

Can We All Be One?

C-7, John 17:20-26; Robert Woody; 6/2/19

Children's Sermon:

In our Gospel reading, Jesus was praying to God that all his disciples, and all his followers would be **one** with God and Jesus and **one** with each other. What if we were **all** one? What does it mean to be "**one**"?

That's what Jesus was praying about in our Gospel reading. That we should be **one** with each other, and **one** with God and Jesus. If we were all **one**, what would that mean? What would it look like?

I think what Jesus is saying is that even though we are all very different, in many ways, if we truly love one another, and don't let our differences separate us, or let our differences control our relationships, we can be **one**, we can be friends, we can stay connected.

We do have to accept and respect our differences. But we must be willing to make our connections more important than the things that could separate us. If we are **one**, we will be deeply connected, despite our significant differences.

Ok, so if you are a boy, can you be **one** with a girl? You wear different clothes. You like different things. You have different voices. You have many things that are different. So if you are a boy, how can you be **one** with a girl? If you are a girl, how can you be **one** with a boy? How can you be **one** with someone as old as I am, that watches different TV shows and plays different games?

What is it that makes us one with Jesus, and with each other? What is it that can hold us together despite our differences? **Love**. If we make **love** the most important thing, we can be **one** with people who are very different from us.

That's what Jesus was praying to God about. That all his followers – boys, girls; young, old; farmers, city-dwellers – could all be **one**; could really love each other.

Are you willing to work hard to be **one** with everybody you can even those who are very different? That's what Jesus wants all of us to do and wants you to do -- to love everyone you can so you can be **one** with them.

Adult Sermon:

When I started thinking about my last sermon at Rec, I was thinking about how I could best say "thank you" for making these last 16 and 2/3's years, the best chapter in my life journey. But when I read the Gospel, assigned for my last Sunday, and started reflecting on what Jesus was saying, what came to me was: I needed to both celebrate all Rec has done, AND offer another, one last challenge to Rec, even on my last Sunday.

The reality is we are not very focused on **oneness** with each other in our world, and even in our country. We are focused more on ourselves, on people that see things the way we do, on separation more than **oneness**.

Oneness is not easy. But what is the purpose of reconciliation? To make us **one**. To help us see and let go of the things that divide us. To help us focus on the things that connect us; that keep us together.

Why are we Church of Reconciliation? So we can be **one** with and love those who are different, or even very different from us.

It is very ironic that on my last Sunday, the focus of the Gospel reading is about **being one** with God and each other -- the focus of our Gospel reading is on the heart of **reconciliation**.

According to Jesus, it seems the purpose of the Church is to make us **one**. To make us one with God and Jesus, **and** each other. To put love first. To find ways to overcome our differences that separate us.

How's that working in the Church Universal? Why is the Church so segregated? White churches, black churches, Latino churches. Are we one with the super conservative evangelicals? Are we one with Catholics? Are we one with the Church of Latter-Day Saints? Are we one with our Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu, brothers and sisters?

If we think the way **we** worship is the right way, and everyone else has it wrong, and they need to convert to our way, are we really focused on being **one**?

Rec has done a great job of welcoming and being **one** with a very diverse community. But we are not perfect, yet. We, and starting next week, You have to continue to stretch and find ways to **love** and **be one** with those who are very different.

Being one with people who are different is not easy! About halfway through our marriage, Julie decided to be a vegetarian. That wasn't easy for me, because I love meat. How could we cook or eat dinner together? I'm the main cook in the house, and I can cook vegetables, but I'd rather focus on meat, BBQ, grilled chicken, steaks. How do we stay **one**?

Well, we figured it out. Julie decided to be a pescatarian. She decided she would eat fish. And it worked. I cook different kinds of fish, mostly marinated salmon. And we love having dinner together. We are still one, despite all our differences.]

Art Ramseur and I having been meeting for lunch about once a month at Barbeque Station on Loop 410, for many years. From a political perspective, Art and I are **very** different. We have had some serious disagreements on major political issues. But we decided we were **not** going to let those disagreements control our relationship. We decided **to be one**, despite our differences.

Fortunately, we both love BBQ. And we love having deep conversations about many things; even though there are still some major issues we see differently. But we strive to be **one**, despite our differences.

After Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Bishop, was elected and ordained in New Hampshire in 2003, 9 months into my tenure at Rec, the Episcopal church and our Diocese were in turmoil. Even our church of Reconciliation was conflicted. Some Reconcilers were angry. Some Reconcilers were hurt. Some reconcilers were scared. And many Reconcilers were not sure what to think.

I decided to have a Town Hall meeting, so that we could share how we were feeling and what we were thinking. Not in order to come to any agreement, but to avoid division. People started sharing their stories. A woman shared that her husband came out as gay and they had to get a divorce. Several gay couples who had been together for decades shared their incredible struggles in our world, just to love who they loved. And an angry couple shouted out accusing me of violating my ordination vows, by even allowing this conversation.

Then this middle-aged man stood up at his table and took the mike. He very slowly explained that he had been raised to believe that homosexuality was a sin. And all gay people were sinners. Then he looked down at a gay man sitting next to him at the table, and he put his hand on his shoulder and he said, "But I love you. And I am not leaving Rec."

Reconciliation is the most diverse and welcoming church, I've ever been a part of. I think because we have held on to the DNA of Rec, we have been able to nurture and support a community that is **one**, despite our many differences. You have taught and stretched me so much. I will always love Rec. [Even in the next two years when I can't show up.]

Leaving will be hard, but I will continue to be one with Rec, and one with you.

Rec is the most loving and reconciling church I have ever known. **And**, we are not perfect, yet. And we will probably never be. Jesus' disciples were focused on loving and being one with those they were separate from in their normal lives. They stretched the Church, but they never made it to perfect.

There are still so many people in our world, our country, our state, our city, our neighborhoods who need our love and support. And we are often blind to them or ignore them.

As I've shared with you before, I do outdoor workouts, 3 days a week at Madison Square Park, downtown. I've been working out there for about 5 years. And every day I ride my bike back and forth. Every day I work out, there are between 3 and 10 homeless people sleeping on the benches or on the ground in the park. Most of them are vets, suffering from PTSD. A few of them know me, and wave or say Hi to me.

Every day I think about what I could do to help them. I've thought about bringing granola bars to hand out, or bringing Gatorades or water bottles. But I've never done it.

How can I be one with them? What would Jesus do? Am I truly following the Jesus Way of love?

None of us, even us Reconcilers, will ever be perfect when it comes to **loving all** our neighbors. But because we focus on love and acceptance, we have welcomed and loved a diversity of people. And Rec has challenged me to reach out and try to be one with people who are very different from me, including people who are struggling to find food and a place to sleep.

Rec we will never be perfect. But I hope and pray that Rec will continue to **stretch** to love and become **one** with those who have been ignored or left out.

Thank you for being **one** with me, the way Jesus taught us. And thank you for all your love and support for each other and strangers.

I will miss you, but we can still strive to be **one**, even in this big, long and painful transition.

Amen