

“Complete Unity with One Another”

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Now, I know that Aaron has already recognized the veterans, but I grew up in a military home. My dad was a veteran of World War Two, Korea and Vietnam. And I want you to stand, if you served in any capacity in the United States military at any time. Would you please stand so that we might recognize you? Please stand. We are the land of the free because of the brave, and we thank you for your service.

I want to read a passage of Scripture now that comes to us from the Book of John, chapter 17, verses 20 through 23, Jesus speaking. This was his last prayer for you and me.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You 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. I have given them the glory You gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and You in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me.”
May God bless the reading of the Word.

I love it when a plan comes together! And we have been seeing that a lot here lately at Central. Sometimes not how or what we thought it was going to be, but we have seen God bless us. And for that we are grateful. That happens when we follow the Holy Spirit. That happens when we work together, when we are pulling in the same direction, when the Spirit guides us and directs us into God's truth. It happens when we are doing what God is blessing, instead of asking God to bless what we're doing. And there's a huge difference. There's a huge difference. Too often, churches do something, and God blesses it, and they just keep on doing it forever, when God stopped blessing it years ago. The secret is to do what God is blessing, instead of asking God to bless what we're doing. And this takes us pulling together and following the Spirit of God together.

Unity was Jesus' last prayer for us. It's that important. I wish there was some way I could communicate to you the importance of unity in the church. For those who are sensitive to the Spirit of God, you can feel unity and division in a congregation. When I was in college, one year I was in 30-something churches and the next year I was in 40-something churches. And one of the advantages of that was I got to experience a lot of different congregations under a lot of different circumstances. And you can palpably feel when a church is united, or a church is divided. It has nothing to do with the building; it has nothing to do with the programming; it has everything to do with the Spirit of God moving within a congregation. And the Spirit of God does not move in a congregation if they are divided.

So, Jesus' last prayer for us was that we be united. Do you know how special this prayer is? Jesus had prayed for himself. He had prayed for his disciples. And then he prayed for those who would believe the message of the disciples, years in the future. That's you and I. This is Jesus' prayer for us. And in the context of this prayer, I want to point out two things about Jesus. First, I want to point out his complete faith and certainty that God's plan was coming together. At this point it was crystal clear what was

going to happen, but I want you to note the context. He is praying for people who are going to believe, years in the future. Yet, at this point, most of his followers had fallen away. The cross was a couple of hours away, and yet he is praying for those who would believe his message years from then. That is how confident he was in the accomplishment of God's mission. And I want you to note, also, his confidence in his men. Now, he knew they did not understand fully at this point. They didn't understand who he was and what his mission was completely at this point. And the fact of the matter is, these yahoos, only a couple hours prior to this prayer, were arguing about who would be the greatest in Jesus' earthly kingdom. He knew also these same guys, in a couple more hours, were going to abandon him. He knew this. But he still had complete confidence that, through them, his message and God's plan would be communicated to the world. And it was. Jesus prayed that we would be one as he and the Father are one, that we would have unity. Now, this is unity. This is not unanimity. This is unity. This is unity within our diversity. This is not a unity of administration. This is not a unity of organization. This is not a unity of worship. This is not even a unity of belief. This is a unity of love. United in love, Christian love can help us overcome all of our differences. Just prior to this, Jesus had said, "I'm giving you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you too must love one another. By this, **by this**, will all people know you are my disciples, by the way you love one another."

Christian love transcends all of our differences and unites us. Imagine, if you will, numerous denominations coming together, counting on unity, counting on Christian love to overcome their differences. Imagine, if you will, a number of different denominations whose administration is very different from one another, and whose belief systems are drastically different than one another, coming together, being united in a common purpose. Did you know that I just described Central United Protestant Church? Did you know that is the dream of United Protestantism: that you and I, who are very different in our ideologies, in our philosophies, and even in our theologies, be one as Jesus and the Father are one? That is the dream of United Protestantism. That's why this church was established. And when we have been faithful to that ideology, when we've been faithful to that dream, God has blessed. And when we have not, He has not.

This unity that I'm speaking of is hindered when we love organizations, when we love rituals, when we love worship styles, when we love our pet peeves, and when we love our sacred cows more than we love each other. Division among Christians has hurt the church more than anything else throughout human history. Division in the church has hurt the church more than any of Satan's other schemes. There is nothing that I am aware of that hampers the mission of the church more than division. Do y'all hear me? Don't get distracted. Our unity is what God is blessing. Guard it jealously.

Our unity within our diversity will show the power of love to overcome hate and evil. Our unity within our diversity will show the power of love to overcome and create peace. Do we need peace right now? Our unity within our diversity will make the world believe that God actually does love the world. Our unity within our diversity will show the power of Christ to change the human heart and to transform the world. But this is something that God does. We've got to follow; God's got to lead. The problem is, there are a lot of folks who want to serve God, but only in the capacity of advisors. (That is supposed to be funny, y'all!)

Unity in the Church Universal has never been witnessed. But we as individuals, and we as a congregation, can model such unity. But it comes at a price. It comes at the price

of "I want." It comes at the price of self. It comes at the price of what I want. So, what would you be willing to sacrifice? What would you be willing to give up? What would you be willing to let go of for the sake of unity within the body? What sacred cow would you be willing to barbecue for the sake of unity? You see, we are real, real ready to barbecue somebody else's sacred cow, but not ours.

Unity is the last thing Jesus prayed for us. There is a contemporary song. Well, actually it's not a contemporary song anymore; it was contemporary about 12 years ago. There's a contemporary song that says, "Everything for Your kingdom, Lord. Everything for Your kingdom, Lord." Are you willing to pray that prayer? "Lord, everything for Your kingdom." This is the intention; this is the desire; this is the design of Central United Protestant Church. That is why we were created: numerous, different denominations combined together for the purpose of cooperating with one another, loving one another, loving this community, and loving this world for the kingdom of God. And when we have been faithful to that ideal, God has blessed us. And when we have not, God has not. And that's the fact.

So, are you willing to say, are you willing to pray, "Everything for Your kingdom, Lord. Make us one." Let us pray. So, in the quiet of this moment, as you reflect, are you willing to pray, "Lord, I am willing to give up my sacred cows. I'm willing to do my part. Everything for Your kingdom, Lord." Let us pray.

Lord, in the quiet of this moment, make us one as You and the Father are one. In Jesus' name, amen.