

Easter 7C (6/2/2019)  
Acts 16:16-34  
Psalm 97  
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21  
**John 17:20-26**

*Jesus' final act of ministry is to pray for the unity of his followers. If the criteria for unity are theological, social, or political, it would appear that Jesus' prayer was never answered. But, the church's unity is not up to us. We discover our unity only through our common need for grace and belonging.*

Jesus' final act of ministry prior to his arrest in the Gospel of John is to pray for his disciples, present and future. That's a remarkable detail to consider. **He doesn't leave us with a teaching to ponder or a sign to behold, but a prayer to cherish.** And, to pray and be prayed for is a profoundly vulnerable thing.<sup>1</sup> It is to articulate both our hopes and our fears, and to admit that we do not finally have control over our circumstances. It is to acknowledge our limitations, and commend our lives entirely to God's mercy.

And if Jesus prays for his followers, he reveals his heart to us: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one...." **This is Jesus' greatest hope, that we partake of**

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<sup>1</sup> Karoline Lewis, "Teach Us to Pray," <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5348>.

**the unity that characterizes his relationship with the Father, the abiding love at the heart of God's very being.**

What a glorious disappointment we must be. Take a quick glance at Christian history, or even the state of Christianity today, and it would appear that Jesus' prayer for unity was never answered. If the criteria for unity are theological, social, or political, then we are clearly not one. I certainly struggle to bear with my fellow Christians whose confession contradicts the core of our ethics – love for the outcast, care for the foreigner, reverence for the natural world.

**Thank God the church's unity is not up to us. Jesus' prayer for unity is not answered by our feeble efforts, but only by his own faithfulness. In other words, we discover our unity only in our common need for grace and belonging, and in "our common acceptance by Christ."<sup>2</sup>**

I can't illustrate the dynamics of Christian unity better than Rachel Held Evans does in her reflection on this topic in *Searching for Sunday*: ["Trembling Giant," pp.182-5].

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<sup>2</sup> F. Belton Joyner, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 2, 545.