Grace Lutheran Community, 29th May, 2022, 7th Sunday of Easter
(Also Commemoration of the Ascension)

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[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.' John 17:24-26 (NRSV)

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A number of years ago I was fascinated by a new show to begin on TV – it was 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'. However, what fascinated me by this show (and saw me stay up late every week) was not the story lines about vampires and the like. Rather, this particular series was written by older people from the "Gen-X" generation for younger Gen-X people ("Generation-X" is a term o describe those who are post 'Baby-Boomer' generation, and it's that group born between 1965 and 1980).

Within this series, underneath the clothing of supernatural themes, was a young girl with a single mother who moved to a new town. Here she struggled to fit in. She met a new 'boy' named 'Angel', but it seemed that their love for each other could not be fulfilled. Her friends and associates were a strange collection of people who also struggled to 'fit in'. But what was truly fascinating in this series was that – unlike many other shows produced by baby-boomers (told from a boomer perspective – older person perspective) – this story was told from the perspective of the teenage girl. The emotions and feelings and experience of a teenager were displayed.

Being told from a Gen-X perspective I wondered how the various issues would be resolved. Would the girl get the boy? How would the daughter-mother relationship be developed? Would there be hope for a new family? How would her friends develop in their relationships? But as the series progressed people just seemed to go from one relationship to another. When it seemed that relationships might 'happen', people would pull away and leave. Enemies would become friends, and friends would no longer love like they did. It all seemed a great mess. Nothing ever seemed to get resolved. I was frustrated in all this. Couldn't people resolve their relationships, and actually 'settle down'? And then one day it struck me… This is the way it is for many people. There is no 'happily ever after… life just 'is'. There is a belief that there is never a perfect 'answer' to things… This was the 'resolution' or 'answer' given in this show – that there is no 'answer', there is no 'hope', there is no peace.

Paradoxically, the answer given was that there is no 'answer', and once people accept this (that life will be a mess, going from one relationship to another), then finally one has an 'answer' – by not trying to find an 'answer'. And here, as a Christian, I realised the difference faith in Jesus makes on our whole perspective, attitude, and hope for life.

In the Gospel for this day (7th Sunday of Easter: John 17:20-26) we hear this prayer of Jesus (v.20): 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."

John Chapter 17 is a really important part of the Bible, but it not often reflected upon by Christians. What is really important in John 17 is that we have the words of a prayer from Jesus – and it's not a 'short prayer' we sometimes say before we 'get on with the real business'. Instead of what Eugene Peterson sometimes describes as 'flower-pot prayers' (prayers that are like a 'decoration' before we get into a meeting, or eat a meal, or whatever), Jesus prays a real and significant prayer. He prays this 'big prayer' just before He enters the Garden of Gethsemane. And this prayer can be divided into three section: verses 1 to 5 are Jesus' prayer for the work He was about to do; verses 6 to 19 is Jesus' prayers for the Apostles and their apostolic work, and; verses 20 to 26 is a prayer for all believers. And as part of His prayer for all believers (that includes you and I) are these words: *"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."* Here is a prayer about a love that exists before the foundation of the world. And here is a prayer that directs us to think about our lives being drawn into the divine life of God.

How do you feel when someone prays out loud for you? You may feel one of these things: comforted, vulnerable, grateful, honoured, humbled, awkward but appreciative, and you may feel that someone really cares for you, and that you're not alone.

This is the most wonderful prayer that ever rose from this earth to the throne of God, and this petition is the most wonderful in Jesus' entire prayer. Jesus opens the window of His heart in this prayer to His Father. We see an ardent yearning for our presence as He prays: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am."

One of the strongest instincts of the human soul is the longing to be with those you love. How gut wrenching when death comes and tears away from you those whom you have dearly loved! Well, our divine Redeemer is our Elder Brother, feels the pulse of our humanity and breaks out, "Father, I desire that they 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."

Prayer is the language of desire. Prayer reveals the deepest longings and desires of a person's heart. This prayer reveals what is truly most near and dear to Jesus. What is Jesus' ultimate desire for you? Jesus desires for you to be with Him. "With me" is the language of love.

You could write a book on the whole Bible called, "Desiring Us," because the Lord's desire for us is a thread that runs throughout Scripture. God saves us so

that we might have fellowship with Him (1 John 1:1-3). The heart of every biblical covenant is this: I will be your God and you shall be My people.

