

If we have learned anything over the course of the last year, we have learned that we live in an imperfect world.

But as John's gospel proclaims in the 3rd Chapter, it is a world which God loves.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16 and 17

God loves each of his children so much that he sent his only begotten Son on a rescue mission in order to create a pathway out of suffering and mortality, so that our joy might be complete and that we might have life and have it abundantly.

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This section of John's Gospel, the 17th Chapter is often referred to as Jesus' “High-Priestly Prayer” it is the culmination of his farewell discourse. It is truly a touching moment. Jesus knows that he is going to his Passion, death, and resurrection, he has offered a long teaching to his disciples before his departure,

and here, Jesus offers a beautiful prayer for them. He addresses his prayer to God the Father and prays this prayer over them for the entire chapter.

In the very next chapter, we hear of his betrayal and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

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The prayer which Jesus prays is quite extraordinary because he prays that his disciples might be One as he and the father are One. This statement in a sense prefigures the miracle of Pentecost which we will observe and celebrate next Sunday-- as all barriers are broken down amongst the disciples who receive the Holy Spirit are able to understand one another in spite of their different languages.

In some ways this is a sacramental sign of the truth that each person's unique consciousness opens out upon the eternal expanse of God's consciousness. In other words, we are separate human beings with separate human lives, but in the end, each one of us comes from God, is loved by God, and is only here because of the will of God. In spite of our differences, then, we all come from the same source, and Jesus prays that we might be One as he and the Father are One.

In his prayer for us this morning, Jesus also prays that we be united as one as he and the father are one. This is an extraordinary statement. Especially in this age of extreme individualism. Jesus does not ask us to lose our individuality. Jesus does not ask us to be a hive mind, he does not say we need to all think the same way, believe the same things, have the same preferences. But Jesus does pray that our eyes might become open to the unitive mystery that undergirds all creation: that every person, place or thing, in this world exists because of the loving God who created them and that God's vision for humanity is that we might be restored to this unity and oneness.

Our uniqueness our individuality is part of what marks us as being made in the image of God. The beautiful thing about the Episcopal church is our ability to come together in unity of worship, and understanding of this mystical unity through which we are indelibly knit together as the body of Christ. We would not exist apart from one another, each of us has influence upon the other. We keep our individuality but we are deeply linked together, deeply united in worship and in faith and through

this incredible unity we are able to accomplish more in the world than we could ever imagine.

Just as Jesus did not belong to the world neither do we belong to the world. But just as Jesus was sent into the thick of things, so we are sent into the world. As Christians we do not flee the world. We do not flee its complexity. We do not flee its tumultuous changes and chances. We do not flee its pain. We follow Jesus through the world's pain into resurrected life.

Jesus concludes his prayer for us in this way: "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." John 17:11.

This passage pairs beautifully with Jesus words from Chapter 16 in which he says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

We who sojourn through this fallen world will have trouble, but Christ has overcome the world and he has prayed for our protection and for our unity as a family.

He has left us in this world as symbols of this Pentecost reality, that in Christ we are restored to a oneness of being. We who are his ambassadors are called to serve as symbols of light, life, joy and hope for those who are living with despair in this world. We do this through our generosity, we do this through our willingness to walk with others through the challenges of this life and assure them that though there are times in this life where we walk through the desert, we serve a God who brings us safely home to lush pastures of plenty.