

John 17:17-23, NRSV

<sup>17</sup>"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

<sup>20</sup>I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup>that **they may all be one**. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them, so **that they may be one**, as we are one, <sup>23</sup>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."

(slide #1)

## "Be One"

-All Saints' Day-

I love children at Micah's stage in life. Toddlers are able to communicate by saying a few words, but choose not to, preferring to just point and grunt hoping that you will figure it out. So Micah will walk up to you, lean against your legs and throw his arms up into the air, in the hopes that you will pick him up. And when you pick him up, he will grunt and point, and try with his body English to move you to whatever he wants—kind of like riding a horse. Sometimes you might think that he is going to jump right out of your arms because he's trying so hard to get his point across—and you're not listening! Micah's thinking: "What am I, speaking English here? Don't you understand what I'm trying to tell you? Am I not getting my message across to you?"

*"Why isn't our message getting out?"*

I recently heard some political pundits discussing the upcoming elections—you know, the ones that are still more than a *year* away? It was noted that one of the parties was concerned that they weren't getting their message out effectively.

(slide #2) It caused me to pause and consider. Pastor Larry has been consistently and rightly challenging us to "share our stories", in essence, to get our message out. So, as Christians in America today, *are we getting our message out?* Are we effectively communicating who we are and why we are willing to invest so much of our lives in this undertaking we call "church"? Are we letting people know how much Christ means to us and to the world through our words and actions?

No. We are not. I'd love to sugarcoat it. Being an optimist, I'd love to see the glass as half-full, but right now there is not a whole lot of anything in the glass. There are exceptions, of course, people and places in our culture in which our message is being boldly proclaimed, and people are responding to it. And there are many places where the message is changing lives at an incredible rate. But most of us have not seen much of that for ourselves.

Why? Why is our message not getting out? Why are we ineffectively communicating our faith journey as American Christians?

There are two primary reasons—there may be a host of other reasons, but these two are the foremost. (slide #3) *Firstly, we're having great difficulty agreeing on the message.* For a variety of reasons, individuals and churches have been preaching different messages—in essence, different gospels—over the past thirty or forty years. For some, the message is primarily about how one feels about him or herself. For others, the message has been boiled down to a plea for Christians to be either for or against the ways of the world. And for still others, the message is tied closely to some political or social movement. The problem is that there *may* be some value in any of these teachings (or a host of others), but whatever value there is needs to proceed from the *real core* of the message.

Let's start by agreeing on the message. Who are we? Why are we here? What is the point of connectivity for us?

Let's look back at the Gospel of John for a moment. As a quick recap, Jesus is praying in John, chapter seventeen, during the last night before his crucifixion. We often pray *to* Jesus—as we should; I encourage you to take the time to read about when Jesus prayed for us, his followers. Jesus prays that we would be *sanctified* (that's a "churchy" word—it means "holy," or "pure," to become all the God wants us to become), that we would be *sanctified in truth*.

So what is our message? It comes from the truth found in scripture, the truth found in our lives. We are here because of one message—or we should be. We are here because of the good news—the gospel—of Jesus Christ. We are here because God offers us a chance at redemption, a chance to be re-born through the blood of Christ. We are here because Jesus is saving us. We are not here because we are perfect, because we are sinless. We are here because God has cleansed us—and is continuing to do so. And we are here because God offers this same hope to every single person that has ever or will ever live.

That's the good news. *That's it.* That's the message. It doesn't mean that we will avoid discussing potentially divisive issues or theologies. It doesn't mean that we don't care about the difficulties of living everyday life. It doesn't mean that we care nothing about the way the established church is organized or handled. What it means—what preaching the core message means—is that telling people the good news is what drives everything else we do.

If you are part of any ministry here at Faith church, that ministry needs to be driven by that one core message—the love of God in Christ for us. I hope—I *really* hope—that you understand that about me, and about Larry and Trudy and Derek and everyone else on staff. We are driven by this one core message. We don't all agree on everything—we really don't! But we are obsessed with the message: Jesus has come to seek and save the lost, to reconcile us to himself, and

to each other. If that is the only thing that you can ever remember me saying to you, if that is the only thing that you can ever remember me demonstrating by my actions, then I have done my job. I am not a Christian because I reasoned my way to it, nor because Christianity is a good starting point for my *real* desires for the world. I am here because I have encountered God's saving grace in my own life, and that is the message that I preach. If I do anything else right, it is only because of the truth of the core message.

