

“Unity”

John 17:13-25

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Prayer for Understanding Holy Spirit thank you for giving us life. Guide us in truth, enlighten us and set our hearts ablaze so every moment of our lives can be illumined with your amazing grace, steadfast love, and abundant life. Amen.

The most glorious building project I have participated in happened when a diverse group of a few hundred people came together to build a barn. On a winter night, a barn burned down about three miles from our farm. They had 120 milk cows, all of which made it out safely. The cows were quickly transported to neighboring farms where they were milked, fed, and sheltered. There was not enough capacity for these additional animals, so they needed to be rotated in and out of these barns for milking, food, and warmth. It was imperative that a new barn be built quickly. The brother of this farmer owned a commercial construction business. The call went out for help. Construction started the day after the fire. The build site needed to be cleared before the water-soaked debris froze. My Dad and I joined the crew of workers. There were farmers, Mennonites, city folks, and contractors, most donating their time. My future father-in-law and some of his employees from Hutman Heating joined the crew. Some of the Mennonites were from the old order using hand tools and horses. Every day at noon a large circle formed. The center circle was the team leaders. The rest of us workers crowded around. Everyone shared ideas on the construction. Everyone shared what they could contribute. It was a fascinating discussion. The commercial builder with blueprints and technology. The Mennonites with simple effective tools and building techniques. Together we debated the strengths and weakness of different approaches and then formulated the overall plan and what each team would do for the next 24 hours. Since it was mainly volunteers, people worked at different times. There were people working 24/7. One of the creative designs was a long single loop pipeline to gather the milk. Each cow was milked in its stall and the milk transported by a pipeline that needed a slope for gravity to carry the milk. For most barns this resulted in a maze of pipes, some high, some just at the wrong height to hit your head and some you needed to step over. Sometimes a series of lift pumps were used. Sometimes cows had to be rotated in and out of stalls. The group decided to build a barn that had a gradual slope to the entire building. This resulted in what we think was the longest straight milk pipeline in the world. It was a fascinating build. There were different segments to the foundation and base wall. Concrete poured from trucks. Rocks salvaged from the old barn and formed into walls by hand mixed mortar from the Mennonites. A crane lifted segments of the barn in place. Other segments were placed with pulleys and horses. Everyone helped each other. Everyone learned and taught each other. All these diverse building practices, tools, paid workers and mostly volunteers were united into one building team to build a state of the art barn. In just two weeks, it was complete enough for the cows to return home. I was filled with joy to graciously work on this barn. I learned so much from the varied building approaches. We worked hard and laughed. We worked together to creatively solve a myriad of challenges. Because we were building so quickly, not everything was planned out, so we often adapted as we built. The barn was three hundred feet long, the length of a football field. The slope was precise from one end to the other. Walking in the barn you did not feel the slope; however if you looked to the end, the slope was obvious. The milk flowed smoothly the entire way. The food was delicious. Made from scratch food from the Mennonites, donations from restaurants and a variety of packaged donations. When construction was complete there was a festival in the barn mow. Again, it blended many traditions into one. The Mennonites led a worship service, there was a polka band, a feast of food and drink including homemade wine and whisky from the Mennonites. Outside, bikes, horses, and buggies were parked beside trucks, tractors, and four wheelers. It was a joyous, glorious build as we came together as one work force.

Jesus prayed for all people to become one and be filled with joy and glory. **John 17:13-25 NLT “Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. “I am praying not only for these disciples**

but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began! “O righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.”

Jesus prays for unity. The gospel of John explains that you can tell if a person is living in harmony with God by two things: love and unity with all people. Jesus prayed. **May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.** Our unity and love sharing fills us with joy and glory. Jesus prays that we can resist the evil one. The devil seeks to divide. The devil left the glory and joy of heaven seeking to divide people, to create fear, judgement, and hate. Jesus prayed this prayer at the Lord’s Supper as he was preparing to prove that love is stronger than death, that eternal life will swallow death so all can enjoy eternity in our true home heaven. Through death, the eternal life that is the inner being of Jesus meets and transcends the limits of temporal life. Love becomes a river of life that carries us all to eternal glory. Another glorious aspect of God’s love is that grace is bringing us all together, uniting us all. Jesus’ ministry created a community of friends who love one another and continually invited all who were alienated into oneness. Jesus is the glue to a fractured world. Our model for unity with each other is God’s unity of Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Each of us should continually be joyously glorifying all other people as they joyously glorify us.

