

“Make Your Name Known”

John 17: 20-26

As we read our text for this Sunday, we realize that there is something different about it. It is not a “normal” Scripture reading. It doesn’t have any parables or preaching. Jesus isn’t teaching to a large crowd. It is not even a typical Bible story where we have a hero or heroine saving the people of God. Rather, in this text, we have Jesus gathered in a upper room with his disciples. Once again, He is not teaching them. He is not preaching to him. Instead, he is praying for them. He is praying over them. In this text, Jesus is praying with his disciples.

Isn’t that amazing to think about, that on his last night with his disciples, Jesus wasn’t giving his disciples any last minute instructions. Instead, he lifts them up in prayer. He surrounds them with prayer, asking for clarity of vision, asking for strength for the journey ahead. Jesus prays to God that his followers may always be centered in the presence of God, that they know that the Kingdom of God is so much bigger than just the ones gathered around that Table.

In this prayer, Jesus asks God to always remind the disciples that they are connected to as a community of believers. They are connected to all the believers in the past, all the believers in the present and connected to all those who will come

in the future. In this prayer, Jesus asks God to always remind the disciples that they will never be alone. They are a community-strengthened by one another, supported by one another, and loved by one another. They are a community first and foremost.

As I have lived with this text this past week, I have come to the realization that in the church we use this word a lot...community. We throw it around in worship. We use it to define our missions. We use it to set the visions that guide us. As a church, and not just our church, but in the wider Church as well, we use this word, "Community" a lot. But I often wonder if we really know what it means. If we really understand the implications this word has for our words and our actions as followers of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, I think most of the time, we tend to think of "Community" as a bunch of individuals gathered in one space or one location. We even define our town as the community of Midway but let's be honest...how much interaction do we really have with the people in this town. Sure, we talk to each other at the post office and depending on how long we have lived in this town, we may know more people than others do. But still I think the word "community" in this particular incidence doesn't even come close to capturing what Jesus is talking about here in his prayer when he asks that his followers be made one.

Here is why I say this: For me, what Jesus is talking about here in this instance is a deeper relationship than just saying hi at the post office. The community Jesus envisions for his disciples is of being in relationship with one another. It is filled with a sense that we need each other to survive. It is based on an understanding that my well-being depends on your well-being. The community Jesus prays for, hopes for, longs for to be lived out through his disciples, both past, present and future, goes deeper than just simply being in the same space with one another. It is an understanding that we are part of something larger than just the ones sitting here. We are part of the Body of Christ, called to work together to bring the Kingdom of God here on Earth for all of God's children. And we can't do that if we are willing to be in a real, authentic relationship with one another.

Let me explain: I want us to take a look at that word, "Community" and really see what it calling us to be as we use it in our liturgies, our mission statements, our very theological reasons for being as here as a church. Next time you get a chance, just look at our mission statement. Right there in the middle is the word, "Community". If we are going to lift this up as a practice of faith for us, then we better know what it means for our words and actions as disciples of Christ.

When I looked at this word, "Community", I couldn't help but notice that it could be divided into two parts: Com and unity. In Latin, "Com" means With. So

when we use this word, “Community”, we are really calling ourselves together “with unity”.

Now, before anyone starts thinking, I am asking us to all think alike, look alike, and act alike, let me just say I’m not. That is not the type of unity Jesus is thinking about when he calls the disciples to be one. Jesus is not asking them to be a homogenous group of people. How boring would that be!?! That certainly doesn’t reflect the diversity found in God’s creation and it certainly doesn’t reflect the diversity found in the Body of Christ.

When Jesus ask that the disciples be made one, he wants them to realize that it is not about them. It is about their connection to the whole. It is about their connection to each other through God’s grace and God’s live, a connection that binds them together and unifies them for a greater purpose-which is to make God’s name known to all the world.

As much as we like to think so, we cannot make it on our own. I know this goes against the American Dream, the dream that tells us we can all pull ourselves up by our bootstraps if we work hard enough, if we want it enough. But that is not reality. Just look around. Our world is filled with a sense of individualism and because of that, our world has never been more broken and divided. The Kingdom of God is not designed for a bunch of individuals. It is a call to become one, to

become a community with unity. We cannot truly be the Body of Christ here on Earth, working towards bringing the Kingdom of God here on Earth if all we do is see ourselves as a bunch of individuals who are just in the same space or the same location together.

Here's why: The way of the world thrives on competition. It needs to step on people and oppress people in order to survive. The way of the word is only concerned with profit. It doesn't care who it destroys on its way to get there. Everything about how the world works goes against the values of the Kingdom of God. There is nothing unifying about our world. It is based on division and separation. It is based on the haves and the have nots. It is based on the need to keep people in fear.

