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In Union for the World

John 17.20-26

Series: Signs of Life

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Rev. Andrew Hawkins, Senior Pastor

I. Fractured Christendom

- A. If you start to think of the unity of the Christian church, you can get depressed in a hurry
 - 1. Picture of what various denominations think of other denominations
 - a. 10 families of denominations
 - 2. It's really worse than that
 - a. There are multiple variations of each of those denominational families
 - b. Distinguishable by doctrinal distinctives, organization, and authority – as well as by geography and culture
 - 3. Estimated that there are 41,000 distinct denominations
- B. It wasn't always that way
 - 1. Essentially one church until the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) dealing with the natures of Christ
 - a. Sprung off the Assyrian Church and the monophysite church (Oriental Orthodox)
 - 2. Great Schism – 11th Century
 - a. Western – Roman Catholicism
 - b. Eastern Orthodoxy
 - 3. 16th Century Reformation
 - a. All bets were off – no hope of ecclesiastical unity
 - b. Reformed Protestantism
 - c. Anabaptism
 - d. Anglicanism
 - 4. Without any central ecclesiastical governing body – denominations multiplied
- C. Will the Church of Jesus Christ ever be united again?
 - 1. Doesn't appear to be headed in that direction, even remotely
 - 2. John White: Considering all the divisions that have plagued Christendom for two thousand years, it is amazing that God has continued to use the church to extend his kingdom.
- D. All the more remarkable when we observe that Jesus in His great prayer to the Father in John 17 makes unity a primary focus of His prayer
 - 1. When you think that if the Father would answer anyone's prayer, it would be the prayer of His own Son
 - 2. Perhaps it is we who misunderstand what genuine Christian unity is really

all about

E. **John 17:20–26** (ESV) —

1. 20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be **one**, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
2. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be **one** even as we are **one**, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly **one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.
3. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
4. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.
5. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

II. **The Lord’s Prayer**

A. But let’s back up – remember what we have learned so far

B. This is **The Real Lord’s Prayer**

1. What we know as the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew 6 and Luke 11 is really our Lord’s instruction on prayer
 - a. Given in response to the disciples’ request to Jesus to teach them to pray
 - b. That Lord’s Prayer is a wonderful framework for our praying
 - c. While we use it from time to time as a prayer, it is better used as a guide for how to pray in the will of God
2. But this prayer in John 17 is the only substantive prayer of Jesus that was prayed in the presence of His disciples so the disciples would remember and record its content
 - a. So it is truly the Lord’s Prayer

C. And for whom is the Lord praying?

1. First, **He prays for Himself**
2. Then **He prays for His disciples**
 - a. Both for those who are present with Him – the 11 in the Upper Room just before His betrayal and subsequent crucifixion
 - b. But also for all disciples throughout history from that time forward
 - c. **John 17:20** (ESV) — 20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...”
 - d. That includes you and me!
3. But it is also important to recognize who Jesus does not pray for
 - a. **He is not praying for the world**
 - b. **John 17:9** (ESV) — 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for

the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

- c. He makes a clear distinction between the world and the Church – between believers and unbelievers
- d. He is praying for believers
- e. He is not praying for the world
- 4. So essentially Jesus is praying for the Church
 - a. Which makes this prayer an incredibly important prayer for us to consider
- 5. And up to now, we have been greatly encouraged by its content
 - a. But when we get to Jesus’ prayer for unity – well, we find ourselves scratching our heads a bit
 - b. The impression is that the opposite of unity is what characterizes the Church in the present age

