The Miracle of Gospel Unity
November 15, 2026 – Jamie Brown Truro Church

John 17:20-23

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. 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.

Source: www.biblegateway.com

Sermon

Good morning! As you're being seated, please open your Bibles with me to the Gospel According to John, as we continue our slow walk with Jesus in John chapter 17… Picking up where we left off last week, looking at verses 20 through 23 of Jesus' high priestly prayer.

As we've heard the last few weeks, Jesus is praying that we would know him. That we would know that we're kept, and blessed, and safe, and sanctified in him.

And – in these verses before us today – he prays that by the miracle power of the gospel, we would be *one* in him.

Allow me to remind us all that everything having to do with the gospel is a miracle. Everything.

How spiritually dead people are made alive. How sinful people are made righteous. How broken people are made whole. There's no explanation for any of this other than the miracle power of the gospel.

From beginning to end, the good news that God saves sinners, and marks us as his own forever as his beloved sons and daughters… is all a miracle! And when it comes to the unbelieving and watching world, according to this prayer of Jesus before us today, the miracle of miracles is how a *divided* people are made one.

So, we're invited, this morning, to consider the miracle of real gospel unity. Which is unachievable and unsustainable apart from Jesus. Who but God would have the power to make us and keep us as one?

Since the fall of mankind in Genesis 3, one of the effects of the curse has been that, apart from God's grace, we live in broken relationships with each other.

The first thing that happened after they ate the fruit was that Adam and Eve made clothes to hide themselves from each other. A few verses later they started blaming each other. A few verses after that, they become rivals against each other, even in marriage. Just one chapter later, one brother kills another. And mankind is off to the races.

Apart from God's grace, we're no better, and we're no different. As our prayer book's collect for the *Second Sunday in Lent* says so well and so succinctly: "we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves." Isn't that true?

So, we need the miracle of the gospel that tears down dividing walls of hostility, and instead, builds us up into one family in Christ.

We need this miracle! And we need it in the Church. And this is a prayer for the Church. It's important, for the sake of context, that we're clear on that.

Jesus isn't praying that we would be one with the world. Just a few verses earlier, in John 17:16, Jesus clarified that we are <u>not</u> <u>of</u> the world.

Three times in these verses before us today, verses 20 through 23, Jesus prays **that the Church may be one**. That the curse of sin that divides us would be reversed by the gospel that unites us.

As we walk through this text this morning, hearing the heart of Jesus as he prays, let me underline two truths about the miracle of gospel unity.

First: **<u>Jesus is the way unity works</u>**. Real unity. We're talking deeper than denominations, or political persuasions, or preferences. Deeper than anything we can see or comprehend.

We're talking about Genesis chapters 1 and 2 unity. Revelation chapters 21 and 22 unity. Jesus is the way – and the only way – that kind of true, godly, blood-bought unity works.

Beginning in verse 20 to the first part of verse 21, Jesus prays:

> **20** "I do not ask for these only *[the first 11 disciples]*, but also for those who will believe in me through their word…

He's praying for all Christians throughout all time, who, he says:

> …will believe in me through their word…

Meaning, through their witness to the true gospel.

What is our source of unity as believers? Upon what structure is our unity built? In what strength is our unity sustained?

Is it common politics, or ancestry, or socioeconomic bracket, or skin color? No! The only way unity works in the church is through our shared confession of faith in the one true gospel.

Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 1, verse 15:

> **15** Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.

A few verses later he says:

> [18] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

If and when Christ is falsely proclaimed, then in that we do not rejoice. Against that we stand.

But if and when Christ is being proclaimed, then even if that's the only thread our unity can hang on, that thread is enough for our unity to hang on.

Jesus is praying for gospel believing, gospel proclaiming Christians, including you and me here this morning, to have him and his gospel as the foundation of our unity. Verse 21 says he's praying:

> [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…

In us. Those two words are key to understanding exactly what Jesus makes possible in the Church.

He's not praying here that we'll just be one with each other. But that we'll be one *in* God. That's what he says in verse 21: "that they also may be in us."

So, just as Jesus and the Father are one… We're brought into that oneness through him. Jesus is the only doorway into real unity. He's the only way it works.

And it's true even in this room right now. The fact that we're all here this morning is a testimony to the fact that Jesus has brought us into a unity that's far superior to any kind of tribal or political or social or racial unity that this world can offer. The unity we have in Christ transcends and tears down all worldly dividing walls of hostility, because – to borrow a line from our prayer book's marriage liturgy – those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder.

And as we look at verse 22, we see *how* Jesus joins us together – not just with each other but in God. And this is important. Because we need to know *how exactly* God works his miracle of unity in the church.

Unity is not just hard on our own, it's impossible on our own. If, after church today, I ask my kids if they want me to pick up some take-out on the way home, I can tell you it will be impossible to achieve unity on that question. We're going to need a miracle of the gospel to accomplish unity. Just on something that insignificant!

