaking of Christians, “καὶ οὗτοι ἔγνωσαν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας – these also know that you have sent Me,” but they often doubted.

26. After the Father sent the Son, “καὶ ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ γνωρίσω – I have also made your name known to them,” and recall all that is meant by one’s “name.” For this purpose, “ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἡγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς – so that the love with which you have loved me should be with them, and I with them,” and all of that is true for the Christian.

Law/Gospel

Deaf God/Listening God - When he was running for president, Jimmy Carter famously said that he had lust in his heart for women other than his wife and that God does not hear the prayers of the Jews. Although I have never met Jimmy Carter, I do not doubt that he lusts after women not his wife in heart. I do know that he was right about the prayers of the non-Christian falling on God’s deaf ears. Because of the person and work of Jesus, the mediator between God and man, God hears our prayers. We make requests for “the things that we need to support this body and life” and for the truth about God and He hears and answers us. Whenever I talk about prayer I make sure and say that prayer is us talking to God (go ahead and point upward when you say this) and that God talks to us in Word and Sacrament (point downward). A lot of Lutherans seem to have the idea that God talks to them in prayer.

Divided/United - We live in a world that is divided in many ways and along a lot of lines. Because of our 200+ year old experiment with religious freedom, the United States is by far the nation most divided by religion not only currently, but historically. The fact that the number of religious groups in our country numbers in the thousands is one of many things for which the Europeans mock us. Especially troubling is that almost all of those religious groups call themselves “Christian.” Sin and focus on self and one’s own ideas about God and Jesus is the root cause of this, a result of which is that we live in a country with a lot of “Christian” false teachers. Jesus warned about that. Our unifier is the Christ of the Bible and the Church. Through Him we have union with the Father and with one another.

Falsehood/Truth - A recurring theme throughout these three chapters, if you don’t know that truth

about God then you will make things up; false religions, heretical denominations. We know that truth about God, and we know Him to be a self-sacrificing loving God.