John’s gospel is permeated with Jesus saying “I am” statements. These “I am” statements are grace. Jesus is actively self-giving to create unity, unity with God, unity with all people. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way the truth and the life. I am the true vine.” In each of these statements, God’s love is lavishly poured into us to unite us with God and each other. God’s joy and glory are infinite. No one, nothing, can contain God’s ever-expanding love, joy, and glory. Glory and joy flow into us and through us, uniting all. We love because God first loved us. It is God’s continual active love, God’s continuous self-giving that creates unity. Jesus is “I am” so that all people may be. In Old Testament language, we are blessed to be a blessing. All people are to be blessed. All people are to be united in one family. An essence of God is sharing. Love, joy, glory is ever expanding a connection across time, space, and every dimension. Love, joy, and glory is ever-expanding a connection across every hurt, disagreement, fear, and hate.

The devil divides by urging people to take and hold by curving one’s heart in on itself, funneling the love, joy, and glory inward in a closed loop of a small group of people and in on one’s self.

Jesus prays for us to share and be free, to open our heart in loving God, all people and self. The more love we give. The more love we receive. Love, joy, and glory expand for eternity.

If you want to do a spiritual self checkup, then check your unity with others. Are you growing closer to others? Are you finding more and more common ground with more and more people?

Jesus’ prayer will become reality. All the people on earth, and in heaven, across time and space, will become one in glorious, joyful, loving unity. Imagine the glory when all people will serve together to meet every challenge that arises. Pick one of the challenges that we are faced with today. Imagine every person contributing a solution. Imagine every contribution being valued, appreciated, celebrated, and utilized.

The building of the barn could have been a disaster if each group would have argued that their way was the best way, or if one group forced the other groups to build using their techniques, or if one group wanted all the glory for themselves. The Mennonites trying to operate the crane. The crane operator guiding the horses. Imagine if each group paid no attention to the others, then the different segments would not have come together in one perfect slope. We enjoyed a glorious celebration. Each of us appreciated one another. The celebration would have been a disaster if someone forced the Mennonites to polka or a Mennonite forced everyone to drink their whisky. Can you imagine what the road home would be like with those who have only driven a buggy driving a truck and those who have only driven a truck driving a buggy?

Some surmise that humanities greatest struggle is that we try to force only way of thinking, one way of perceiving, one way of living, one way of loving. The invitation is to honor, respect, celebrate and glorify all ways of thinking, perceiving, living, and loving to become a united worldwide community.

Jesus never tried to make anyone believe, behave, live, or love like someone else. Jesus met each person wherever they were at and freed them to love in their unique way.

We are plagued with limited thinking such as binary thinking, that there are limited ways and that one way is right or better. There are no constraints to love. There are a multitude of ways to love, rejoice, and be glorious. We are plagued with limited thinking such as, good, better, best, thinking, comparison thinking, wanting to be like another thinking. Each of us is unique. Each of us brings unique loves, joy, and glory to the cosmos. Each of us will follow a unique path to complete unity with God and all people.

Pastor Martyn Lloyd-Jones said: "Some people come to me and they say, 'What a wonderful Lord we have! Thank God this is the same gospel here as in my home country and my hometown!' And immediately I am one with them. We are related, we are in the same family, there is a fundamental union of Spirit. I feel that I have known them all my life, and that if I were to meet them again in the future, I would never be more close to them than at that first moment. That is the unity our Lord talks about; it is not an external matter, nor a matter of denomination or organization."

We are each created different. We each worship God different. We perceive the world different. We live different. God loves variety. There is variety throughout the cosmos. God is unity. All is interrelated. No one part can thrive until all thrive. No one person will be complete until all people are united. Instead of being obsessed with our differences and segregating, we are to celebrate our differences, rejoice in our similarities, and become one. We all have the Divine spark of love permeated in our essence. We are all created in the image of God.

Jesus prayed. **John 17:23 "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one"** How are you striving to be one with all people? Amen