

**17** After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. **2** For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. **3** And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. **4** I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. **5** Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.

**6** “I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. **7** Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, **8** for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.

**9** “My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. **10** All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. **11** Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are.

**6** So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

**7** He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

**9** After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. **10** As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. **11** “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

**12** Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. **13** When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying.

Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the zealot), and Judas (son of James). **14** They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

# One in Ministry

John 17.1-11; Acts 1.6-14

Opening remarks

Problem - Lack of unity

While we are one (family, church, community, country), we can be very divided.

We may even wonder... *Is Unity Possible?*

We live in a time when extreme voices cry out above all others. We are a very polarized people.

How sad is it when...Violence breaks out, and we cannot even agree on how to respond.

Some blame the victim. Others blame the perpetrator. Still others blame law enforcement.

We live in a time when it is not safe to go out alone, anywhere, anytime. Guns - which used to be for protection or hunting - have become weapons so freely and easily acquired and used.

We live in a time when law enforcement officers are not always respected. They are put on trial for their actions in response to violence or the appearance of violence.

We live in a time when corruption is present at every level. Crime is no longer committed only by those we deem as criminals.

We live in a time when politicians - our elected leaders and trusted public servants - fail us, either by deception, lying or blatant misjudgment.

We live in a time when the Church has become irrelevant to most people. The message has lost its fire, its passion, its meaning. Christian disciples have become more concerned about themselves and their rewards and accomplishments and less about fulfilling the mission.

We live in a time when it seems the Church has lost its way. Have we become more concerned about maintaining our magnificent buildings at the expense of maintaining and caring for our own souls?

So, why are we here, Lord? What is our purpose? Mission? What can You do in us, through us, and in spite of us? Use us, Lord.

In a week, a few thousand people will gather at Lakeside for the 48th session of the West Ohio Annual Conference. Friends and colleagues will re-connect. Ministry will be celebrated. Names of the deceased clergy and spouses will be read. Retirees will take one final walk across the stage. Promising ministry candidates will be affirmed by either commissioning or ordination. Budgets will be discussed. Recommendations will be debated. Motions and amendments will be made. And God will be glorified in our multiple worship celebrations.

For some, Annual Conference is a great time to renew and rekindle old friendships or make new ones.

For others, it is a time to fall deeper into fits of anger, rage and jealousy.

We wonder: *Why do some people get the "best" appointments.*

*How is it that some get the ideal ministry settings, while others never seem to advance?*

*Why do some seem to catch all the breaks, while others remain in dying, declining churches?*

*How is it that some folks stay in their ministry settings as long as they want, while others find themselves packing up and moving again and again, from corner to corner, across the connection?*

Though we are one as colleagues in the Conference, as ordained and licensed clergy, we are not always ONE. in mind. In heart. In mission and ministry.

Sometimes, we may see each other as rivals. Competitors.

We may even become jealous of some of our colleagues.

Scripture - John 17

Jesus prays that the Disciples become ONE. One with Christ. One with each other. One in ministry to all the world.

These are His final words to the Disciples before being arrested, tried and crucified.

He just demonstrated what He was teaching them by washing their feet. He taught them a “different kind of love.” a sacrificial love. Unconditional love.

Jesus knew that... The disciples will be scattered, but wouldn't be permanently lost.

They will eventually return as a gathered community of believers (witnesses) who carry out Jesus' mission. (John 17.1-5) (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 14 “The Prayer”; pp. 252 - 260)

During this final speech, Jesus' disciples are... affirmed and blessed.

Jesus asks the Father to keep the Disciples in His Name, lest they “abort the mission.”

Jesus asks that the Disciples be “full of His joy (v. 13). But this doesn't “mean they will escape tribulation and hostility.” They will remain in the world, not taken out of it. Hatred and hostility will result “when they are faithful to the Word.”

