

“We Are Yours”

Living the Resurrection – part #6

John 17:6-19

[1] Welcome, friends. I am so glad you are here this morning. Please do me a favor: turn to your neighbor and tell them, “We are all in this together.” No matter how hard we try, none of us can be a “Lone Ranger” Christian. We are created by God for each other; to be God’s church, we need every one of us. It doesn’t matter if you are here for the first time or the fiftieth time: God is calling to be an active part of the church. I pray today you will hear God’s voice and respond to his love. Let’s pray.

Who are we, God, that you would be mindful of us? What right do we have to come before you and intercede for ourselves, our church, and our world? With humble gratitude, we ask that you send your Holy Spirit upon us, right now, in this place. Allow us to hear these words of Jesus Christ afresh in our ears and our hearts. Embolden us, God, to listen and obey the word you have for us this morning, for we long to glorify you in our words and actions. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

[2] I have a question for you this morning. You know in the fall, when you see those amazing flocks of Canadian geese crossing the sky, have you ever noticed that more often than not, one side of the “V” is longer than the other? Do you know why? Because there are more geese on that side.

[3] Gotcha! But seriously, Canadian geese are incredible creatures, and perhaps they can teach us a thing or two. Canadian geese are the largest geese in the world, weighing up to 20 pounds. They are fiercely loyal, mating for life, and they defend their young with surprising aggressiveness. And of course, they are record flyers. Geese will travel two or three thousand miles in the winter, looking for open water. They can travel up to 1500 miles a day, averaging 40 miles an hour, and even up to 70 miles an hour with a good tailwind. This is possible because of their distinct “V” formation. The goose in front breaks the headwind,

allowing the trailing geese to draft along the airflow. They communicate by honking, shifting positions and taking turns so that they won't tire out.¹

This is truth nature communicates to us: we achieve better results in unity.

[4] I'm not suggesting we go outside and flap our arms in a V-formation downtown, although that would be funny. However, I do think we ought to consider what unity in the church looks like. Where does that unity come from?

I can think of summer camps, mission trips, and Vacation Bible Schools, where I have seen teams of Christians pouring their time, energy, and money into a project to help others know Jesus. One of the things I've really missed in this pandemic is funeral dinners. Weird, I know, but it was always thrilling to me to see the church surround a family with love, comfort, and potato salad. When the people of the church gather around a common purpose, it is beautiful.

What would it look like if we practiced true Christian unity in every area of our lives? What if every ministry we offered in this place and community was the result of the super-natural prompting of the Holy Spirit, bringing hearts and minds together as one? And we didn't even have to honk at each other?

If you are hungry for that kind of unity in the church, I've got good news for you. Jesus even prayed for us to be united. And if the Son of God lifts us up in prayer, it has to be important, and unity has to be possible. Let's dig deeper into this passage in John 17 and see what lessons it has for us "Michiganders".

[5] Jesus never flew solo in his ministry on this earth. He gathered twelve disciples around him, plus many others. In his final moments before being arrested, tried, and crucified, he had those men and women in the foremost part of his mind. In fact, his prayer to his heavenly Father, as recorded in John 17, is a model prayer for us as we seek unity.

[6] To achieve unity in the church, we first must understand whom we belong to. Jesus prays to the Father in verse 6, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." He goes in verse 9, "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours."

¹ <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/DNR-News-Releases/ArticleID/2868/8-cool-things-you-should-know-about-Canada-geese>

Jesus states that the Father gave the disciples to the Son. Did you know that you belong to God? You are precious to him. One reason we can act in unity is because we all have one Creator, one Lord, one Savior, who cares about all of us together.

We belong to God because God created us and chose us. We remain God’s people when we believe and obey God’s word. And Jesus prays for us specifically, because we have heard and obey his word.

[7] One of the things Jesus prayed was that he would never lose a single one of his disciples. (v.12) When a goose is injured, it doesn’t get left behind. Two other geese will separate from the flock and stay with the injured one until it recovers.² Similarly, God always watches over us, protecting us, guiding through difficult times. We also have a ministry of compassion with each other, because of the compassion God has shown us. Our protection is better than a flock of geese – we have the comfort and protection of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus has asked to accompany us.