We have a hard enough time finding unity on insignificant things. How in the world can Christians find unity on hard things? Jesus tells us how. And it's through the power of the cross at work in us. Jesus says to the Father:

> **22** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one…

The glory that the Father gave the Son is an eternal glory, from before all time and forever. And that glory was manifested to the world on the cross.

Jesus' cross-shaped glory has been given to us, he says at the end of verse 22.

> …that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one…

"Perfectly." Now that's interesting. Jesus thinks that we can become perfectly one? Has Jesus seen the Church?

Not only has he seen the Church – but he gave his life for the Church on the cross. It's the glory of the finished work of the cross that made unity possible, and it's the glory of the ongoing effects of the finished work of the cross that keep making unity possible. It's always his work, all the time.

How else can this local church contain within itself:

- Men and women, young and old
- Republicans and Democrats and Independents
- People from many nations, and backgrounds, and upbringings
- People with different opinions, and personalities, and worldviews
- Lifelong Christians, recent Christians, longtime Anglicans, people not-so-sure about Anglicanism but they grew up Baptist and they're ready for something different
- People who – outside of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ – would be pitted against one another

How can we all stand together in worship, and kneel together for communion, and call ourselves brothers and sisters in the same family? Only because of the glory of the finished work of the cross of Jesus and the glory of the ongoing effects of the cross of Jesus.

We have no power in ourselves to help ourselves. Left to ourselves, we'll hide from, and blame, and become rivals against each other. We need Jesus to work a miracle. And he does through the cross! Jesus alone makes superior gospel unity work. That's the first truth.

Second – and don't worry… much more briefly – we hear this truth repeated in these verses as well: **Jesus is the message unity sends**.

Why does Jesus pray that we would be one? In the end of verse 21 he says:

> …so that the world may believe that you [Father] have sent me.

And Jesus repeats himself again at the end of verse 23. He's praying that we would be one:

> …so that the world may know that you [Father] sent me...

But then look at what Jesus adds at the end of verse 23. To inform this whole prayer for the unity of the Church, Jesus gives one of the most breathtaking descriptions in the whole Bible of the love of God. Jesus says that his Father:

> …loved them [believers!] even as you loved me.

Isn't it amazing that the same love that the Father has for Jesus, he has for you. Not a lesser love, or a different love. God the Father loves you with the same love he loves the Son.

And here's the point. Here's why Jesus brings this up in this prayer for Church unity.

Because, if I've been loved like that – then who in the world do I think I am to withhold my love from you?

Whatever you could do to offend against me pales in comparison to what I have done to offend against God. And if God has loved me in Christ, in my offense, and in my sin, then I – as a Christian – I do not have the option of withholding my love from you. And you don't have the option of withholding your love from me. Earlier, in our reading from Ephesians 4, verses 1 through 3, we heard Paul urge the Church:

> 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…

A gospel-centered person, a gospel-centered church, is eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, because it's yet another way we proclaim the glories of Jesus who loves us even though we don't deserve it.

Jesus is the message unity sends.

You may have missed this, but we just had a midterm election in this country. And the map of the United States of America was divided into two colors. Red or Blue. This or that. Winners or losers.

This is the world we live in. A world of winners or losers. There is a toxic poison in the air, and it's nothing new. It's been around since Genesis 3.

It must not be present in the Church.

In two weeks, on the first Sunday of Advent, we'll sing:

> O come, desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind
> Bid thou our sad divisions cease and be thyself our King of peace

Only Jesus is the antidote to the poison of division. Jesus our King of Peace has reversed the curse that divides us by the miracle power of the gospel that unites us. Everything having to do with the gospel is a miracle.

Like how the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. And he breathes within us the same love that the Father has for the Son… So that what we could never do in ourselves, God does in us in Christ: he makes us one with each other in him.

So that the world may believe. As they look at the church, a divided people made into one people, and they say, “Who but God could do that?”

Discussion & Reflection Questions

1. Jamie noted that Jesus' prayer is designed to undo the curse of the Fall. We see the effects of the Fall immediately in Genesis 3:8-24. Skim that portion of Scripture. What divisions do you read about there?

2. In John 17:20-23, who did Jesus ask the Father to make one?

3. What is the basis of that unity? (See the top of p. 3 in the sermon.)

4. What are the purposes for that unity? (See the "so that" clauses in v. 20 and v. 23.)

5. We have been loved with the same love that the Father has for the Son and that the Son has for us. If that's the case, what can we ***not*** do? (See the bottom of p. 5 in the sermon.)

6. *In pairs:* Think about places of division within the Body of Christ. These may be divisions within the worldwide Church, within the congregation at Truro, or between you and another brother or sister in Christ.

    a. Select one division that particularly grieves you.

    b. Tell your partner a little about that division. What caused it? How it is impacting those involved?

    c. Pray for each other. Ask the Lord to give you a vision for what reconciliation and unity might look like. Ask the Lord to give your partner the wisdom, grace, and courage to take actions that will support reconciliation and unity in the coming weeks.

    d. Commit to pray for each other, and check back with your partner next week to see how it's going.