God calls us, his people, the apple of his eye (Deut. 32:10), his treasure (Ex. 19:5), his portion (Deut. 32:9), and his bride (Rev. 21:9). Those are all terms of endearment. They express God's love for us and his desire to be with us. Revelation 21:3 declares: "Behold, God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them, and He will be their God." Jesus desires us. Jesus, the Lord of lords and King of kings, wants you to be with Him. That is what John 17:24 teaches us.

In our world there are many homes and many lives that struggle to know and experience true peace, harmony, unity and love. There are many people, even those who live as the people of God, who struggle at times to live with true peace, harmony, unity and love. And like that television series, at times it feels like there is no 'answer' at all.

But in His great High-Priestly Prayer Jesus prayed, "'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*." Jesus' prayer is that all people may be 'one', and especially all believers may know the peace and unity that God gives, and indeed that exists within God Himself. And this peace can become a reality in our lives.

Is it possible to experience peace, unity and wholeness in our lives? The simple answer is 'Yes'. But such peace and unity cannot be generated within our own self; within our own human spirit. That's what Jesus really tells us. Rather, human attempts will ultimately lead to further division and frustration. Usually human attempts at trying to find some sort of 'peace' end up with some person trying to tell another person what they ought to 'do. And once we let ourselves, or place others, under the spell of the law then here our human ideas about love and unity often end in failure. That's certainly what most shows on television and in the movies usually tell us.

The clue for knowing true peace, unity and harmony in life is contained in the words of Jesus, "May they all be one. *As you, Father, are in Me and I am in You*…" Beloved, this is the language of heaven… A pastor from the past, Samuel Rutherford, once prayed, "O my Lord Jesus Christ, if I could be in heaven without thee, it would be a hell; and if I could be in hell, and have thee still, it would be a heaven to me, for thou are all the heaven I want…" In other words, what makes heaven heaven is Jesus…

God didn't create because He was lonely; He created because He is glorious… God didn't create because He needed someone to love… The Father has always loved Jesus; it's a love that has no beginning and will never end; it has always been… This tells us a great deal about what God is like; He has always been a loving Father… Indeed, this is how we know that God is love; because He has always been actively loving Someone… If God were not Triune He would not be love; but He is; and He has always loved and will always love Jesus…The Father's very being has eternally been about loving His Son…

There are five petitions in Jesus' great prayer (John 17): (1) Jesus Prays That His Father Will Keep His Followers Safe; (2) Jesus Prays That His Father Will Make His Disciples One; (3) Jesus Prays That God Will Sanctify His Followers; (4) Jesus Prays That His Followers Will Experience the Full Measure of His Own Joy; (5) Jesus Prays That His Followers Will Be with Him Forever. Jesus prayed for you.

Sometimes we feel the pain of division within our own families, or within our own congregation, or as we go about our daily business and life. And, at time, in spite of all our best efforts and intentions we just can't seem to resolve these things. But if we remember that in Jesus there is true peace, unity, harmony and love – the fruit of the Spirit – we begin to see that although we may not yet 'see' peace between ourselves and others, it exists nevertheless. We are thus released from our own 'self', and instead are able to rest in the Father's love through our faith in Jesus.

Unlike others who feel there is 'no hope', and who seem to stumble about in life and relationship, we have the love of God in Jesus. Jesus prayer for 'unity' is not only a call to a particular way of living, but it is His gift to us all. We may have hope and peace in life always – always through the holy and forgiving love of Jesus.

When we come to these words of Jesus, these are the last words we have for the disciples before His crucifixion. So these words are important. Jesus prays that we would know His 'glory' (that is, God's great love for us on the cross). And Jesus prays that we would live under His glory as we celebrate His great love for us all. We have been assured that Jesus' prays for us. We all are in need of prayer. We can't do it by ourselves. But we are guaranteed help from God.

A story is told of a Lutheran Seminary professor in the U.S. whose son was killed in a violent way. He found it impossible to pray and went about his teaching and his work feeling empty and without anything to give. Sharing his pain with a colleague, he revealed his apparent loss of faith and inability to pray. His friend told him, "We will pray for you until you can pray for yourself again." As his healing took place, he was not abandoned and eventually he was able to pray again.

As the One who loves us, Jesus prays for us. So let us pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, through the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus the Christ, You revealed Your glory, the forgiveness of our sins, and the hope of life eternal. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, assure us of Your presence, remind us of the joy of forgiveness for repentant sinners, and strengthen our faith, and. Form us into Your church, that we might live our lives reflecting Your steadfast love and faithfulness. This we ask in Jesus' holy name. Amen.