

First Baptist Church

July 12, 2020

Series Title: Christ, the Church, and Our Current Crises

Sermon Title: The Church Unified

Pastor Jared Gustafson

Good morning! I want to draw your attention to the fact that this is the first Sunday ever in the history of First Baptist Church (131+ years) where we will have people worshiping in our building, and at the same time worshiping in our parking lot, and at the same time people worshiping in their homes. Some likely worshiping in their cabins, some worshiping from other states while on vacation, and I know we have brothers and sisters who join us in worship from Ukraine and other parts of the world. Isn't that cool? That is an amazing thing! So, I want to welcome all of you who are worshiping with us somewhere other than this room, and a special welcome to those who are worshiping with us in this room, and from the overflow spaces and all those other places that I mentioned.

Next Sunday, just as a reminder, we have an 8:45am Traditional worship service in the main Sanctuary, with overflow space in the Multipurpose room and down in the Fellowship Hall. And we will have a 10:45am Contemporary worship service that will be live in the Multipurpose room with overflow space in the Sanctuary, down in the Fellowship Hall, and we will be expanding some of the overflow space into the youth rooms as needed in the weeks ahead.

Finally, in the time being, we will not be passing offering plates. I know some of you have been really excited to put your offering in a plate! Well, for the time being, we are encouraging you to put them in the Giving boxes (there are 3 of them) that you will find spread out in the lobby area near the main worship centers. Hopefully, you will find one of those. Obviously, a lot of you have switched to online giving and many of you have been mailing your checks. Those options are still available as well.

I am going to pray, then we are going to continue in our worship.

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks and praise that we can again be in your house glorifying you. This facility you have blessed this church with over many, many decades and over many, many building projects is such an incredible place to worship you and lift your name on high. We also thank you that through technology we have brothers and sisters who are worshiping you right now in our parking lot, in their homes, at the cabin, all over the world. We pray, Lord, that you would be glorified as your church – First Baptist Church in Cambridge – worships you in all these places, but with one heart, one mind, one love. We are so excited that we get to gather in that way.

We pray that you would be glorified in all our offering to you this morning. The way that we offer ourselves to you. The way that we offer our voices to you, our minds, and hearts to you. The way that we offer gifts to you. We pray, Lord, that you would be glorified in all these offerings to you this morning and that you use them to do great work here and around the world. We pray this in the matchless name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Before we dive into the message this morning, I wanted to share an email with you. I do have permission from Gene VanAlstine to share this email. He wrote this last Sunday evening and I think it captures where so many of us are at in light of the pandemic and the other things that are going on around the world. I shared this email with the staff, and they said, “Ask Gene if we can share this with the congregation.” because I think it will be helpful to us.

Jared, we just finished your sermon for today. As I watched you walk out, it occurred to me that keeping things going at church without the contact that we are used to has to be very difficult.

And it has been. It has been hard for all of us in so many different ways!

I want you to know that nothing has changed in Shari and I as far as our commitment to the church and you as a staff. We pray for you and are just as committed to our faith as ever. I wrestle with this virus issue. It seems that I change my mind about how we should deal with it almost every day. Some days I think I should just forget that it is real and go back to living just like we

did before it came along. God will protect me, so what am I worried about? Then I hear a report about how devastating it has been in some parts of the country and I think I need to take precautions. I'm just what the virus is looking for. I am 74 in a couple of weeks. I have had cancer four times. I am pre-diabetic, and my immune system is not as strong as it should be. So, then I think I had better stay here on this farm where I am reasonably safe. The next day, I am somewhere between those two positions.

Shari and I have talked about these issues a lot and at least for now, we have decided to attend church through the videos you are providing. When a vaccine becomes available, we will be back at church for the worship service. If there is anything we can help with, considering all of this, please do not hesitate to call on us. Thank you for your efforts to provide a worship service. We appreciate having them available. God bless you and the staff.

That is for me, and I think for most of us, how we all feel. One day we are over here, and the next day we are here, and the following day we are somewhere in between. I want to pray peace over all of you. In the weeks and months ahead, some of you might be here this morning, you might decide, "You know what? God is with us wherever we are, and my brothers and sisters are with me in heart and spirit even if I am not physically present. I feel safer, more comfortable worshipping from home." That is okay!

Many of you grew up in families where if the church doors were open, you were there. Right? So, there can sometimes feel like this sense of burden, this weight, that if the church doors are open, I had better be there. I just want to say, "The church doors at First Baptist Church are open in all kinds of different ways in this season." So, if you are here with us this morning and you have kind of been wrestling, struggling like Gene in trying to make a decision of whether to continue worshipping from home for a while, you are blessed in doing that! And we are glad that you are able to worship with us.

