

*That They May Know You*

**John 17**

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Businesses, hospitals, and schools talk about their mission. It's common for organizations to define their Mission, Vision, Values, Strategy. Sometimes you'll see posters or framed documents listing mission, vision, and values. Someone has said that a mission statement is "a long, awkward sentence that demonstrates management's inability to think clearly. All good companies have one" (Unknown, from *Smile Notes*).

In the church, we talk about our mission, vision, values, and strategy as well. The mission of the United Methodist Church is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (*The Book of Discipline of the UMC 2016*, paragraph 120).

For some time here at First UMC we've talked about the "head, heart, and hands of Christ." I think that describes our vision or goal—what we want to be: the body of Christ in action here.

Maybe we need to be more specific about what we do. Some weeks ago, I was talking about our legacy and mentioned a statement from another church I once read. I'm sure many churches use something similar. Following their mission statement, they say their method is "Helping people know Christ, grow in Christ, and go in Christ" (St. Andrew's UMC, Oklahoma City, <http://saokc.org/know-grow-go.html>). Know, Grow, Go. We could borrow that to talk about how we do our mission. That's what we're exploring today and the next two weeks.

Some time ago, I read a book called *Does Your Church Have a Prayer?* The short answer is, Yes! In John 17, Jesus prayed for us as he prayed for his disciples who represent the entire church. He also prayed for us as he prayed for all who would believe through the disciples' message. At the same time, Jesus shows us how to pray. He's our model for relationship and conversation with God the Father. Jesus shows us how to know God and makes it possible for us to know God.

If Jesus is praying, I want to get in on it. As we listen to Jesus' prayer we can learn more about our praying and our living. Can you imagine Jesus

praying anything except the Father's will? If we can listen to Jesus praying, we can join him in that prayer. We can pray with confidence and devote ourselves to the things that fulfill what Jesus prays.

This prayer in John 17 is a prayer of the union or communion of God the Son and God the Father. Jesus prays aloud so the disciples—and we—may share in this union. Prayer flows out of that communion. It starts with God, involves us and then returns to God.

Let's look at what Jesus prayed and prays for us in his relationship with God the Father.

First, Jesus announces that "the hour" has come and that he has fulfilled the work the Father had given to him. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus kept saying, "My hour is not yet." The time of fulfillment was in the future. But now the time has arrived.

Then Jesus prays for himself. He prays that the Father would glorify him so that he might glorify the Father. He asks to return to the glory he shared with the Father before the Incarnation, even before the world's creation. Through the glory of the cross and resurrection, Jesus enters again into God's eternal glory.

The meaning of "glory" has several facets. In this Gospel glory is "a visible manifestation of majesty through acts of power" (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Anchor Bible*). The majesty of God shines through Jesus. That glory is to continue shining through the followers of Jesus.

Another way of saying this is that Jesus *reveals* God. He says that eternal life is *knowing God and Jesus Christ whom the Father has sent*. Eternal life is not some abstract thing in the far-off future. It's a relationship—a relationship with God whom we know through Jesus.

Jesus says throughout the prayer: "I have revealed your name—I have brought you glory on earth—I have given them your word—I have made your name known."

A name represents a person. In the Bible, name is character. Jesus reveals God's character. He shows us that God *is* and that God is holy and righteous, majestic and powerful, a Father who loves and creates and redeems and heals. Jesus makes God known through his miraculous signs,

his teaching, and, ultimately, through his death and resurrection. As we come to Jesus we can know God. And in knowing God we have eternal life.

The themes of glory and revelation are essential to the ministry of Jesus. Based on these, Jesus makes some specific requests for his people.

He prays for our *protection* (vv. 11, 12, 15). Jesus protected his disciples by the name God gave him. He asks the Father to keep protecting them—and us—by that name.

“The name” here refers to “I AM”—the self-disclosure of God that Jesus used throughout the gospel. The Lord himself, the great I AM, protects us and keeps us as we know him and live in relationship with him.

