

June 1, 2025

John 17:20-26

“Blest Be the Tie That Binds!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In this life we frequently ask people to pray for us when things are not going well. Behind such asking is often a feeling of being alone and helpless. Knowing that someone else is praying for us puts them in the situation with us. Our asking them to pray seems to me to be an almost unspoken request for comfort when we feel that it is impossible to fix our situation. I think we often hope that others, who have gone through similar things, will be able to give us some sort of an insight to help us in what we are going through. If not, at least they are praying to God with us and for us. I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, where the apostle writes about the “God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

I think that our gospel lesson for this morning is truly consoling. It’s a portion of what is known as the priestly prayer of Jesus. Before we were even born Jesus was anticipating our arrival on the scene. Jesus prays for us while already knowing that our lives down here are not going to be well. He begins by asking that future generations who believe in him might be one. In other words, he is praying that the many believers in him might be a single thing - that we might be tied together.

We want to be connected. We want to be understood and we want to understand. We want to be linked up with others to share in this thing we call “life.” If we don’t want to connect then it’s probably because we tried a time or two and got burned. It’s sad that this thing called “life” is so over taken by the fall into sin and its consequences that there are conflicts so that even our best relationships with others can be rocky at best. But we are looking for the tie that binds. So, what is it? What is the tie that binds?

That expression - “the tie that binds” - is interesting. I tend to think of the concept as a shoestring that ties two sides of a shoe together so that the shoe doesn’t fall off your foot which keeps us from stepping on rocks and other hazards on the ground. A more formal definition that is found in *The Free Dictionary* is the following: “The value, belief, characteristic, etc., that is shared between or among people and which results in a unique and unbreakable connection.” In our gospel lesson, Jesus prays that we “... may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” You can’t get any closer than that!

It’s that word “one” that really gets my attention. That word is used in various contexts in the New Testament to denote singularity and unity. It can even point to exclusivity which is the opposite of being inclusive. It can mean that there are those on the inside and that there are those on the outside - believers and unbelievers - sheep and goats - wheat and weeds. Of course, those who think of themselves as tolerant cannot tolerate this idea in Christianity that there are those who are in Christ and those who are not. Anyway, in the New Testament, the word “one” highlights the importance of a unity among believers in the oneness of God and his redemption for the world, which benefits us only if it is received by faith.

An easier way of saying it might simply be to quote Paul in Ephesians 4:2-6 when he speaks of the body of Christ urging us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called: “... with

all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” In this passage the word “one” underscores the connectedness that we have in the Christian faith. We have become the body of Jesus with him being our head through the one Spirit who has called us to the hope of the salvation in the gospel and sacraments. We are united in the steadfast love and truth of the Lord, who is constantly faithful creating and preserving faith in us to receive cleansing in our baptisms, making us his own and thereby ruling us and all for our salvation - to be with him forever.

This is the tie that binds. In the gospels, the word “one” is used to emphasize the singularity in our relationships, which is not only to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of all our sins, but to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to be there for one another to keep each other clean in Jesus and ready to be with him. Our sermon hymn puts it in the following way: “**Blest be the tie that binds** / Our hearts in Christian love; / The fellowship of kindred minds / Is like to that above.” Indeed! The tie that binds is the love of God in the sending and sacrifice of his one and only Son at the cross for the forgiveness of all our sins, and to give Jesus and ourselves to each other and even to those who hate us. Jesus says:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

What does all this mean? The glory of the Father, which is the revelation of his grace and truth (his steadfast love and faithfulness) that his Son made flesh also possesses, is now given to us in Jesus’ life and death on the cross. In the life and death of Christ, grace and truth are made manifest so that we may receive these by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith. What we receive is pardon for all our sins and the anticipation of the paradise of God. It is in the pardon for all our sins and our hope to be with God forever that we become one with him and one with each other. The revelation of the grace and truth of the Father in his one and only Son is a love that also stirs us to love one another. **Blest Be the Tie That Binds!** The name of Jesus is a love that loves us so that love is in us to care for each other.

The love with which God loves his Son is in us through the cross and empty tomb. The love that the Father has for the Son which touches us in the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven is the type of love where one gives oneself to another. The Father from all eternity gives all to the Son and the Son in time and space gives all to us in joy. The reason why we were made was so that we could receive all that is or ever has been and to joyfully participate in that one thing together, even also giving ourselves to one another in truest love. Because of the nature of this love that now touches us in a fallen world, this love takes effect in us individually and collectively. What do I mean by that?

The hymn goes on: “Before our Father’s throne / We pour out ardent prayers; / Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, / Our comforts and our cares.” Do you see here how the one love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit touches us to love in a fallen world all those who have now been rescued? In his priestly prayer, Jesus prays for us in what he knew would be a difficult journey. If our love is one with Jesus’ love, who lived a difficult journey for us, and we love one another as we have been loved, then we comfort each other with the comfort we ourselves have received. We are here for each other. Our hymn says: “We share our mutual woes, / Our mutual burdens we bear, / And often for each other flows / The sympathizing tear.”

To be one is to be united in the grace and truth of Christ in this messed up world and to be there for one another. We live together as if we are all going to the same place. We are keeping each other safe as we prepare to leave this messed up creation behind. We are looking forward to what is before us in the new creation. We see it faintly while being bound together in a common faith, hope, and love.

Therefore, whatever we do in this life has in view the maintenance of one another’s faith, hope, and love in the forgiveness we have received in Christ. We keep our eyes on the prize. As our epistle lesson says: “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” Until that day, it goes on to say: “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.” Indeed, the time is near, and so let us be there for each other to see one another through. **Blest Be the Tie That Binds!** now and in the day when from sin we shall be set free, and as the very last verse of our sermon hymn says: “... And perfect love and friendship reign / Though all eternity.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott