

**“What price, salvation?”**  
*Realizing Christ’s vision “that we may all be one”*

**May 4, 2008**

*Text: 1 Peter 5:6-11, John 17:20-23*

I.

John 17 is the last chapter in what are known as the *discourse speeches* in John’s gospel. The entire chapter is essentially a prayer that Jesus offers to God. To say the least, the prayer is inviting and engaging.

In fact, the motto verse for our *United Church of Christ* denomination comes right out of this impassioned prayer—John 17:21: **that they may all be one.**

When we think about the BIG PICTURE meaning of our Christian faith ... as in, *what’s it all about? What is God’s intent, God’s vision for creation?* John 17 reigns as one of the greatest inspirations: **that they may all be one.**

Clearly, from a biblical perspective, this is the will of our Creator God—that we find ways of coming together, ways of uncovering common ground so we can lift up the common good; that we find ways of bringing the red states and the blue states together, ways of creating occasions for conservatives and liberals to sit down and have adult conversations about things that matter.

If we think about it ...

- Is it not possible that Jesus knows some things about us that make this vision of UNITY possible?
- Is it not possible that we have more in common as human beings than we sometimes remember? City folks and country folks ... blue collar and white collar ... middle class, lower class, upper class, whatever it is.
- Is it not possible that, at many points, we want the same things? That we have similar fears and anxieties?

The implicit assumption in Jesus’ impassioned prayer here is a resounding YES!

II.

Moreover, when we go more deeply into the circular language of John 17 ... again, this is an engaging gospel, particularly these *discourse speeches of Jesus*, of which this prayer in chapter 17 is a part. CHECK IT OUT!

- *All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.*

- *Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that **they may be one, as we are one.***
- *As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us ...*
- *The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that **they may be one, as we are one.***

When we *get in to* this language, with its circular nature, promoting, as it does an intimacy and interdependence with one another as human beings, we can easily conclude, as theology professor **Scott Bader-Saye** does in a reflection on these passages, that ...

***The unity of Christ's followers is not incidental to our salvation.***

**What price, salvation?** Hey—the price is our LOVE, our LOVE for each other ... our ways of working together, of doing whatever we have to do to make God's creative handiwork, on the human level, a UNIFIED FAMILY. That's God's purpose through Christ. I believe that!

But, of course, it's not easy. Working together takes initiative; it takes sacrifice.

III.

In one of the Peanuts cartoons, Lucy comes into the living room to find Linus in control of the TV. She demands he change the channel. Not wanting to be a door mat, Linus says, *What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?*

*These five fingers,* says Lucy. *Individually they're nothing; but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold.*

*Okay, okay,* says Linus; *which channel do you want?*

Turning away, he looks at his own fingers and says, *Why can't you guys get organized like that?*

The question for us becomes, very simply, *Why can't we get organized like that?* So we can work together, reaching out with an open mind, an eager heart and a tolerant spirit. Why can't we commit to learning one another's stories ... to listening to our common plight—our hopes and dreams, our fears and failures?

***That we may all be one ...***

#### IV.

If we allow this text from John to really open up and speak to us, there's a real challenge for us here. Listen carefully, again, to the words from text:

*I ask not only on behalf of these (referring to the disciples), but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, **that they may all be one.***

Then some of the intimate language of Jesus' prayer, here, is expressed:

*As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. We see, here, all the emphasis of being bound up in one another's lives.*

*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 and have loved them even as you have loved me.***

Again, what all of this suggests is that our unity is not unrelated to our salvation. That's an alarming notion! Salvation, which we tend to think of in terms of the individual, is, in fact, *social*.

If we think about it, how could this not be the case? How could our salvation, whatever it is, be solely about us and God and that's it? Where's the love? Where's the forgiveness? Where's the personal sacrifice? Where's the cross?

#### V.

In one of her books, **Corrie Ten Boom** tells of meeting the guard from the concentration camp where she and her family had been held by the Nazis. She had been speaking at a large church meeting, and after the meeting, he had come forward.

He put out his hand to her, in an act of contrition and repentance. Instinctively, however, she pulled back, remembering the horrors the former Nazi guard had participated in. But then, something came over her ... she wasn't sure what it was ... and she reached out and grasped his hand and extended her forgiveness ... as tears rolled down his cheeks.

#### **What price, salvation?**

**That we may all be one** is hard work. It's the price of loving one another, forgiving one another ... letting go of stuff we need to let go of ... listening when we may not feel like listening ... going the second mile.

It's the price of being a BIG person ... and making a personal commitment about the kind of life we choose to lead.

## VI.

There's a story about Jesus and the angels, when Jesus returns to heaven after his time on earth. Speaking to the angels, Jesus says,

*I left behind twelve **faithful disciples** and a handful of **men** and **women** who have faithfully followed me. They will continue to declare my message, **that we may all be one**. This is the meaning and purpose for which God used me. And these faithful ones will live out this message and they will build my church.*

But the archangel **Michael** asks Jesus, ***But what if the people fail ... what if they fail and don't do what you expect of them. What is your backup plan?***

Immediately, Jesus answers him, saying, **I have no back up plan.**

Friends, we're it. We're God's plan for this church and for this community, this nation, this world. We're it ... each of us ... wherever it is that we live out our lives. God is counting on us.

**What price, salvation?**

**That we may all be one!** That's the price. But it's also the vision and the hope.

Friends, the commitments that we make matter. In education, in health care, in *going GREEN*, in promoting peace in the global community; reaching out ... in support of the many Christian outreach programs of our church ... again, **that we may all be one ...**

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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