Why do we need protecting? Because knowing God in Jesus doesn’t remove us from the pressure and pain of living in the world. But it does enable us to overcome the world. “The world” here includes the people and the systems that rebel against God and reject Jesus. Jesus prays, “Don’t take them out of the world, but protect them from the evil one.” We are not of the world. We no longer belong to the world. Our loyalty is not to the world. The world doesn’t define who we are or give us meaning and purpose. To survive here, we must live in relationship with God. That’s where our protection is.

At this point in the prayer, the world is the enemy—a source of hostility and persecution for God’s people. It resists God. Jesus had told the disciples earlier not to be surprised if the world hated them, but to remember that it hated him first. “If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you ...” (16:18-20).

Will Willimon is a retired UM bishop. For many years he was the chaplain at Duke University. He tells about a student who called him early one Monday morning needing to talk. The young man was in terrible shape. He had wandered around the campus all night, crying most of the time.

When Will asked him what was wrong, he described what he called, “the worst night of my life.” Following their Sunday night fraternity meeting,

the men sat around and talked about what they did over the weekend. During a party on Saturday, this young man had gone upstairs to get something from a "brother's" room and he walked in on a couple who were being intimate.

He just closed the door and went back downstairs, saying nothing. But during the time of sharing after the Sunday meeting, someone said, "I understand that Mr. Christian got a real eyeful last night." Then they all began to laugh. But he said it wasn't a good, friendly laugh; it was cold, cruel, mean laughter. They were saying things like, "You won't see nothin' like that in church!" and "Better go confess to the priest!"

The young man said, "I tried to recover, tried to say something light, but I couldn't. They hate me! They were serious. I walked out of the meeting and stood outside and wept. I've never been treated like that in my life."

Willimon said, "That's amazing. You're not the greatest Christian in the world, are you? You don't know the Bible that well. Don't know much theology."

"You know me. I don't know anything."

"And yet, even a Christian like you, in the right environment, can be recognized as a threat, can be persecuted. There was a time in the church's history when to be a martyr, a witness, you had to be good at preaching, had to be some sort of a saint. These days, even a guy like you can be a witness, in the right hands" (*Pastor* 259-260; originally in *Where Resident Aliens Live* 27-28).

Jesus tells the disciples that the world's hostility is not cause for sadness. The promise of Jesus that God will protect us gives disciples fullness of joy.

*Joy* is something else Jesus prays for us to have. Deep, abiding joy in spite of our circumstances is a gift of God's grace. We can rejoice no matter what. How can we be glum when we know what Jesus has done for us, what he gives us, what he's praying for us?

Jesus goes on to pray for our *sanctification*. He says, "For them I sanctify/consecrate/dedicate myself." Jesus consecrates himself as the high priest would before going into the Holy of Holies to make atonement. He

dedicates himself as a priest would dedicate a sacrifice. Jesus is both high priest and sacrifice. He gives himself. He lays down his own life. In this way he glorifies God. This is how he gives eternal life through knowing God.

We can see the purpose of Jesus' sacrifice in several phrases that follow his prayer of dedication.

- "that they too may be truly sanctified"

To sanctify means to make holy, to set apart. In the Bible whatever is sanctified and holy belongs to God. Jesus wants his followers to be people of distinction, to know that we belong to God.

The Father consecrated Jesus and sent him into the world. Now Jesus prays for the disciples to be consecrated and sent into the world.

Jesus prays two more purposes or results of his sacrifice and our sanctification: *unity* and *mission*.

- "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you"
- "that they may be one as we are one"
- "that they may be completely one"

Jesus prays that his followers may be united. The model for our unity is the relationship between Jesus and God the Father. We're invited to share in the love and glory of God—and to share it together, to love each other. Love is what unites us: Knowing we are loved by God, loving God in return, and loving each other.

An older man in another church used to say, "There's nothing like a church fight." Sadly, that's true. A pastor friend of mine was going through a difficult time because of disagreements in the church about some projects they were attempting. The disagreements turned into personal attacks. It's not only our denominations and doctrines and practices that divide us. What about bickering, pettiness, competition, and pride?

But Jesus prays for our unity and his prayer will be answered. We'd better learn to love each other and know the unity that's part of sharing the eternal life we have in knowing God.