You know, some of you are worshipping with us online right now and you have been struggling with "I did not really feel comfortable coming back this first Sunday, but when should we go back?" I just want to, again, say to everyone –

whether you are here in person or online, worship as the Lord leads you. We want to provide as many different ways for you to worship, and different settings for each worship so that you can do it in a way that feels safe and comfortable, and does not create in you a lot of stress and anxiety. When we come to worship Jesus, there should not be any stress or anxiety about that. So, worship in ways that you sense the presence of God and the peace of God, even if that means for a period of time you are not going to be here. That is okay.

I am going to pray, then we will give into the Word together.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are with your people all around the world right now! We have brothers and sisters who are completely isolated because they have been thrown into prison because of their love for you and professing your name. You are in that jail cell with them.

We have brothers and sisters who worship in homes in quiet and secret because they are in parts of the world where they could be arrested or worse for worshipping you, and you are there with them.

We have brothers and sisters from our church family who are spread throughout this community and this state that are worshipping you from their homes. And we thank you that we have the ability to worship you together in that way.

We have people all throughout this building who are worshipping you in different rooms and we thank you for the gift and the opportunity to do that as well. We thank you, God, that you are glorified when your children declare your greatness together. What a gift to be able to do this again in person, for those who are here, and to be able to do this ongoing for people who continue to worship with us online. We pray, Lord, that you would be glorified. That you would build your church, strengthen us, and help us to experience a greater depth of love and unity that we have never experienced before. Even in this challenging season. So, we give ourselves to you now, Lord. We ask that you would be glorified in us as we worship you through the study of your Word. I pray, Holy Spirit, that you would speak in a powerful

way. That you would transform us from the inside out. We ask these things, we pray these things in your name, Jesus. Amen.

I invite you to open your Bible to John 17. We looked at this prayer of Jesus several times over the past few months together. I read a portion of it last Sunday as well. But I want to read it again because Jesus speaks of, and more importantly, prays for unity in his Body in this passage. It is really cool for me to think that you can be an answer to a prayer of Jesus'. So often we think of prayers we lift up to Jesus, up to the Father, up to the Holy Spirit, and asking God to answer our prayers. Here's a really cool thing! You can be an answer, I can be an answer to a prayer of Jesus'.

John 17:20-23

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Just as a reminder, what we see in the early church is a radical answer to this prayer of Jesus' as the church comes together as one people. Loves one another, serves one another, cares for one another in radical, loving ways. That oneness, that unity, that service and love of God and others allows them to experience incredible miracles in their midst.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere

hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Let us jump ahead to Acts 4. We looked at this chapter last week, but so good to be reminded.

Acts 4:32-34a

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them.

Let us take little portions from each of these passages and think about it in light of the church in 2020. Could we say that this prayer of Jesus' and these descriptions of the early church are true of the church globally that we see around us and are true in even the most unique, local bodies of believers?

"...that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." – Jesus' Prayer

Acts 4:32a

"All the believers were one in heart and mind."

Acts 2:47b

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

I believe one of the primary reasons that the early church saw such amazing miracles happen in their midst and saw God perform salvation after salvation after salvation (3,000 on the Day of Pentecost and thousands more in the days and weeks to follow that) was because Jesus' prayer was answered. Again, this fledgling group of believers who for the first 250 years of their existence as a church were under severe persecution for most of that time, grew from 120

people to well over one million people. The reason they saw that was because Jesus' prayer was answered in their midst. Because the Spirit drew them together in a powerful way and they were one in heart and mind. Can we say that about the church today? Can we even say that about First Baptist Church – a much smaller gathering of believers – that we are one in heart and mind, that we are united in this way? Or are we missing out on something that God wants to do in our midst? I believe that First Baptist, in the years that I have been here at this church, has overall been a very united church. That is a blessing and that is a gift! That is interesting, and in some ways hard to believe in light of what is true of First Baptist Church, and true of most churches across this planet.

Let us first think about First Baptist Church:

1. We all come from Different Upbringings.

How many of you discovered that when you married your spouse that even though you share many things in common, they maybe grew up a little differently than you did? I say to people, and I mean this, "If I had grown up in Mandy's family or she had grown up in mine, I think we largely would have turned into the same people that we are today." And yet, there are things that the Johnson family does that is different than the Gustafson family. And expectations that we brought into our marriage. The reality is, when you get into a group of 400-600 people together, there is going to be a whole lot of differences in the ways we were raised. That creates potential points of conflict at the intersection where we do not necessarily understand one another in the way that we desire.