III. **The First Petition: Glory**

- A. In the first petition Jesus prays for Himself
 - 1. **John 17:1** (ESV) — 1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...
- B. We recognized two aspects of His prayer that the Father glorify Him
 - 1. Referring to the **His crucifixion**
 - a. The crucifixion of Christ displays the nature and character of Christ like nothing else!
 - b. The love of God for a lost humanity
 - c. The grace and mercy of God in sending His Son as a sacrifice in our place
 - d. As well as the justice of God in punishing sin through our substitute
 - 2. But He also refers to **His future glory** in the presence of His Father
 - a. **John 17:5** (ESV) — 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.
- C. In that section we also learned something critically important in understanding the nature of the Church
 - 1. We learned **Salvation from God’s Perspective**
 - a. We learned how the Church comes into existence
 - 2. God the Father takes a people out of the world
 - a. And He gives them to Christ
 - 3. And the Father also gives to Christ authority over all people
 - a. So that Christ gives eternal life to all those the Father has given Him
 - 4. This is great assurance for the believer
 - a. We are saved because the Father has taken us out of the world
 - b. Given us to Christ

- c. Given Christ authority
 - d. So Christ gives eternal life to us
 - 5. All the initiative is from God
 - a. All the giving is from God and from Christ
- D. So that first petition is rich in its implications for us believers
 - 1. Even as Christ prays for Himself, that He would be glorified

IV. **The Second Petition: Safety**

- A. The second petition is for safety
- B. The world is the nasty place, a dangerous place, a morally disintegrating place
 - 1. Jesus is leaving the world
 - 2. He is giving eternal life to those the Father has given Him
 - 3. But He is leaving these believers in this nasty world
- C. Believers are vulnerable in this world
 - 1. Temptations everywhere
 - 2. Enemy of our souls seeks to derail our train to the promised land
 - 3. The remnants of our sinful nature still rears its ugly head
 - 4. So from inside and out – we are in danger in this world
 - 5. And yet, Jesus leaves us here
- D. So He prays to the Father that we be kept safe
 - 1. **John 17:11** (ESV) — 11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.
 - 2. Jesus tells the Father that while He was with them, He kept them safe
 - a. And He lost none while He was with them
 - 3. Now that He is leaving He asks the Father to do the same
- E. This is a spiritual safety
 - 1. It does not mean we would be free from trouble, persecution or oppression
 - 2. But it does mean that the Father will assure us that He will keep us under the authority of His name
 - a. That we will still know Christ as Lord
 - b. And that He will carry us to an eternity in the presence of Christ

V. **The Third Petition: Sanctify**

- A. And then the third petition tells us how the Father will do that
 - 1. Jesus prays that we will be sanctified
 - a. Set apart for holy use
 - b. And made genuinely holy, transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus through the process of sanctification
- B. And the way that happens is through the ministry of the word
 - 1. **John 17:17** (ESV) — 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
- C. That's how we grow in Christ, that's how we're sanctified
 - 1. Through being immersed in the Word of God
 - a. Through individual study
 - b. Through group studies

- c. Through the preaching and teaching of the Word
- d. Through means like Study with the Pastor
- D. And it is through sanctification that the Father keeps us, protects us, provides safe passage to eternity
- E. So where we come to the final petitions in this great prayer

VI. The Fourth Petition: Unity

- A. The fourth petition is for unity
 - 1. **John 17:20–23** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be **one**, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
 - b. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be **one** even as we are **one**, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly **one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.
 - 2. This is not the first time the issue of unity has come up
 - a. **John 17:11** (ESV) — 11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be **one**, even as we are **one**.
 - b. Even the Father’s safety, the Father keeping, is meant to create unity in the Church
 - c. And as we have seen that sanctification through the word is the means by which the Father keeps those He’s given to Christ, the sanctification that comes through the word is meant to create unity
 - 3. But what kind of unity does Jesus have in mind?
 - a. What would Jesus say about our 41,000 denominations?
 - b. What would Jesus say about our fractured Christendom?
- B. **Unity is not...**
 - 1. **Organizational**
 - a. Here’s where we misunderstand true biblical unity
 - b. We think that in order for there to be unity in the Church, we must be organized under one institutional structure
 - c. That’s not what Jesus has in mind at all
 - d. **John 17:21** (ESV) — 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
 - e. The issue is relational, not structural at all
 - f. In the early days of the church there was a great deal of vitality, growth, and expansion – but little real organizational unity
 - g. Later, once Constantine was converted and declared Christianity to be the religion of the Roman Empire, the church became increasingly organized and centralized