They “are being sent into the world.” Jesus asks that they be “sanctified, set apart, and consecrated for their special task.” (v. 17) (John 17.6-19)

(Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 14 “The Prayer”; pp. 252 - 260)

During these final fleeting moments on earth Jesus is praying fervently. But, according to the Gospel writer of John, He was not praying for Himself or His safety or deliverance.

Instead He was praying for His Disciples. In Jesus' final prayer before crucifixion; we see how Jesus intercedes for His Disciples. (John 17. 1-26) (HarperCollins Study Bible © 1993, Harper Collins Publishers, NY. John 17.1-24, pp. 2046-2047)

During this prayer, Jesus prays fervently for His Disciples. That they would experience

unity in the midst of trouble, trials, tribulation (John 17. 6-19) (HarperCollins Study Bible © 1993, Harper Collins Publishers, NY. John 17.1-24, pp. 2046-2047)

Later in the same prayer, Jesus prays for all believers, anytime and anyplace. Those

who will be the Church, the Kingdom of God, the followers of Jesus Christ. (John 17.20-24)

Jesus' Prayer for the Disciples extends to church beyond. Church of the future.

(HarperCollins Study Bible © 1993, Harper Collins Publishers, NY. John 17.1-24, pp. 2046-2047)

While we are one, we can be very divided. Is Unity Possible?

In our second scripture reading, we find Jesus (once again) preparing to depart His disciples. This time, it is the author of Luke-Acts. Jesus has made several appearances after His resurrection. But now, we find Him about to take off, up into the sky. (Acts 1.6-14)

So, what do the Disciples say about all this?

*“Lord is THIS the time You are going to restore the kingdom?”*

Even after spending three years with Jesus, the Disciples still did not get it. They just didn't understand His mission and purpose.

Here, Jesus was preparing them for His earthly departure, and all they can think of is “restoring the kingdom of Israel.” They still thought He would become a King (earthly) and kick the Romans out and restore peace and justice in the galaxy. Bring order to the Force.

Somehow, even after all His parables, sermons, teaching, miracles and messages, they still were not ONE in mission and ministry. They still had their own agenda. They wanted things THEIR way. They wanted to make Jesus their Savior - created in their image.

Still, Jesus patiently listened and understood. *“It’s not for you to know. Only the Father knows.”* and then He promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit. *“And you will be My witnesses, here, there and beyond; to Infinity and Beyond!”*

And then He vanished into the sky. So they stood, heads cocked, looking at the sky. But then, two men in white interrupt their gaze.

*“What are you doing? This Jesus is gone now, but will be back!”*

And so, they went back to Jerusalem. All Eleven Disciples. And they devoted themselves to prayer. *Are we willing to do that?*

Like the early church, we need desperately to PRAY - to depend on God to do WHAT we cannot Possibly do on our own. And we need to PRAY DESPERATELY for God to breakthrough the hardness of our hearts and work in ways we never imagined.

Make us One, Lord.

Maybe we need to pray as Jesus prayed.

Jesus prayed that all believers would be ONE. Wouldn't that be a miracle?

Imagine what would happen if we began to pray.

***Make us one, Lord.***

Prayer - activity of early church. There was no major decision made without a season of prayer. (Acts 1.14) (HarperCollins Study Bible © 1993, Harper Collins Publishers, NY. Acts 1.1-14, pp. 2058-2059)

**“It takes all of us, the entire body of Christ becoming one in ministry to see the world and God’s people with the eyes of Jesus.”** (Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Story – Power of a Praying Church (Communicator’s Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 14 “The Prayer”; pp. 252 - 260)

Could it be that we are at a similar place as that congregation? Could it be that we, too, need to discover for the first time, or once again, the power of Jesus’ prayer?

A couple weeks ago, a group from Grace church attended a training event on Breakthrough Prayers. We were blessed and overwhelmed with the energy, passion and power of praying for God to breakthrough in our lives, for our loved ones, for our community and for our congregation.

Is Unity Possible? On our own, we struggle. but by prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be one in ministry together.