2. We come from Different Faith Backgrounds.

Some of you come from families where you were born into the church. Others of you came to Christ much, much later in life. Some of you are from different denominational backgrounds than Baptist. Some of you grew up with a different religion that was practiced in your household. Again, that could be a point of us being divided or not understanding each another, not loving one another. Not loving each other the way Jesus desires us to love each other.

3. We come from Different Socioeconomic Realities.

We have some people in our church who God has blessed immensely with wealth and prosperity. It is amazing for me to watch people in those ways be so kind and generous and compassionate and loving. And God uses them to do amazing things for his kingdom through the giving of those resources. And, we have some in our church who struggle to get by. They live check to check, and that is just the reality that they live in. We come together and it would be easy for those realities to divide us. Some of those who are well off might not be real comfortable interacting with some of those who do not have as much. And some of those who do not have as much might not be quite so comfortable interacting and building a relationship with those who have much. Yet, the reality is that it is a beautiful thing! We see in the New Testament. We see in the early church that poverty was eradicated in the church because of the generosity of God's people in the way that they treated one another, loved each other, and cared for one another. So, again, this could be a dividing point (and we see in our culture that this is a huge dividing point) yet the reality is that God desires to be united; to be one.

4. We have Different Cultural and Racial Identities.

We have got Swedes and Norwegians here! Right? How are we ever supposed to get along? And in addition to that, we do have people who have grown up in other parts of the world who lived major portions of their life in other cultures. We do have some racial diversity. Obviously, First Baptist Church is fairly reflective of the community around us when it comes to racial diversity. But thank God he has brought some brothers and sisters here of different racial backgrounds.

5. We have Different Opinions and Responses.

We have different ways that we think as individuals or that we, as a church, should be responding in a global pandemic.

The reality is all of us have become really good armchair quarterbacks of what is going on around us. Right? We have read a lot, we have watched the news a lot, we all have very sure opinions (unless you are like Gene and I) about what we should be doing as a family. Or here is how I should respond.

Or here is what should be happening at work. Or here is what should be happening in our residential area. Or here is what should be happening in the church. All those different opinions and different ways of responding could be a potential source of division.

6. We come from Different Political Ideologies.

The Sunday after I preached the message on the racial reconciliation that I believe God wants us to be part of His work in this world, I had lots of great conversations with a lot of people. I had conversation with one of our brothers and he said, “Jared, I pray for you because we have many in our church who are more of a conservative republican bend, and we have some in our church who are of a very strong democratic, more liberal bend. And the reality is, that is a hard church to minister within.” I said, “You know what? That is one of our greatest strengths!” One of our greatest strengths is the fact that we come together as one body to worship one Lord, Jesus Christ, even though we have different perspectives and understandings of the best ways of governing this land of ours. We need to come together in all these ways. We need to come together as one despite the different ways that Satan would want to bring division in the church.

We see this in the world around us. We see this in the culture around us. So much division! So much anger, strife, hatred, naming, and blaming! There is so much ugliness going on in the world around us. And the church must be different. The church must be a place where despite all these realities and differences, that we love one another as Jesus has loved us. That we come together united in the name of Jesus Christ ready to bless and serve and care for one another and reach out with the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world around us.

We have to be one. I believe this is one of the most powerful areas that we, as the church, can be a light in this world. That we are one by the power of the Holy Spirit if we worship God. God desires us to be one in heart and mind! God desires you and me to be one in heart and mind. God desires us, and Jesus prayed that we would experience complete unity – that we would be one as He and the Father are one!

Again, that statement is so familiar to so many of us that it easily goes in one ear and out the other without rattling around too much in our brain. But think of this! Almighty God, who has existed 3 in 1 for all eternity – like Jesus is literally part of the Father, and the Father part of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit part of both of them, and vice versa – they are three unique, distinct beings and yet they are one at the exact same time. And Jesus prays for that kind of oneness for you and for me. This is a lofty goal and calling! This is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is only possible through a supernatural work of our God.

We need to understand that unity comes from the Holy Spirit. And, at the exact same time, unity requires an effort on our part to be willing and ready to bend a knee to Jesus Christ and allow the Spirit to have His way in us. Because the problem is this. Though unity is a gift from the Holy Spirit, often times we get in the way of experiencing the full blessing of that unity that the Spirit wants to bring into our lives corporately as the body of Christ.

Let us look at a few passages that can hopefully serve as an inspiration and reminder in terms of the role that we play in seeing God's unity on display in and through the church in these times and at all times. In John 15, Jesus is talking to his disciples just before he gave his life on the cross.