- h. And during the Middle Ages the was pretty much one united ecclesiastical body
 - i. But those were not the times of great fruitfulness
 - j. There were not large expansions of the faith; people were not drawn increasingly to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ
 - k. Spurgeon: (speaking of the Church in the Middle Ages) The world was persuaded that God had nothing to do with that great crushing, tyrannous, superstitious, ignorant thing which called itself Christianity; and thinking men became infidels, and it was the hardest possible thing to find a genuine intelligent believer north, south, east, or west.
 - l. So organizational unity really had nothing to do with the kind of unity Jesus was praying for
 - m. Because, as we'll see, the unity Jesus prayed for would have vast influences for the growth and expansion of genuine Christian faith
 - n. Perhaps we get too exercised about the existence of so many denominations
2. **Conformity**
- a. The kind of unity Jesus has in mind is not conformity either
 - b. That is, that all Christians and all churches would be exactly alike
 - c. In fact, the kind of unity the Bible calls for is a unity in diversity
 - d. We would find that within the local church, as well as between local churches
3. **Ephesians 4:1–16** (ESV) —
- a. 1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
 - b. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
 - c. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
 - d. 8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."
 - e. 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?)
 - f. 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)
 - g. 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to

mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

- h. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
 - i. Keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is accomplished in the local church through the beauty of diversity
 - j. Even different churches, in different communities, in different cultures will clearly have different expressions
 - k. That's why we have a mission statement for TVC
 - l. It's consistent and congruent with the mission of the church at large – the Great Commission
 - m. But it has unique application here to this church, in this community, of seniors
4. So the unity Jesus prays for is not a unity of organization or a unity of conformity
- a. So what is Jesus praying for?

C. **Unity is...**

- 1. The unity Jesus is praying for is **Spiritual and Relational**
 - a. It is rooted in the kind of unity we find in the Godhead
- 2. **John 17:21** (ESV) — 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us...
- 3. The unity Jesus is praying for is the kind of unity that exists with the Father and the Son
 - a. They are united in their nature, in their character, in their purpose, in their strategy
 - b. Even though they have different roles
 - c. The Father is the Creator; Jesus is the Redeemer, the Son of God incarnate; the Spirit is the sanctifier
 - d. But they, though three in person, are one
- 4. In the same way, the unity Jesus prays for is a spiritual unity
 - a. It involves a genuine spiritual union with Jesus Christ
 - b. **John 17:23** (ESV) — 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one...
- 5. The more we grow, through sanctification by the Word, the more we become like Christ
 - a. And the more all of us grow into the likeness of Christ, the more united we'll be
- 6. **Romans 6:3–4** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

- b. 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
- 7. **Romans 6:5–8** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
 - b. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.
 - c. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.
 - d. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
- 8. It is our spiritual union with Christ that provides for genuine unity in the body of Christ
- 9. That unity, of course, has a content; we saw that in the Ephesians passage
 - a. **Ephesians 4:4–6** (ESV) — 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- 10. **1 Corinthians 15:3–4** (ESV) — 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...
- 11. Central truths of the Christian faith help to define genuine unity – which we learn from the sanctification that comes from the Word
 - a. Incarnation: **1 John 4:2–3** (ESV) — 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God...
- 12. That’s why we at TVC, and in the CMA denomination, have fellowship with all those who hold to the historic, orthodox Christian faith
 - a. “Faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” (**Jude 3**)
- 13. Most of those 41,000 denominations hold to those orthodox truths that the Church has recognized as coming from the apostles through the scriptures
 - a. While they differ in many other ways
 - b. Organizational structure
 - c. Local church authority
 - d. Mission emphasis
 - e. Worship style
 - f. Cultural engagement
- 14. As we grow in Christ we share a unity with Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, most Pentecostals, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and others – as long as they believe in the biblical Jesus, and trust Jesus alone for their personal salvation
 - a. Even though they may do things the way we do them

