



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“What Jesus Wants” **Sermon on John 17:20-26**

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June 1, 2025

Seventh Sunday of Easter

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels: “syn” meaning “together” and “optic” meaning “seeing.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke SEE the story TOGETHER. They hold a common view.

But the Gospel of John sees Jesus differently. One of the differences is a timely one. It is, after all, a gospel that starts with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In John’s Gospel, time blurs and recedes. The past, present, and future are all intertwined. There is no need for a wristwatch or the second coming. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is the eternal logos – past, present, and future, all together. Jesus is in the beginning, Jesus is now. Jesus is forever.

Our text this morning is the prayer of Jesus. And so, it is a prayer not just for a long-ago day, it is the prayer of Jesus praying for us.

John 17:20-26

²⁰ “I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,^[a] so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made your name known to them, and I will make it

known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.”

Jesus prays, “I ask not only on behalf of these...” Who are “these?” Are they the 12 disciples in the room at the time? Those who are within earshot? Those whom he encountered on the way? Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the man born blind, the boy who shared his lunch for the feeding of the multitudes? He prays for all of them. Jesus prays, “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me.”

I heard an interesting thing recently – that since the time these words were written down, there have been about 108.2 billion believers who have lived on this earth. There are more every day. So, Jesus is praying not only on behalf of those in the room, but on behalf of those who have believed throughout time.

The prayer is now. It is also for all the saints from whom their labors rest – your parents and grandparents. The prayer is for all the saints in heaven and on earth. The prayer is for the past, the present, and the future. The prayer has a want. The want of Jesus, “That they may be one!”

Now that would be a miracle! If that’s the prayer, how do you think that’s going for Jesus? What would you say, are we growing more and more together, or are we splintering apart?

The very idea of it, that Jesus would offer that prayer in days like these. What is Jesus thinking? I’m not thinking “oneness!” I don’t even like to bring “oneness” up anymore. I don’t need the left and the right writing and texting me about how I don’t get it! I can hear it now, “This is no time to embrace ‘oneness.’ This is the time to fight! Get our country back!” I know!

Look! Underneath this white alb of innocence beats the heart of a guy who has strong opinions about what is wrong with this world, this country. I send money to change things. I want the other side to lose big! I get it! I don’t need another email – I get it! It’s Jesus who doesn’t get it!

This is my prayer – don’t blame me! I’m just the messenger here! If you don’t like it, if I don’t like it, we do have options. There are other religions out there. We could live without God. It’s very popular! It’s not very demanding. You can say what you want. You can do what you want. You can make your own rules. You can be free. We can go! You can go!

Fine. Stay. Hear the Word of God. Our ears are open! The prayer! The prayer! “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.”

“Father, I desire, I want...that those whom you have given me may be with me where I am...so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

“The love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” He’s all about the love! Wanting! Persuading! “Father, I desire... I desire... that they may all be with me! That they all may be one!” To say a prayer like that must mean that the love is so amazing! Jesus can’t just keep it between the two of them. Amazing stuff we all share!

When you go to a beautiful spot, you want to share it! "I'm here, it's beautiful, and I wish you could join me!" It's so much you have to share it. "Oh, this restaurant is the best! Have you been? You have to go – you'd love it!" The desire to share the love!

This morning, I received a text from Jeff Slaughter, a member who sings in the choir. He texted to say that his 40-year-old niece surprised the family by committing suicide this morning. Overdosed on pain meds. Why do you suppose that? Didn't want to feel pain? Why? And why did Jeff send a text to a handful of people? "I feel numb, and I have to share this pain." He's trying to feel the love! To be one with those who have love! Love is a feeling. I know it to be!

How is Jesus doing with getting what he wants? Oneness. Sharing the love. I feel as though there's so much anger out there! Anger, though, can be love. "That desperate, loud desire to understand the why. Anger can be love. Why? Anger is love, I feel.

How is Jesus doing with getting what he wants? There's so much sadness. I feel sadness. Sadness can be love, I suppose! That's something or someone of great value has gone missing. Sadness is love, I feel.

How is Jesus getting what he wants? Oneness! I feel there's so much right and wrong out there. And the right are always righteous. But righteous can be love. When you know the truth, the truth marches on! "Trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." Giving a voice to those who have no voice! Righteousness is love, I feel.

So much stress out there. Stress can be love. Trying to keep it all afloat. Trying to make ends meet. Trying to make you happy! That's love, I feel!

Anger, sadness, righteousness, stress, you name it, I suppose one could argue it's all love. It just doesn't feel like love. It feels so much of the time like lonely. And loneliness is the epidemic of our days. An overdose of pain meds, whatever she was feeling. Lonely.

Wouldn't you like to feel love? Nothing better than the feeling of love.

Two Sundays ago, Beth and I celebrated forty years of marriage. I remember the first date I had with Beth – a long walk around town, talking and walking. Walking and talking. It was so exhilarating. We lost track of time. At that point, the campus cafeteria was closed, so I took Beth to the finest gas station in town. Look, it was a Sunday, so everything was closed! I opened the freezer door at the back of the station, and asked her to pick anything on the menu, so long as it was less than the five dollars I had in my wallet.

She chose a frozen hamburger. I read the directions, opened the plastic bag, and set the microwave for two minutes. I would love for you all to go to that gas station in Orange City, Iowa! It is such a romantic place with the most romantic florescent lights. And the lotto signs! Gazing out the window to the towering grain elevators in the background and dead dragonflies plastered to the grill of the Ford pickup in the foreground. And the cheeseburger was just so hot and delicious! You have to go and see! Do you understand why you have to go? Of course you don't! You have to be in love.

Love changes everything. Guy read that love can turn prison cells into music halls! Love does that! And music halls into a sanctuary of life. Love does that. "Don't kill yourself! We are all still here! We're all one! Join us!"

How do you think the prayer is going? Is Jesus getting what he wants? That prayer he gave on the that same night in which he gave that new commandment. "This is the new commandment that you love one another just as I have loved you. You also must love one another." He gave that prayer on the same night he took out a basin of water, got on his knees and touched the feet, washed the feet. Intimate. We've become so distant. The stresses and the politics and the worries... I feel.

Forty years of marriage translates to about 40,000 loads of laundry, 3,000 trips to take out the trash, 14,600 goodnight kisses. I feel! It feels like Saturday morning stepping on Lego blocks with bare feet. It's "I don't understand." It's the rolling of eyes, spits and spats, "I'm sorry." It's all love.

But I do favor the time when we take the time, and her hand is in mine, and mine in hers. It's so amazing. It's like being at the gas station in Iowa. The glow of the setting sun behind the grain elevators. Wow!

There is room for oneness. The touch. There is room in this world; we can be so close. Fortunately, we have a prayer. Fortunately, we have the answer to the prayer. Fortunately, we are the answer to what Jesus wants. I feel!

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, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.