John 15:9-13

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

So, the first thing that we need if we are going to experience the unity that God has for us, if we are going to be an active participant in that, is that we need more Jesus! You need more Jesus. I need more Jesus. The more Jesus we have filling our hearts and minds, leading and guiding and directing us, the more Jesus is present

in our lives through the Holy Spirit, the more that we give the Holy Spirit control, the greater unity we will experience as a body of believers. Jesus said earlier in that same passage when he was speaking with his disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” **John 15:5**

Apart from Jesus, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, there will not be unity in the body of believers. And apart from us yielding to Jesus and allowing the Holy Spirit to have control, there will not be unity in the body of believers. We all, simultaneously, have to bend our knee to Jesus Christ, profess Him and live with Him as Lord and Savior, as King and Ruler over our hearts, our minds, our bodies, our lives. And in doing so, as we seek Jesus more and more fully in control of our lives, that is when we will experience the kind of unity that God desires to bring between you and me and everyone else who confesses the name of Jesus Christ. We need more Jesus.

We also need more love. Again, love cannot happen apart from the Holy Spirit having control. Jesus in the text says, “Love each other as I have loved you.” As the Holy Spirit has greater sway in our lives, that allows us to love, serve, and care for the people around us more naturally. People who are part of this church family. People who are out in this community. It is the presence of Jesus, the power of Jesus, and the work of Jesus that allows us to love one another as Jesus has loved us. And Jesus gave his life for us. Right?

One of the things I do in weddings often when we are looking at the Ephesians passage is to talk about where men ought to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Well, guess what husband? That means you die every single day to yourself in order to love and serve your wife. And this is an invitation for all of us as the bride of Christ to die to our lives in order to love one another in the ways that God desires us to love one another. Jesus was the ultimate example. He gave his life for his friends. He has called us friend, and yet the reality is that in the midst of our sin, in the midst of the depravity of our sin, we were enemies of God. Enemies of Jesus when he gave his life for you and for me. So, we need more Jesus and we need more love.

I am going to ask you to open the Bible to Philippians 2 because we are going to look at a few things that come out of this passage as we look at Jesus as the example for us.

Philippians 2:1-11

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So, we need more Jesus. We need more love. Another thing that we need to experience more and more of the unity that God desires to have among us is more grace.

I shared almost two weeks ago the plan of how we are going to come back together to worship Jesus, and we continue to work on this plan and develop it in the weeks and months ahead. Who knows what is going to happen in the community in the weeks and months ahead? So, we are trying to remain nimble, flexible, and adjust. We thank you for your love and your patience and your prayer. Thank you for so many of you who have reached out to a pastor or who have talked to a board member or other pastoral staff to say, "We know this is hard and we are praying for you and we love you! We are thankful for the leadership that you are providing."

Yet, the reality is, some of us have different opinions as far as how we think this should be happening. We have some in our church family who have literally said to members of the staff, "If we are required to wear masks, I am not going to be there as one of the things that I love is the opportunity to really have that fellowship and see people smile and to be able to communicate in a way that is meaningful to me. So, if masks are required, I am not going to be there."

Conversely, this past week I received an anonymous letter from long-time members here at First Baptist Church who were really critical and really upset that we did not say, "Everyone who steps foot inside First Baptist Church must have a mask on. Period." I was hurt by this letter because they insinuated, they claimed that "Well, I guess there are big box retailers who care more about me than my own church does." So you have these polar extremes and what we have attempted to do as a leadership of First Baptist is to embrace the complexity in the middle where we provide a worship space for those who need that extra safety and security and know that everyone around them will have a mask on. And at the same time try to provide a place for those who have small children. Many of you have had children at some point in the past, and you have grandchildren today. You know, if you had three kids ages 3, 5, and 7 can you imagine trying to keep a mask on them for an hour-long worship service? We are trying to be thoughtful of everyone. We are trying to love everyone. We are trying to provide a way for everyone who wants to come to First Baptist to worship the Lord to do so in a way that is meaningful to them. That provides an opportunity for them to do that.

But you know what? That complex area in the middle causes people on both extremes to think, “Well, my church is out to lunch.” Or “I don’t really like the decisions they are making.” Or “I am opposed to this or to that.” Here is what I would ask of you. Please give us grace. We need a lot of grace! We are doing our best. And I know that all of you in your own life with your immediate family and extended family, with your friends, you are doing your best. We are all doing our best to love and serve God in a very unique and challenging season of life and to love and serve the people around us.