[8] To stay unified as a church, we have to remember whose we are, and trust in God’s protection. This is Jesus’ final prayer before going to the cross: He asks God, “Please, protect them. Unify them.” Look again at verse 11: “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.” Can you imagine what that would look like, to be as close to each other as Jesus is to the Father? We teach the doctrine of the Trinity in the church – that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal and mysteriously One God. That type of unity is the ideal Jesus has for us. That’s pretty powerful.

[9] There is one other aspect of this prayer that we shouldn’t miss. Jesus, when praying for the unity of the church, does not pray that we be taken from this world. Jesus prays for his disciples, and all who would follow him, who will remain in the world even after he ascends back into heaven. It is important we understand this. We are not meant to isolate ourselves from the world, even as we seek Christian unity. We do not sit around idly waiting for a one-way trip to heaven. We are here to engage the world now, to work with God to restore the

² www.billgosling.com/blog/5-things-geese-can-teach-you-about-teamwork

world. Recall, Jesus first met his disciples in a locked room after the Resurrection, and later they went out in public and proclaimed the gospel.

Geese may enjoy flying in the V, but they have a destination. They, too, are part of a bigger picture, an ecosystem that involves many parts. Let us not mistake isolation for unity. True church unity involves inviting, welcoming, engaging, and connecting others to the gospel. I challenge you, church, if you are working to build unity here, how are you including others in your ministry?

Jesus says we do not belong to the world any more than he does. (v.14) We all eat the same food, breathe the same air, drive on the same roads, swim in the same lakes; so what make us different? This: we do not take our values from the world. We are salt and light, flavor to those who do not yet know God. Jesus wants us to be in the world, to continue his mission. That's why it is so desperate we remain united. The world won't want anything to do with us if all they see is strife, in-fighting, and bitterness.

[10] Do you crave the unity the Jesus espouses? If so, what are you willing to give to see it happen? I fear too many of us only pay lip-service to unity. Sure, it sounds like a great idea, as long as I don't have to sacrifice my time, my money, my political views, my weekends, my fishing trips, my career, my family, my craving for dark chocolate ice cream. Real unity requires real sacrifice from real disciples who understand our real reward is in heaven as we please our Lord.

[11] To us, all geese probably look the same. However, in the church, let us not mistake uniformity for unity. We should not repress our individuality. We actually need each other's diversity, to sharpen our edges and our minds, to converse with each other on topics that have different viewpoints. True unity is only achieved when everyone has a chance to thoughtfully listen and respectfully say what is on their hearts.

[12] Unity is costly, because discipleship is costly. Jesus warned his followers to consider the cost of discipleship. He says in Luke 14, if you value anything more than his love, whether it be family, career, or even your own life, you cannot be his disciples. "Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27)

[13] According to Jesus, when we seek unity and the things of God, the world may hate us. Why? Because we reject the values of the world. In a world where everyone is trying to get ahead, where the rule is if you can buy it, steal it, or use it for yourself, go ahead, we value honestly, humility, generosity and sacrifice. The world may call us dumb geese. Are you OK with that? Are you OK with rejection? Jesus says we are blessed when the world rejects us for his sake. (Matthew 5:11) Maybe that rejection is misplaced, because I believe the world craves unity just as much as we do. It is up to us to show the world how God truly wants us to live.

[14] We can overcome the disunity in the world. We can be shining examples of what it means to truly love one another in spite of our differences, maybe even because of our differences. We can offset the rejection by the world with acceptance in the church. We can be the ones who communicate with each other, deeply listening from the heart.

You may not know, but last Thursday was Ascension Day, a church holiday when we remember that Jesus, after the resurrection, "migrated" to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. And like our good faithful Canadian geese, we do expect Jesus to return, although we don't know when. Ascension Day, however, reminds us that while Christ left us in bodily form, he is still present in the Spirit. To us it makes no difference if Jesus is here, sitting in a pew with us, enjoying a bag of popcorn, or sitting at the throne of God in heaven. Either way, he is real, he is watching us, and he is encouraging us to go forward in unity, for the benefit of our church and for the good of this world. Flock together friends, and include others, so that Jesus' prayer may indeed be answered in us.

Let us pray.

Memory Verse: Acts 1:8 (NIV)

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Reflection Questions:

1. When have you experienced real unity or team spirit?
2. When have you felt united with other Christians?
3. Why does Jesus want us to be unified? What purpose would that serve him?
4. How does God protect us and the church?
5. What do you need to do to show others your desire for unity?