

JOHN 17:20-23

I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.

I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are—I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me.

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

This prayer of Jesus, the High Priestly Prayer has been the subject of significant controversy. Part of it is what Jesus prays for. He prays for unity among his followers. Does that mean that we have work to do, to maintain unity? Or does that mean that we have nothing to worry about? Jesus has it under control. The sad thing is that throughout the history of Christianity we have been everything but unified.

Even our little group of Jesus' followers find it difficult to maintain a modicum of agreement and unity. The joke states that where there are four Rabbis there are eight opinions. I think we Lutherans believe that

there is only one opinion that matters and its mine.

There are two thoughts from the prayer which really stimulate my interest. One is how Jesus speaks about unity. "You are in me and I am in you!" This is the way that Jesus speaks right throughout the Gospel of John. Elsewhere Jesus is even more direct with Thomas: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). I understand the significance of unity; however, I struggle to understand the preciseness of the language and the metaphysical image. This confusion becomes even more significant when Jesus goes on to describe the relationships that we share in exactly the same language.

So that they may be one, as we are—I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one.

The second thought that I often come back to is the insignificance of the group of disciples balanced against the 'glory' of the Father. Sometimes glory seems to mean the magnificent presence of God. Sometimes it seems to mean giving honour to God. What does 'glory' mean in this context? Jesus gave glory to the Father 'simply' by doing what the Father asked of him. Earlier in John's Gospel, when Jesus asks the Father to give him glory, he was referring to his death on the cross. Here the will of the Father is fulfilled, and God's purposes for humanity are reaching their peak. (The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus are almost an after-thought, the icing on top of the cake.)

But in this prayer Jesus also talks about returning to the glory he shared with the Father, before coming to earth. Here glory almost certainly means the magnificent presence of God. However, when Jesus is talking about you and I seeing God's glory, it may well be happening within the gathering and the living of the small community of disciples. We live and experience the glory of God. Maybe we are part of that glory.

Your shepherd-servant and brother in Christ.

Pastor Geoff