The Kingdom of God works in a completely different way. It calls us to be one, as a community, in unity. It calls us to embody the promises of God, promises that restore and renew, promises that bring people together, even if they disagree. The Kingdom of God calls us to realize that we cannot be people of faith on our own. "We know and experience God's love and follow Jesus through our everyday relationships with those closest to us." Believe me- I know. It is hard work. But how else is this world going to know about unity and community unless we as believers of Jesus Christ embody it?

This is what Jesus knew on that night when he gathered in the upper room with his disciples. He knew that being divided as a community would be easy for his disciples and for all the others who would come along later as his followers. After all, during all the time they were with him on his travels, preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of God, all they did was argue and fight. They never really seemed to get this unity thing while they followed him around. All they did was want to know who was going to be the greatest. All they did was betray, deny and abandon him.

But still, Jesus knew that there was something more needed for the people of God than this world could offer. And it all started with his prayer that they be made one.

Jesus knew that for his disciples that being one, one in unity, one in community was difficult. He also knew there was no way they were going to do it on their own. They needed each other but more importantly, they needed God's help to do it. That's why instead of last minute instructions, Jesus lifted them up in prayer.

Jesus knew that if they as a group didn't become one in God, one in the Spirit, there was no way any one would ever believe in the healing power, the uniting gift of God's love and grace. But that was what must be done. Because how

else was God's name going to become known to this world, in this world, if it wasn't through this group of disciples who could show that although they may disagree politically, theologically, even disagree on who the best basketball team in the nation really is, if this group of disciples couldn't come together as a community, with unity, and break bread with one another, and respect each other as a child of God, then how on earth was anyone going to believe that love would overcome the darkness time and time again.

This world needed to know that in spite of the divisions and brokenness that was and is filling it, another way was possible. And it all started with his disciples gathered around the Table.

To be divided is easy. To be one is difficult. But that is what we as disciples of Christ are called to do. It is not about us. It is about our connection to the whole, a connection that unifies us and serves a greater purpose as well. It is how we witness to God's love for all the world. We come together as a community in unity and embody God's promises of healing and wholeness to world that is so divided and broken.

And we start today. We start by being a community with to and for all of God's children, by becoming one and making God's name known throughout all the world

Because you see, today is hard for many of us. It's Mother's Day. There are a whole range of emotions on this day, especially for people who have lost their mothers, people who want to be mothers but can't, people who had difficult relationships with their mothers. Unfortunately, this day divides more than it unites.

That is why today is the perfect day as people of faith to embrace our call to become one, to become a community to and for all of God's children. Because this day isn't about Hallmark or flowers. This day was started by a woman who was "tired of war, tired of tribalism, tired of the lives of the vulnerable not being valued. She was tired of the divisions and brokenness of the world. This woman's pain and hope merged and became her mission. After living through the bloodshed of the Civil War, she called out for revolution. She called for all to become one and to make God's love and grace known through the world.

Here is what she said as she declared a call for all humankind to come together as one: *"Women need no longer be made a party to proceedings which fill the globe with grief and horror. That word should now be heard, and answered to as never before!"*

Arise, then, women of this day! Arise, all women who have hearts! Whether your baptism be that of water or of tears! Let us meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let us then solemnly take council with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, man as the brother of

man, each bearing after his own kind the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God!”

So that the great human family can live in peace...

Now if that is not a call to community with unity, I don't know what is.

This broken, hurting, divided world needs us to become one, to become a community with unity because....Well...did you know that on any given night in Europe, tens of thousands of refugee children are cold, hungry, and alone. While fleeing from war, they've lost their parents—temporarily or forever.

Or did you know that on even given night in America, over 200,000 homeless youth sleep on our streets. Many of these children lost their families through rejection. Of that number, 40% have been a part of the foster care system. These beloved ones never had a forever family.

This broken, hurting, divided world needs us to become one, to become a community with unity. Because “together, we can unite the world. We can make God's love and grace known. Together as a community with unity, we can reach BEYOND ourselves and BEYOND our neighborhood. We can reach beyond races and religions and rules and borders and differences and fear. We can become the community that reflects the Kingdom values here on earth. We can become the

Body of Christ Jesus hoped for, longed for, prayed for on that night in the upper room.

You see, God's love insists that there is no such thing as disconnected individuals, lost and alone. God's love insists that there is no peace for us until all children have peace. God's love insists that there is no healing and wholeness for a child of God until all children of God are made whole.

So this Day, although the world tries to divide us, politically, theologically, socially, even on which basketball team is better, as people of faith, we will become one. we will give and serve. We will work together to bring healing and wholeness. We will make God's love and grace known to all of God's children as a community with unity. Because that is what Jesus hoped for, longed for, prayed for on that last night together with his disciples in the upper room. The Community that Jesus knew we all could be. That is what it means to be the Body of Christ here on Earth. To come together as a community in unity.

So knowing this, may we always look beyond ourselves, beyond our neighborhoods, beyond race, religion, rules, borders, differences and fears, and may we become one. Amen.