15. That's the kind of unity Jesus prays for
 - a. And it is not out of reach
 - b. And is not dependent on an institutional organization

D. **Unity's purpose**

1. And here's the most amazing aspect of Jesus' prayer for unity – its purpose
2. **John 17:21** (ESV) — 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
3. **John 17:23** (ESV) — 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.
4. The world will know whether Jesus came from the Father based on the answer to Jesus' prayer for unity
5. If we are always at each other's throats, always criticizing each other and other groups, the world will look at us and conclude that Jesus is not from the Father
6. But if we, growing in Christlikeness, also grow in unity with our brothers and sisters – in our own church, and with believers in other churches
7. Then the world will conclude that the Father has sent the Son
 - a. And that the Father has loved those whom He has taken out of the world and given to Christ
8. Reminiscent of another passage in John
 - a. **John 13:34–35** (ESV) — 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
9. Unity, love – these are the marks of the Christian
 - a. They are the way the message of the gospel effectively communicates to the world
10. The purpose of unity is evangelistic and missional
11. If we want to fulfill our mission, we must seek to love one another, and commit ourselves to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

E. **Unity's provision**

1. **John 17:22** (ESV) — 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one...
2. This is an astonishing statement
 - a. The Father has given glory to the Son – the glory that the Son has displayed during His earthly ministry
 - b. Jesus says the He has given that same glory to His disciples
3. In our union with Jesus, we are made partakers of His glory
 - a. Do you realize how significant that is?
 - b. That the very nature and character of God is, in some measure, demonstrably ours
4. The apostles understood the significance of this extraordinary truth

- a. **2 Peter 1:3-4** (ESV) — 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.
- b. Partakers of the Divine Nature
- 5. That doesn't make us Christ
 - a. We still battle with our sinful nature while we are in this world
 - b. But it does mean that through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, we now live with the capacity for holiness
- 6. Jesus says that He has given us that glory
 - a. So that we may be one

VII. **The Fifth Petition: Glory**

- A. If that isn't enough to blow your mind, listen to the final petition in Jesus' prayer
- B. **John 17:24** (ESV) —
 - 1. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
- C. This prayer ends where it began – with Jesus praying for the glory of God
 - 1. He prayed that He would have the glory He had with the Father before the world existed
 - a. The full effulgence of the glory of God in heaven
 - 2. And now He prays we would experience that same glory with Him!
 - 3. That those whom the Father has given to the Son would ultimately experience the glory that the Son has had from eternity past in the presence of the Father
- D. In fact, the verb in this verse is not expressed strongly enough in the ESV – “Father, I desire that they...”
 - 1. Desire – not just that Jesus wishes that this would be the case
 - 2. KJV – I will
 - 3. This is strongly stated – Jesus fully expects the Father to answer this prayer affirmatively!
- E. This brings the salvation from God's perspective to its truly glorious conclusion
 - 1. The Father takes a people out of the world
 - 2. The Father gives those people to Christ
 - 3. The Father gives Christ the authority over all people to give eternal life to all those whom the Father gives to Christ
 - 4. Christ gives eternal life to all those given to Him by the Father
 - 5. The Father keeps those given to Christ in the name of the Father, through sanctification by the word of God
 - 6. Through sanctification He brings unity to the Church
 - 7. And He brings the Church home to an eternity to experience the glory that

the Son had with the Father from all eternity

- F. What an expansive picture of the salvation God has prepared for those who love Him, who are those who are loved by God from the foundation of the world

VIII. **The Grand Summation**

- A. **John 17:25–26** (ESV) —

1. 25 “O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.
2. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

- B. It all comes together

1. The world does not know God
 - a. But those the Father has taken out of the world, those who believe, they know that the Father has sent the Son
 - b. They include us who believe
 - c. Christ has made Himself known to us
2. So that the love of the Father for the Son will be in us
 - a. Just as Jesus dwells in us by His Spirit

- C. What an incredible prayer?

1. Do you believe it?