

Whenever I hear this section of John's gospel it makes me think of an old Beatles' song.

*I am he
as you are he
as you are me
And we are all together.*

I'm pretty sure that Lennon and McCartney weren't thinking about Jesus' final conversation with the disciples when they wrote "I am the Walrus," but they can both be a bit confusing.

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me

It's a bit of a tongue twister. And it is the last bit of Jesus' last words with his followers.

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On his last night with his friends, Jesus washed their feet, he shared his last meal with them, he gave them a new commandment to love one another and then he answered question after question about the fact that he would shortly be leaving them.

And then, he looked up to heaven and prayed, which is important to remember when considering our gospel for today. Up until this point in the evening, Jesus had been teaching. He's been giving the disciples instructions and there's a lot in his final conversation with his followers that's very helpful for us as well. There's a lot to learn in the "final discourse"¹ but with the start of Chapter 17, Jesus' focus changes. He's no longer talking to the disciples. He's talking to his father. He isn't training or instructing. He isn't preaching or teaching or rallying the troops. Jesus is praying. Just praying. Just talking with God. And it's a very different prayer from the one described in the other three gospels. In *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Jesus' last prayer takes place not at the dinner table but in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is in the minutes that precede Judas' kiss, sealing his betrayal, a moment from which there is no going back. That prayer, the one in the garden, is full of pain and confusion as Jesus considers his future. He is so very alone. The three friends who are with him have fallen asleep. And in his agony, Luke reports that Jesus' "sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."

In stark contrast, John's account has no anguish. This prayer has no tears. No pleas. Instead it is a prayer of intercession. It is a prayer for those who were gathered around the table that night.

Preacher Barbara Lundblad wrote, "Jesus is praying like a mother who has adopted these children. They belonged to God, but God gave them to Jesus to care for, to teach, to nurture. Soon Jesus will go away and he prays for these children with the love of a motherly heart."

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How do you feel when someone prays out loud for you? In my reading this week I came across these words: comforted, vulnerable, grateful, honored, humbled, awkward but appreciative, like someone really cares.

It is the tradition in my family to pray at the dinner table. And when it is a special occasion rather than praying "Come Lord Jesus" in unison, someone prays what our daughter used to call "a special prayer." If my father is present, he is usually the one to pray and in addition to thanking God for the gifts of the day, there are prayers for children and grandchildren, for friends and neighbors. There are prayers for those at the table and those far off – that they might be blessed by God's mercy and love. And they are prayed for by name. "God please be with Carl today. Bring healing to Gail. Comfort the Larsens."

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As they sat around the table, on that night long ago, Jesus asked for God's blessings for his friends, but he didn't stop with those who were in the room that night. Jesus said, "I am not praying just for these followers. I am also praying for everyone else who will have faith because of what my followers will say about me." Jesus was praying for you and me. We are the ones who have come to believe because of what the disciples said and did. And so, "it is as if Jesus' prayer hangs in the space between earth and heaven, between time past and time present and time yet to come. Jesus is praying that we will remain faithful and trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit."²

Today's reading gives us the opportunity to overhear a prayer on our behalf and if you follow all the *you in me and they are me and we are all together*, it becomes readily apparent that the Father and the Son actually spend time talking about us and our little corner of the universe. They have

¹ Chapters 14-17 of the *Gospel according to John* are known as Jesus' "Final Discourse."

² Quotation from Barbara Lundblad

conversation about this church and the faith of this community. Not only that, Jesus asks the Father to invite us into the work that they have done and will do.

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Throughout his life, Jesus had been clear that he knows the Father well. From the beginning of all things, they have been one. But the Spirit of God is also a part of that intimate unity and so Jesus' prayer asks that those who follow him may be drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity.

God the Father sent God the Son to us so that he might draw all of us - all of the children of the world- into the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. If that all sounds a bit mysterious for a Sunday morning, there are other words in John's gospel that might make it clearer.

At the very beginning of his book, John proclaims the good news that all who welcome and receive Jesus have been given the power to become children of God.

