

“One”

John 17:20-26, Acts 16:16-34

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“That they may all be one.” That's what Jesus says when he prays. When he prays for us, for those who believe because what what the disciples have taught. That we might be one. What does that mean? What would it mean for us to be one? Should we all be the same? Certainly that's not what Jesus means—he doesn't mean for us to all look the same or sound the same or even speak the same language, right? And we're not supposed to dress the same, are we? Years ago, when Erin and the kids and I were visiting her father in Wilmington, North Carolina, we decided to go to church on Sunday to the First Presbyterian Church in Wilmington. It was summertime and I had not packed a jacket or tie to bring on vacation, but hey, it's summer! I had a nice sport shirt and khakis and the kids and Erin of course were dressed nice, but when we went in for worship, even though it was summer and already warm, we quickly noticed that there was only one other man in the entire congregation who wasn't in a jacket and tie. And he at least had a sport coat on but without a tie. No the only one without a jacket that day in church was me. Everyone else was dressed the same. Is that what Jesus wants?

I don't really think so. Jesus has faithful disciples who wear all kinds of clothes, who speak all kinds of languages, it is not our outward appearance that makes us one.

Well, maybe we are one because we all believe the same thing. Maybe we're not supposed to have all these different kinds of Christian churches, but maybe there's one real church and we're all supposed to be part of that church. But which one? Are we right? Or are the Methodists? Or the Baptists? Or the Episcopalians or the Catholics? What about the Jews or the Muslims or the Buddhists—what if they are right? This morning we're going to say together the Nicene Creed, a statement of belief that was adopted by Christians in the fourth century. Surely we can all believe that, right? Actually, no. There are plenty of Christians in the world that belong to church that were established before Nicea and

who've never been able to buy into the Nicene Creed. And you'll notice when we say the Creed that there are a couple of little words that are in parentheses--(and the Son). When speaking of the Holy Spirit the creed for centuries said that the Spirit came from the Father. But later, believing that in order to lift up the equality of the Son, the western church said that the Spirit comes from the Father and the Son. But those in Eastern Christianity from the Orthodox tradition couldn't go along with that. Not that they didn't believe it, but that any changes in something as important as this should be decided by a council of the whole church and there hasn't been one of those since the 8th century. So in the Orthodox church they say the same Nicene Creed as we do, except for that little phrase. We've been trying to figure this out for thousands of years and haven't had much success, so maybe we aren't really supposed to all believe the same thing.

But here in this church, aren't we all supposed to believe the same thing? We all affirm that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, that the Presbyterian way is the best, that Princeton is the best seminary, that organ music is the only appropriate music in church—wait, maybe we don't all believe the same things. And for sure we don't all have the same opinions, do we? Look at all the things going on in our society. We have people who are having a difficult time with other people's opinions. We have Trump Supporters and Never-Trumpers, Hillary folks and people who feel the Bern. People who wanted this week to preserve the village and those who wanted to reclaim Richland. We don't think everyone here in this church shares the same political opinions, do we? We don't even share the same opinions about how things should be run here at the church, we have all kinds of disagreements—budgets, theology, priorities for the church, salaries, building use, what kind of coffee to use—we can find all kinds of things to differ with each other on. So what does Jesus mean when he says “that they all may be one?”

There is a language issue in this passage that doesn't really come across in English. When the evangelist John wrote this passage down he wrote in Greek. And there are two Greek words that are used in this passage over and over again. “So that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in

me, that they may become completely one.” The word in Greek for *in* is *en*, and the word for *one* is exactly the same except for a little mark over the e making giving it an *h* sound, making the word *hen*. But as you are reading it, the words look almost exactly the same, in and one. “So that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me.” What does that mean, to be one in Jesus and one in the Father. Well, Jesus tells us in the next verse: “that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

We are not one because we all dress the same, we are not one because we all belong to the same church or that we all believe the same things even something as foundational as the Nicene Creed, we are not one because we have the same politics or even because we never have disagreements in the church. We are one because of love. It is love that unites us. And notice please that it is not even our love for one another that unites us. It is because God loves us. “You . . . have loved them even as you have loved me.” That is the basic truth that unites us and makes us one family—that you are loved. No matter your dress or your theology or your politics or your opinions, you are loved. Notice what happens in the Acts story that Steve read for us. The Spirit brings together prisoners and guards, Jews and Romans, those in power and those who have been beaten by the crowds. The Spirit breaks down any barriers that we erect between one another. Each one is loved and valuable.

Each one of you is loved. But we only become a church of Jesus Christ if we are able to take the next step. You are loved, Jesus loves you, this you know, for the Bible tells you so. Yes you are loved. But so are they. And so are they. And so are those ones over there. The object of God's love is always plural. God loves all of us. And God loves them—whoever you conceive *them* to be. And ultimately that's our witness to the world. Jesus says “that the world may know that you have sent me.” The only way the world will know that is through love. As he says, “that the love with which you have loved me may be in them.” That's how the world will know of God's love—if that love is in us.

Is it? Is that love in us? How would anyone know? How would anyone know that we believe that not

only are we loved by God but that love lives in us? How would anyone know? Maybe it is because we are not all the same and we can in fact be very different that is a witness to the love of God that lives in us. Would someone know if they are with us for a while that we not only believe that each one of us feels loved by God, but that we believe that each other person is equally loved by God and precious to the same God who treasures us? Would they know because we are always ready to pray for each other and encourage each other? Would they know because we value each one's gifts and don't really care who gets credit for an accomplishment? Would they know because we never go behind another's back but we speak our concerns openly and honestly and kindly? Would they know because we not only try to control our own tongues but we don't listen to gossip or the wounding of others? Would they know because we not only seek the truth but try to speak the truth only in loving ways? Would they know because even when we discover that the person next to us is going to vote for "you know who," that we listen to them, hear their concerns, refuse to think less of them? Would they know because we do not seek our own glory, but seek the glory of God, to know him and to live in sacred loving relationships with God and with one another?

Today we celebrate the human family and give thanks for loving mothers and the mothering instinct that is in all beings, male or female. And it is a good day to remind ourselves that our mothering God loves no matter what-- and that is the example that we want to show to the world. We are one because we are loved. You are loved—and so are they.