

THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

(John 17:20-26) "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, {21} that they may all be one. 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. {22} The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, {23} 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. {24} Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. {25} "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. {26} I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

GOOD-BYE

Lucy Freel was almost 102 years old when she died. She lived alone in the Freel home until she was 100. ***"I don't want to go to the nursing home,"*** she said, ***"because that is for old people."*** She walked to town every day until she was 95. When the weather was good, you could always find Lucy sitting on the front porch of her home on Wesley Street in Canton, North Carolina. Lucy was full of history and information and you always learned something new about the town or her family when you stopped by to visit. She was an inspiring lady who never complained and had an incredible zest for life.

I'll never forget one visit. We talked for some time and then Lucy stopped the conversation and said, ***"You know, I can always tell when you're ready to leave."*** ***"How do you know that,"*** I asked. ***"Well,"*** she said, ***"You always scoot up on the edge of your chair." That's how I know you are getting ready to say a prayer and leave."***

The singer songwriter Carly Simon sings, ***"Nobody ever stays in one place anymore."*** It's true. Every hello eventually leads to a good-bye. Anyone who has raised children knows about separation anxiety. The child clings to the mom or dad when they are left day care or school for

the first time. As we grow older, we learn not to cling to our parents and we usually learn to stop the wailing by at least October of the first grade.

Still, absence hurts. Entering the house after a spouse dies and driving past the home place after your parents are long gone, causes all kinds of emotions to bubble to the surface. Sometimes it's loneliness coupled with intense emotional pain. Other times it's just a longing for a return to the past.

The words we use at leave-taking—now secularized and emptied of religious significance—still hearken back to a day when departure meant a time so painful and threatening that we needed God to help us through it. Whether it is the English good-bye, the Spanish adios or the French adieu; they all imply that moment between here and not here. Suddenly a person is present and then they are gone. In years past, we would say something like, “*Good-bye, God be with you.*” In other words, we would give the person over to God during the time of absence.

Interestingly, in the Gospel of John it takes Jesus four long chapters to say good-bye to his disciples. Along the way, the disciples—almost in a childish way question Jesus:

- “*Where are you going?*”
- “*Can we come too?*”
- “*Who’s going to stay with us?*”

What does Jesus do in response? He prays for his disciples. He prays for all of us his children.

PRAY THAT WE ARE ONE

Jesus prays that we will have what we need in order to face life, face the future and face the end of life. In order to have the resources we need to face these things he prays that we would be one with each other, one with God, and one in Glory.

Personally, I think Jesus had a good idea but there were those who came after him who thought otherwise. In the 17th century, scientists and great thinkers like Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton taught that atoms were the basic building blocks of the universe but that they did not have a relationship with the other atoms around them. They floated in a void, own their own. Any relationship they might have was purely accidental they believed or perhaps ornamental as in the interaction and flow of colors in art.

This kind of thinking carried the day for over 200 years and influenced other thinkers like Charles Darwin and Andrew Carnegie. Today we know that these men were wrong. Quantum physics tells us that all things are connected in ways that we cannot begin to comprehend. It is what meteorologist Edward Lorenz calls the “*butterfly effect*.” Lorenz found that all weather patterns are sensitive to the prevailing conditions of other weather patterns. In other words, when a butterfly beats its wings in Tokyo, it ultimately affects the weather in New York.

Scientists now theorize that when one particle changes here on earth it causes another particle on the other side of the universe to change. **We are one!** God created things in such a way as to be interconnected. I find it interesting that Jesus prays that we be one with each other.

ONE WITH EACH OTHER

The Episcopal Priest Bennett J. Sims tells the story in his book *Servanthood* about a group of African students at Candler School of Theology at Emory University. When they turned in a paper they had worked on together the professor inquired, “*Whose paper is this?*” They answered, “*Ours.*” Their answer blew the professor’s mind and turned the grading process on its ears. No one had bothered to tell them that in

America they were expected to work alone as competitors, not as collaborators.¹

Jesus knew about collaboration and interconnectedness. He worked with 12 disciples and prayed that they would be one with each other. The disciples didn't always agree and neither will any of us. What we need to understand, especially as a community of faith, is that any move we make makes an impact on more than just *“me.”* In a community of faith that is trying to following Jesus, the *“we”* is more important—the *“we”* of those who are a part of the community of faith and the *“we”* of the surrounding community.

Even more important is what this has to say about the power of prayer. Jesus believed that his prayer would make a difference. Jesus wants us to understand that when we pray it affects more than just the person praying or maybe the one person we are praying for. Prayer has a rippling effect that can have a tremendous impact on God's people and the church.

The great thinker Albert Einstein captured the essence of this in a single paragraph:

*A human being is part of the whole, of what we call the universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest. This is a kind of optical illusion of consciousness. This illusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for those closest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion for all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.*²

¹Bennet J. Sims, *Servanthood: Leadership for the Third Millennium* (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997), 38.

²www.spaceandmotion.com/albert-einstein-quotes.htm. Accessed on May 11, 2010.

Jesus, in all his wisdom, seemed to know this. Jesus then continues to pray that we be one with God.

ONE WITH GOD

This is the core of Jesus' prayer. He prays that his disciples would experience a oneness with God. Jesus knew that prayer was a very descent into the core of one's self in order to discover God's speaking with us. Maybe an analogy will help.

Imagine, if you will, that several people build homes that are separate from each other. Each home is distinct and different and reflects the values and resources of that person. Each person digs a well. It is drilled and every homeowner hits water. All homeowners have a private well. But we all know that these private wells are not really private. The water comes from a common source. The ground water surfaces in a unique private well, but it is connected to a common pool.

