

## Easter 7, Year C, 29 May 2022

Acts 16:16-34

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

### John 17:20-26

Wow! There is so much in these seven verses, isn't there? But I guess we can say that the underlying theme is one of Christian Unity. "I pray *that all of them may be one.*"

What do we mean by being one, being united? Perhaps football can give us a clue? We have Manchester United and Dundee United. For these clubs being united means sharing and working to the same overriding goal: that of being the best, gaining the trophy. Their heart beats for this one thing.

In January we had the week of prayer for Christian Unity. The theme for this year was chosen by the churches in Lebanon and was based on the Epiphany, the visit of the magi to the new-born king Jesus in Bethlehem. This concentrates on two aspects; first, the coming together of those from different religions and cultures to worship the incarnate God and second, on the need for a light to lead the way to the Saviour who is himself the light of the world, the light that overcomes the darkness. Joint worship and joint witness.

And witness is implied in Jesus's prayer because he prays not only for those who were his disciples at the time but *also*, he says, *for those who will believe in me through their message*, their witness to Jesus. He prays for us.

But do worship and witness encompass all that Jesus meant when he prayed for *complete unity*? Doesn't he mean something much more intimate than doing things together, even worship and witness?

I have thought hard about how I can express this visually. And what I have come up with are gloves!

I have these pairs of gloves that can be linked together. The idea is that I won't lose one without the other. It also means that I can link non-identical gloves, perhaps a crude illustration of worshipping together and witnessing together from different backgrounds.

The Miriam-Webster dictionary defines unity as the 'quality or state of not being multiple. Makes sense. Joint worship and joint witness.' Good stuff.

But while we are united in a common activity and a common goal it may or may not be an expression of complete unity. We may be still multiple, although linked in these activities.

Jesus had something much more constant and continuous in mind.

His desire is *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.*

This is the key phrase: *may they also be in us.* If I am in the Father and in the Son and you are too then we are one.

Let me come back to gloves to illustrate this very imperfectly.

If this glove is the Father and this is the Son – and I hope you realise that I am not being irreverent here - then I can place one inside the other and they are one. What the Father is doing the Son does also; what the Son is doing is what the Father is doing.

And we, collectively and individually, can be represented by this third glove. We are to be so in the Father and the Son that our hearts beat with a common goal that is the beat of the Father's heart, so what God is doing we do also. This is true Christian unity.

So, what is the key to being in the Father and the Son? It is mentioned repeatedly in our gospel reading. It's love. It is the love of the Father for us that draws us into that close relationship. And Jesus says that the Father loves us *even as* he loves Jesus.

Jesus prays *I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.*

You know, one of the things that I find hardest after Brian's passing is not sorting out his finances or having to look after the quarter acre of grass he looked after, or sorting through his many belongings and disposing of them, but not being able to talk with him, not hearing him say he loves me.

And I wonder whether that was part of the reason Jesus spent so much time in prayer to his Father; just to experience the love relationship that they have and to hear the Father say he loves him.

And I wonder if that is why most of us spend so little time in prayer. We don't have that intimate love relationship with God. We have never developed that two-way loving communication that prayer should be.

Our unity depends both on us knowing what Jesus has taught about the Father and his love, and on a continuing close relationship with Jesus who, he says, *will continue to make the Father known to us.*

How does this happen? Jesus has ascended back to his Father.

Next Sunday is Pentecost when we remember the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples ten days after his Ascension.

In Romans (5:5) Paul writes that *God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

It is through the Holy Spirit of Jesus that we experience and grow in the Father's love.

And it is through our response to that love that we become united with the Father and the Son.

Earlier in John (14: 23) Jesus says *Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*

Perhaps we can think of it this way. If someone gives you some vital medication that you need to dramatically improve your health – say, the Father's love – and you say thank you and praise the giver but fail to ingest the medication – loving back in return by doing what Jesus asks - then the relationship is incomplete.

The intimate relationship that Jesus desires is there for the taking but it doesn't come automatically. It is based on a love relationship with Jesus.

Paul wrote to the Philippians (in 3:7-11) *I press on to be found in him*, that is in Christ.

There is work to be done. But it is not the work of organising united services and activities with other Christians, although we may well do that.

It is the daily work of laying down our cross-of-going it alone and picking up the cross of relating to Jesus, pressing on to know him better, to learn how he wants us to serve him and developing that intimate love relationship with him.

It is so much more than simply sharing worship and witness with others. It is about our hearts beating together with the heart of God's love.

And it is through this complete love unity that the world will see the Father's love. It is our love unity that should witness.

Friends, let us press on *press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us* (Phil.3:12), that intimate relationship with the Father and Son through Holy Spirit that will be our unity, our spiritual worship and our witness.

May it be. Amen

Chris Shaw, 29 May 2022