When the risen Jesus meets Mary Magdalene near his tomb he gives her a special mission. "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

We are the children of God, connected to the Trinity in a way that cannot be broken. Jesus prayed for unity and love between God and people because he knew that that kind of connectedness would lead to people believing that the Father sent him.

It is a prayer for all people, even the ones who would turn away- even the ones who would drag him to the cross - so that they might believe Jesus was sent by God. And in believing, have life in his name.

Jesus' prayer describes his hope, his vision and his picture of what we are to look like and how we are to live our lives together. It is a prayer for connectedness and community. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a part of a greater whole. According to Jesus there are to be no solitary Christians or spiritual "Lone Rangers." To be a follower is to be at home wherever his name is spoken.

We may not always behave that way, but it is the way God sees the world. As one. We are one in Christ whether we agree with each other or not. We are one in Christ whether we like one another or not. To become a part of Christ is to become a part of the community; a part of the one.

Earlier this week I was on a Facebook page that I help to administer for pastors and this woman wrote, "I am sitting in church at a funeral for a member. It's a Wisconsin Synod Evangelical Lutheran church. I'm in my clerics. Please pray for me." Now people who were not "insider Lutherans" weren't quite sure what was going on but they knew to pray for her. But this woman knew that by coming to this funeral at this church that she didn't belong to and by wearing her collar she was setting herself up for conflict because that church doesn't ordain women. They don't have women pastors. They don't believe women should preach or teach adults. They shouldn't be in positions of leadership. So there she was, all dressed up in her clerics, which said "I'm a pastor," and she was afraid. She was afraid that she wouldn't be welcomed. Worse than that, she was afraid that somebody might say something and question why she was there. Or question whether or not she should really be a pastor. So we prayed for her. People all over the world were praying for her that morning.

How sad that we can come together as the community of Christ and have moments where we don't feel connected. We feel disconnected and it can happen so easily, so readily.

At one point when I wasn't serving in a congregation, Katie and I went to worship at a church. She was two, but let me tell you that at two she was very savvy at liturgy and hymnody. She knew to behave herself because she was a pastor's kid. And we went in and we sat down. And by the way, she was extremely cute. She was the baby you wanted to talk to during the sermon and ignore the pastor because she was so cute. So there we were sitting. We were trying to find a place where we could land because we didn't have a church home. I had asked if I could sign the guest book, but nobody knew where it was. Then they didn't have a pen and I thought "well they don't really care about my name." So we go and sit down...and we were in somebody else's seat. And they were not shy about discussing this behind us. These two women gave up the opportunity to play with this really cute baby, but they also gave up the opportunity to welcome another member of the Body of Christ who had come to be with them. This is not who we are called to be.

Katie asked me yesterday when we were driving in the car...I had agreed to drive her some place and she said she'd help me with my sermon. It didn't really work out but she asked me this question, "Why did you feel at home at St. Matthew's?" I thought about it. The very first night I came here I interviewed with the committee in the Welcome Center and that was great. Then we came in here into the sanctuary and I could feel myself just going [deep exhale], because it felt like home. I can't tell you why, but the Spirit is alive in this place and for some reason it caught me that night. This place feels like home for so many and we can make it feel like home for people or we can do that other thing.

You are invited to keep making this home, to remember that God is on your side and that Jesus has prayed for us to do this work. To be together. To share the love of God so that more and more people will come to know the truth, that they already are God's children. And God has loved them from the start.

Earlier I asked you if you knew what it was like to have somebody pray for you. So, Susan and I got a wild hare. She couldn't change the hymns because she's not playing today, but we got this idea. We're going to pray for you this morning.

[Instructions about individual prayer at the distribution of Communion.]

If you haven't had somebody pray for you in a while, today's your day.

May God bless you. Bless you in your ministry and the chance that you have every day to share with people the good news that you are a child of God and so are they. And that means that we are one and we are loved.

The mystery of the incarnation is that God desired unity with us so much God became one of us. The wonder of the incarnation is that God loves us so much that he would pray for us.