

Someone is Praying for Us

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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." (John 17:20-26)

1. Someone is Praying for Us

Do you know that someone is praying for you? About 20 years ago, I served a church in New York City for five years. When I talked with a couple who were members of the church, they said that they prayed for me every morning. I am sure that they still pray for us. You might think that nobody is praying for you. But today's scripture tells us that there is someone who prays for you and me.

2. Jesus Prays for Our Unity

John 17:20 says, "***I ask not only on behalf of these (the disciples), but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word.***" This is what Jesus prays. He prays when he is with his disciples seated around him at table on his last night. Jesus shares a meal with them. He washes their feet. He gives them a new commandment. Jesus says to his disciples that he would leave them. Then Jesus begins to pray.

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane before he is arrested. However, in John's Gospel, Jesus offers an intercessory prayer for his disciples when he is with them. In John's Gospel chapter 17, Jesus prays for himself in verses 1-5, for his disciples in verses 6-19, and for future believers like you and me in verses 20-26. Can you believe that Jesus prays for those who would come to believe in him through the message of the disciples two thousand years later?

What does Jesus pray for? Jesus prays in verse 21, "***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.” Jesus does not pray for what we need or what we want. He does not pray for our health, wealth, success, prosperity or happiness, but prays that “we may all be one.” What does “being one” mean? Mark 10:7 & 8 say, “***For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh, so they are no longer two, but one.***” As marriage brings two individuals one, when we receive Jesus as our Savior and the Lord, we are in Christ and become one. Paul says in Romans 12:5, “***in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.***” By using the concept of the human body, Paul teaches us how Christians should live and work together.

3. The Challenges of Becoming One

Although Jesus does not use the word “unity” in his prayer, he prays for the unity of his followers. Jesus prays in verse 23, “***they may become completely one.***” Why do you think Jesus prays for the unity of his followers? Is it because his followers would have no unity? Each one has different backgrounds, personalities, perspectives, preferences, and characteristics so that it is not easy to be one.

Since the special General Conference held in St. Louis, MO in February 2019, United Methodists use the terms, the traditionalists, the centralists, and the progressive. Some Methodists lament that we are no longer “united.” We are far from being one. What do you think John Wesley would say to us? He would remind us that he did not break with the Church of England and start his own denomination.

John Wesley talked about unity, “though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.” He also says, “to separate ourselves from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united, is a grievous breach of the law of love... It is only when our love grows cold, that we can think of separating from our brethren.”

What would St. Paul say to us? This is what he says to Christians in Corinth, “***Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose***” (1 Corinthians 1:10). After Paul leaves the church in Corinth that he founded, he learns that arguments and divisions arise. To address the problems Paul writes 1 & 2 Corinthians. The followers of Jesus in Corinth have different views on idols, sexuality, marriage, women in the church, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds them that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. He appeals to them to become one.

4. The Purpose of the Unity

Why do Jesus and St. Paul want us to become one? The purpose of the unity is to let the people know that Jesus is sent by God. Verse 21 says, "**the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them.**" Jesus wants his followers to become one as a powerful witness to the love of God. How is God's love revealed to us? 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 say, "**So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!**" ¹⁸ **All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.**" By blotting out our sins through the death of Jesus God brings us back to himself. We are no longer God's enemies because we have been reconciled to God. Jesus prays for us to be witness to such wonderful love of God.

How can we become one? 1 Corinthians 12:12 says, "**The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its part of many, they form one body. For we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**" Paul compares the community of faith to a human body. Each part is called by the Holy Spirit and has a unique function that is necessary to the body as a whole. The parts are different and they should work together. Each part must be coordinated.

Colossians 1:18 says, "**He (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church.**" What does the head of the body do? The head gives directions each part of the body what to do. If each part of the body does not listen to what the head says, the body would not work properly. All parts of the body must focus on what the head wants them to do surrendering all to the head. UMH # 354 says, "All to Jesus I surrender/ All to Him I freely give/ I will ever love and trust Him/ In His presence daily live/ I surrender all/ I surrender all/ All to thee my blessed Savior/ I surrender all." When we surrender all, our Lord would use our gifts for the best benefit of the body.

Today's Old Testament lesson, Psalm 97 praises God's kingship. God reigns with righteousness and justice. The writer of this psalm urges the readers to rejoice in the Lord because the Lord guards his people and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. When Jesus is in control, he knows what we can do best and he will use each one of us to make this world better.

5. Neve Shalom

A few weeks ago, I talked about Jerusalem. I told you that Jerusalem means "the city of peace." But Jerusalem has never been the city of peace. Throughout the history there have been conflicts or wars because the reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians have never happened. Last

week, I saw a very interesting video about a community in Israel called “Neve Shalom.” Neve Shalom is located midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The village is called “Oasis of Peace: an intentional community jointly established by Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.” This community got started by the Father Bruno Hussar in 1970. Father Bruno had a vision to have a community where “Jews, Christians and Muslims would live there in peace, each one faithful to his own faith and traditions, while respecting those of others.” Let’s watch a news report video.

6. Conclusion

What makes it possible that longtime enemies can live side by side peacefully? Jews and Palestinians in Neve Shalom respect and love one another despite many differences among them. They show the world that even enemies can become one and live together in harmony and peace. Jesus prays, “***I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them***” (verse 26). Jesus prays that God’s love and his love may be in us. When the love of the Lord is in us, we can be one and love our enemies.

7. Application

Last Friday twelve people were killed in Virginia Beach, VA by a gunman at a municipal building. The shooter was an engineer for the city. Eleven of the twelve victims were employees of the city of Virginia Beach and one was a contractor. We do not know why he killed his 12 coworkers. If he had a sense of belonging in one body with his coworkers, he would not have killed his colleagues.

What makes us become one despite differences we have? 1 Peter 4:8 says, “***Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.***” Although we disagree with each other and may not like one another, if our heart is filled with God’s love, we would become one. And the love in us will bring others to Jesus Christ. Faith We Sing 2223 says, “We are one in the spirit/ We are one in the Lord/ We are one in the spirit/ We are one in the Lord/ And we pray that all unity will one day be restored/ And they’ll know we are Christians by our love by our love/ Yes they’ll know we are Christians by our Love.”

Jesus prays for us even today for our unity. His prayer tells us that our unity is important not only for us but also for those who want to experience the love of Jesus. I pray that every activity we do in our church such as worship service, fellowship, a Bible study, Sunday school, Prayer meetings, Cantatas, mission projects, service, VBS, a yard sale, and a strawberry festival is the opportunity to show the love of our Lord to the people in our community. Amen.