

Easter 7, 2010
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 17: 20 – 26

The words of Jesus, in John chapter 17. Actually, the *prayer* of Jesus in John 17, that last lonely night in the garden of Gethsemane. Father, He prayed, may those who believe in me be one, so that the world may know you sent me.

In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.

It was late Thursday night, and Jesus and His disciples had gone as they often did, to a little roadside park on the outskirts of Jerusalem, a place called the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples were tired; they kept falling asleep. Jesus, He was wide awake, how could *He* possibly sleep?—knowing as He did, that His crucifixion was only hours away. And there, in the Garden, alone, in the very shadow of the cross, Jesus prayed to God the Father in heaven.

Now, time out for a second. If I knew I was about to be crucified, I'd pray too—and so would you. We'd pray our socks off, God get me out of here. God, help me escape. God, pick someone else God don't let this happen to me, of course we'd pray. We'd pray the way we always do when things get tough. We'd pray for a miracle, we'd ask to be rescued somehow, bottom line—we'd pray for ourselves.

Jesus prayed, but notice what He prayed for. Not Himself, but us. Not

Himself, but us, hard as the cross was Jesus was prepared for it. He was ready to fulfill God's eternal plan, He was determined to die to forgive us that He might then be raised from the dead to save us, the cross was there waiting and Jesus was ready; He didn't blink. In fact, in His prayers, He'd already moved *beyond* the cross to His disciples, beyond them even to all those who would ever believe in Him including us, He prayed that we may be one. Unified, together, one, why? So that the world may know. So that the world might believe.

Well, that was the prayer of Jesus and it just goes to show you sometimes, even if you're Jesus, the answer you get to prayer, is No.

Christians have argued with each other from the get-go, and some of the arguments in hindsight—well, it's hard to believe people got worked up over this stuff. But they did. When to celebrate Easter, when even if to celebrate Christmas. How much water to use in Baptism, when to get Baptized, where is Jesus in the bread and when and how did He get there? What about stain glass, what about robes; what about music? Years and years ago people got mad and left, and churches split, when that very secular instrument the pipe organ was introduced to Christian worship—now they'd get mad and leave if the organ was gone. Look up and down the street in any town in America. Steeples on every corner. Well, ok, nice that people have churches to go to,

but what does that say about us? What does that say about the prayer of Jesus? Division in the church everywhere, so even if you're Jesus—I guess sometimes your prayer, gets answered with a No.

A couple of questions, I'd like us to consider this morning, #1. Why should I care? Why is this an issue? Ok, we have a phone book full of churches, but is that really a problem? I mean, we have different opinions about stain glass and communion and all the rest, but no one seems real mad about it anymore, don't we have other problems to worry about, bigger than this one? Well, ok, but—Jesus wants us to be united somehow, He prayed it there in the Garden, it's like His last will and testament. Seems to me we ought to take it seriously. And what's more, He told us that's the way to win. Like a coach at halftime, Boys, if you want to win this football game you have to play as a team, so also Jesus—You want to solve this world's problems? You want to feed the hungry, care for the sick, save the lost and bring souls to heaven? You want to see your grandkids in heaven? Well then, you have to play as a team. “May they be one,” He said in verse 23, “that the world may know.” So all those other problems out there, so big and seemingly so more important? Maybe oneness in Christ, is the key to addressing them—a key that has been hidden in plain sight.

So ok, unity in Christ is important, so why is it so difficult? That's easy.

Everybody always has to be right. *We* have to be right, we have to win—the first sin in that other garden, the garden of Eden, was the sin of pride. It's still with us today. Look at your family, look at your community, look at this world: If we honestly understood humility, and could practice it for the sake of the common good, how many problems would there be left to solve?

Overcome yourself. With the help of God overcome your pride, overcome your need to look good, overcome your need to win—do that, then come tell me what other problems you have out there that still need to be overcome.

Now concerning the present controversy in the church, the present argument about sexuality and all those on either side who feel they are right—many of whom were at the assembly in Bowling Green this weekend. I know what I believe to be *The Truth*. I also know 1) I have been wrong before. 2) God alone is right, and God has a way making His will plain in time, so with the humility there is also a call for patience; and 3) I know as well what Jesus prayed in John 17. And I think it's time we heard *Him* praying, and stepped back, that His will might be done.

So much in the Christian faith is a mystery. We believe in a triune God, for instance—what does that mean? You know they argued about that for a while, some interesting books I could show you sometime—or not. So much is a mystery. This we know and confess above all else. Jesus finished His

prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, then walked alone to a cross we designed and built and richly deserved, and died there. He took our place in the tomb, and even went to hell for us; and on the 3rd day He rose again, that we might be welcomed to heaven. God alone is right, and that means all the rest of us who aren't God, are wrong. God alone is right, and in His love and mercy has chosen to save anyone willing to swallow their pride and let Him. Do you have any place for pride in your life? Do you? Look at yourself in the mirror sometime and repeat the words, *I'm right*. How ridiculous is that? It's Christ, and Christ alone. May His will be made plain, may His will be done in all of us together, unto life everlasting. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.