So, #1—*Why are we not getting our message out?* Because we are confused about the message itself. Our message is one of ultimate truth—that God's unlimited grace is available for **everyone!**

(slide #4) Now, #2—*Why are we not getting our message out?* Sometimes we struggle to communicate our message because even when we agree on the message itself, we don't get along with the others speaking and living it.

Again, let's look at the scripture. Our Lord knew that his time on earth was drawing to a close. What Jesus prays in these verses represents what he thought the core of our existence ought to be. And so he prays in verse 20—**I ask not only for those who already believe, but also for the benefit of those who WILL believe through the message of those who already believe.** Very interesting! Christ seemed to think that the world would recognize the truth of our message as much in the *way we live* as in *what we say*. We've all heard "walk the walk, talk the talk." Here it is. Jesus prays **that we would be one.** And then he repeats himself two more times in the next few verses. Jesus wants us **to be one** (v. 22) or **to be completely one** (v.23), just in case we didn't get it the first two times.

What does that mean: **be one?** How can we ***be one?*** We are individuals. Each one of us is special. We have the right to think for ourselves. We have the right to be who we want to be, to believe what we want to believe, to hang out with who we want to hang out with. *I am my own man*, or *I am my own woman*, we say. That's our culture speaking. As Americans, we are the most hyper-individualistic culture that has ever walked the earth. We are consumed with our capacity to make up our own minds and to live our own lives.

Now, there is value in our individuality. Our cultural freedom does allow us to pursue whatever we would like—to *be all that we can be*, to use the old Army slogan. Most people in the history of the world (and even today around the world) do not have such a blessing.

But the downside to our individuality is insidious, because we don't recognize how difficult it is for us to ***be one*** with someone else. You can see it in our relationships; as a culture, we have no idea what true godly intimacy is. We bounce around from friendship to friendship, from partner to partner, from church to church trying to find real intimacy with others. But as consumers, the best we can usually manage is to find a person or a group of people that think or act like we

do, and hang out with them. But we're not even truly **one** with that person or group, because as soon as things go some way we don't like, we look for another.

(slide #5) Jesus said "**be one**." That means that we are to come together on the core of what it means to be a Christian—namely, the good news of Christ. *He didn't say that we are to agree on everything.* I love the fact that not everyone on staff at Faith church has the same perspective on some of the debatable issues—because we agree on the one that is most important: God's love in Christ, and our call to be about his work. And we agree that each of the others is a committed and valuable part of the body of Christ—the Church.

**Be one.** Do you know how it would change our community and our world if we as believers took this challenge seriously—if instead of separating ourselves every time we have an issue, we sought to **be one** through the Holy Spirit?

Today we are celebrating the lives of the saints who have gone on before us, especially in this last year. I have a question for you: if any one of the saints who have gone on to be with the Lord could return with one bit of advice for us, what would it be? *Listen: I cannot say for certain.* I can only guess. I've not actually met anyone who's gone on to be with the Lord. But, I think I can make a credible guess. I bet any of them would encourage us to let go of our petty differences and focus on the one important thing—God's love found in the cross of Christ. You wanna' know why I think that? Because I have seen something like it many times in the lives of folks who recognize that their time on earth is drawing to a close—men and women who, on their deathbed, want as much to see their enemies as their loved ones. Why? Because when our lives are gone, we want to be whole. We have a natural desire to be reconciled, to **be one** with each other. The petty personal wars that we fought don't matter anymore. We want things to end well. It is only our sinful stubbornness that prevents it during our lifetimes.

Now is the time to start asking: *Are we one with one another—I mean, here, right now, in this fellowship?*

I cannot make the church all over the world **be one**, but I can start with myself. Am I one with each of you? Are we one? Am I willing to lay aside my own issues (important though they may be) for the sake of the truth—the good news of Jesus' love for each one of us? Am I dedicated to showing the world that what Jesus says is true because we in the church look and act totally different than anything they've ever seen, because we are willing to **be one**?

Today, when we take Communion together, I want you to consider whether you have been cut off from anyone else here in the fellowship by differences that maybe aren't as important as we first thought they were. Is God asking you to be reconciled—to **be one**—with that person? Jesus laid down his life so that we could **be one** with him, and one with each other. As we prepare to remember Christ's sacrifice, let us consider whether we will work toward his desire for us—to **be one**.