When we pray, we drill down through the unique private property of self and hit water. This water nourishes the soul. It comes from same pool that Jesus drew from. The pool is the spirit of God. It is available through all and in all. It is the one with whom we all live and move and have our being.

Finally, in Closing, Jesus prays that we will all be one in Glory.

ONE IN GLORY

We are created by God for interlinking and spiritual bonding. This bonding will outlast this earthly journey and even links us to those who have gone before us. As we stand upon the saints of church history and of our community of faith, we are connected to the one God who created it all. As we move towards Memorial Day at the end of this month we realize that we are connected to those who died for our country. We owe them much. We are a part of who they were and we carry their sacrifice in our hearts, souls, and bodies.

THE ONE SOURCE OF POWER

Let me close with a parable.

It is a story about a Roman Catholic nun named Sister Helen and the very first class she ever taught at St. Mary's school in Morris, Minnesota. Third grade. Thirty-four kids. All of them special. But none so much so as Mark Eklund...a kid with a happy-to-be alive attitude that made even his occasional mischievousness delightful. The only problem was, Mark was one of those kids that talked incessantly. Sister Helen corrected him, just as incessantly. Every time she did, he apologized (saying), *"Thank you for correcting me, Sister."* I'll let Sister Helen tell the story:

"One morning my patience was growing thin and I made a rookie teacher's mistake. I said, MARK, IF YOU SAY ONE MORE WORD, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO TAPE YOUR MOUTH SHUT."

20 seconds later Mark blurted out his next word. The rest of the class pointed it out, forcing me to make good on my threat. With two strips of masking tape, I made an X over Mark's mouth and walked back to my desk. When I turned to look at him, he winked at me. I started to laugh and then the rest of the class started to laugh. With everybody laughing (and finally cheering), I walked back to Mark's desk and removed the tape. The first words out of his mouth were, "THANK YOU FOR CORRECTING ME, SISTER."

At the end of the year, Mark moved on to fourth grade. I moved up to junior high math, and before I knew it, I had him again. Since the work was more difficult, he didn't talk nearly as much in the ninth grade as he had in the third.

One Friday, things just didn't feel right. We had worked on a new concept all week, and I sensed that the students were frustrated with themselves and edgy with one another. Feelings in the classroom were turning ugly. I stopped the lesson and told everybody to list the names

of the other students in the room on alternate lines of a page, leaving a space between each name. Then I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it under the name. It took the remainder of the period for them to finish the assignment. As Mark handed me his paper, he said. "THANK YOU FOR TEACHING ME, SISTER. HAVE A GOOD DAY."

On Saturday, I wrote the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper. Underneath the name, I listed all of the nice things that had been written about the student. On Monday, I returned the lists. This brought smiles back to the classroom. When Monday's class was over, no one ever mentioned them again.

The group moved on as did I. Several years later, upon returning from vacation, my parents met me at the airport. As we were driving home, Mother asked the usual questions about my trip, the weather, and experiences in general. There followed a lull in the conversation, whereupon Mother gave Dad a sideways glance, leading him to clear his throat as he usually did before saying something important. "THE EKLUNDS CALLED LAST NIGHT," he began. "REALLY," I said. "I HAVEN'T HEARD FROM THEM IN YEARS. DID THEY SAY HOW MARK WAS?"

My father responded quietly, "MARK WAS KILLED IN VIETNAM," he said. "THE FUNERAL IS TOMORROW AND HIS PARENTS WOULD LIKE YOU TO ATTEND."

To this day, I can still point to the exact spot on I-494 where Dad told me about Mark. I had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. Mark looked handsome and mature. But all I could think at that moment was: MARK, I WOULD GIVE ALL THE MASKING TAPE IN THE WORLD, IF ONLY YOU WOULD TALK TO ME NOW."

The church was packed with Mark's friends. Someone sang "THE BATTLE HIMN OF THE REPUBLIC." The pastor said the usual prayers. The bugler played taps. Everybody took the last walk by the casket, sprinkling it with holy water. I was the last to do so. As I passed by, one of the pallbearers in a military uniform said, "WERE YOU MARK'S TEACHER?" When I nodded in the affirmative, he added, "MARK TALKED ABOUT YOU A LOT."

Following the funeral, most of Mark's former classmates headed to Charlie's farmhouse for lunch. Mark's parents were there waiting for me. "WE WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "THEY FOUND THIS ON MARK WHEN HE WAS KILLED. WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT RECOGNIZE IT."

Opening the billfold, he carefully removed a worn piece of notebook paper that had been folded and refolded many times. I knew without looking that the paper was the one on which I had listed all of the good things that Mark's ninth grade classmates had said about him. "THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR DOING THAT," Mark's mother said. "AS YOU CAN SEE, MARK TREASURED IT."

Mark's classmates started to gather around us. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, "I STILL HAVE MY LIST. IT'S IN THE TOP DRAWER OF MY DESK." Which led his wife to say, "THAT'S ONLY BECAUSE I WOULDN'T LET HIM PASTE IT IN OUR WEDDING ALBUM."

"I HAVE MINE TOO," Marilyn said. "IT'S IN MY DIARY."

Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her purse and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. "I CARRY IT WITH ME AT ALL TIMES," Vicki said, without batting an eyelash. "I THINK WE ALL SAVED OUR LISTS."

There are many Marks, Charlie's, Marilyn's and Vickie's out there in the world. They all are a part of God's creation. Jesus loves us all and He wants us to be.

One with each other
One with God
And one in Glory

Shouldn't that be enough to sustain us through all of life? In the Name of the Father, Son and holy Spirit, Amen.