Then amazing things can happen. Jesus prays for our mission. Think about what this congregation has accomplished working together. Think of the unity, the passion, the dedication, and sacrifice that went into buying this land and constructing this building. What's next? What's God calling us to do together now? What if we applied the same unity, passion, dedication, and sacrifice to growing the church and reaching new people? More amazing things can happen.

If we've truly accepted the words and the revelation that Jesus gives, we can't keep our faith to ourselves. Jesus expects his disciples to serve and share the way he has and he prays for our protection as we face the opposition that comes when we share the faith. As Jesus left the glory of heaven to come into the world, we may have to cross some boundaries to take the good news of God's grace to others.

I recently met a couple who are associate pastors at a UMC in Tulsa. They are from Brazil and they lead the multi-cultural service at their church. Eight nationalities are represented in that multi-cultural service.

I read a story that illustrates going with Jesus across boundaries to bring God's glory and love to people. Eugene Maddox, a pastor in Florida, writes that when he was a young child and teenager, he and his mother almost always ate dinner at cafeterias. Occasionally they would be invited to dinner at her friend and employer's home. He thought those homemade meals were wonderful and those people treated him like family.

When he was about 15, in the early 70s, he and his mom and some other guests were invited there to dinner. The other two guests were a very kind woman who was elderly and somewhat crippled and her personal assistant, an African-American lady named Addie.

When it was time for dinner, the long table was filled with food. They said grace and started eating. About halfway through the meal, Eugene noticed that Addie was missing. He didn't think much of it at the time and assumed she wasn't feeling well.

On the way home he asked his mom what had happened to Addie. His mother told him to call her "Miss Addie," and then told him what had happened. Her answer shocked him. Their hostess's sister, who had cooked the meal, had grown up with the tradition that black and white people didn't eat together at the same table. And so Miss Addie had been told to eat by herself in a separate room.

Neither Eugene nor his mother could believe this had happened in this home that they had come to love and respect, and they both hurt for Miss Addie. They felt some guilt and shame because they'd been part of that meal.

Three days later when he came home from school he got another shock. His mom was cooking a meal at home. Equally amazing, she wasn't making beef stew. Beef stew was the only thing he knew his mom could make. But that night she was making a roast, and the dining room table was set as fancy as he had ever seen.

Eugene asked, "Mom, what's going on?"

She replied, "I have invited Miss Addie for dinner."

He says that night was the most wonderful dinner he ever had with his mother, and Miss Addie was a pleasant guest, who even brought them a set of guest towels for a gift. No Christmas or birthday present his mother ever gave him compared to that night. As she sat at that table, she was 100 feet tall in his eyes. Three years later she died, but the memory of that night lived on. Though he didn't recognize it at the time, his mother had given him a living picture of grace, of God's heart, and God's great table (Eugene A. Maddox, Palatka, Florida, *Preaching Today*).

Jesus wants us to be in relationship with him and the Father, "so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (21b). The church's unity is also in order that the world may know that the Father sent Jesus and that the Father loves the followers of Jesus as he loves Jesus (23b).

The world, which earlier was seen as the hostile source of persecution, is now the object of God's loving purpose and our mission. As followers of Jesus are in the world, we're to be witnesses to the world. Our dedication to God, our unity, our love confronts the world with God's love and God's call to find life in Jesus. If people respond positively, they find God's life and

love for themselves. If they reject God's offer, the very witness they've heard will judge them.

As Jesus concludes his prayer, he says, "I will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me will be in them and that I myself may be in them." How will Jesus continue to make the Father known? How will Jesus be in us? The Holy Spirit isn't mentioned in this prayer, but Jesus must be referring to the Spirit's work here. Jesus will continue to make the Father known in the world through the Spirit and through his disciples.

Jesus is praying that you will come to know God the Father right now. Won't you come to him and find life in knowing him?

Jesus is praying that we would be completely dedicated to God. Will we stop holding back and give ourselves to him?

Jesus is praying that we would be one; that, given all our differences, we would love each other and share together our relationship with God. Will we be part of the answer to Jesus' prayer?

Jesus is praying that we would go into the world as witnesses for the love and glory and life of God. Will we go? Will we let others see Jesus in us?