I do not claim that anything that I helped develop is absolutely 100% the right way and infallible. Or anything like that. That is why we have welcomed many times for you to offer thoughts, input, feedback, opinions because we want to honor you and love you and serve you as best we can. But let’s all offer one another a whole lot of grace in this season. Because apart from that there will not be unity. And Satan would love to divide us. That is how the church is destroyed – when we turn on one another and treat one another as enemies rather than brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. So, let us be full of the grace of God and lavish that grace on one another as we move forward together.

We also need more humility. This is an area where I think a lot of us, hopefully, are leading in in our circle of friends, in our family, in our community. You know, it is easy to feel like “Well, we have got four months of this under our belt and we have listened to this expert, and this doctor, and this talking ad and so I know how this should work. I know what we should be doing as a nation, or I know what we should be doing as a family.” Let us just be humble like Jesus. Let’s come with our ideas and let’s have an understanding of how we think things should happen, but let’s hold those things very loosely and say “God, I am so thankful that you are in control! That you are sovereign. That I do not have to figure this all out. That I do not have to have all the answers. That my perspective does not have to be the exact right perspective because I trust in you. I cling to the One who knows that beginning from the end and the end from the beginning. And I walk with you.”

Let us be a humble people who model the humility of Jesus Christ.

Let us also be a people who value others above yourself. Let me just talk about masks a little bit more. Some of us have the perception that everyone should wear masks everywhere they go, and that is our landing spot. And that is an okay place to land. And yet, behind our mask as we are walking in the community, we are looking at people and judging them or thinking down about them or in our minds are saying, "You do not love people. You do not care about people." I believe that if Jesus had a mask on and was walking about, He would look on everyone with compassion and love.

And on the flip side of that, maybe you are someone who thinks this whole thing is a hoax and the mask is not effective anyway. It is just dumb that we have to wear masks. So, we walk around feeling like we are the liberated ones, we are the right ones and we are looking at people wearing masks and think, "How silly that they are doing this. It is not effective. The science is all over the map. It is just silly and meaningless, and I wish they would just take that dumb thing off." So, we are doing the exact same thing only from the opposite perspective.

Instead, let us be like Jesus. Let us value others above yourself. It is okay for you to land somewhere and say, "Here is what I think is the best way forward." But to do so with the attitude of "I want to love and serve and have compassion on everyone whether they are in the same boat or not." The masks are just one issue. There are a thousand ways that we can value others above ourselves on a day-to-day basis. That is the heart of Jesus. That is the call of Jesus. That will produce in us more and more unity.

Finally, more serving and laying down of our lives. Jesus served all of humanity and He calls His church to serve all of humanity. There is supposed to be something special and unique about the love that exists between brothers and sisters in Christ. There is supposed to be something that goes above and beyond the ways that we are able to love the world around us because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in you and in me. And yet, we are not only supposed to love one another as Jesus has loved us, we are supposed to love the world around us by laying down our lives as Jesus gave up his life for you and for me and for everyone in the world.

Again, an incredibly high calling for all of us. But if we walk in these ways and have a growing understanding of the presence of Jesus in our life, are submissive and humble before Him, and allow the Holy Spirit to have greater and greater control over our life, and if we are more full of love, grace, and more humble, value others above ourselves and begin serving and laying down our lives in the way that Jesus calls us to, God will do the miraculous in our presence again. God will do the miraculous in and through you and me because we will experience a unity that Jesus says will prove to the world that He was sent by the Father. Our unity is an integral part of the Gospel message going forward. So, let us be reminded what Jesus said as he was praying to his Father.

“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” – Jesus

The way the world knows that Jesus is the Messiah, that it is the love of the Father that we are recipients of, is when we are one. When we are united. Thank God that the Holy Spirit does the heavy lifting and let us join Him in these ways by growing in and becoming more like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Jesus, we are so utterly dependent on you. Holy Spirit, we are desperate for you to have your way in us. We cannot do any of these things on our own. The unity that you desire for us, Lord, is a gift from you. It is something that the Holy Spirit does in the hearts and lives and minds of all believers. And yet, Lord, there are so many ways that we get in the way of experiencing that full unity that you desire of us. We repent of those attitudes, thoughts, and ways. We ask you, Lord, that you would help us to walk with you in order to experience more of the unity that you have given to us as a gift so that the world will know that you are the sent one of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and the world will know that the Heavenly Father loves us and loves all people. He desires that none would perish apart from that life-saving relationship with Jesus Christ. We thank you in the midst of these difficult days that you are with us and that you have united us as one. We pray this in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.