

"DREAM OR A POSSIBILITY?"

JOHN 17:20-26

T.E. Lawrence, whose life and adventures have become popularized in that famous classic film, "Lawrence of Arabia" once said, "All men dream but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds awake to the day to find it was all vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they many act out their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible..."

I'm sure we have all come across a person or two in our life-time that we could label him or her a dreamer- someone who is willing to as one person put it to, "color outside the lines;" it's the person who pushes the envelope and thinks big and does not let things like money or other obstacles that can be constructed get in their way, or at least in the beginning. Maybe you are one of these types of persons.

If we are truly honest we know that we need the dreamers and the visionaries to help us see the possibilities, to help us explore the “what-ifs” so that we don’t remain stuck- stuck in the past, stuck in the present, stuck in the mindset that says, “We’ve never done it that way before.” And even if we don’t consider ourselves “dreamers” but the definitions I have just suggested, we all, at one time or another, have had a dream or an idea that we wanted to see become, at the least, a possibility and at most, a reality.

We read our scripture passage today where Jesus is praying what has become known as His **High Priestly Prayer** where He prays in verse 21, “that they may all be one.” Jesus prays for “Unity.” If you read the verses that precede our passage you find that He first, prayed for Himself as He was preparing to face the cross; second, He prayed for His disciples and that God would keep them and protect them for it says in John 17:15, “...I ask you to protect them from the evil one;” and now, in our passage Jesus looks to the distant future, and He prays for those both near and far, those who in

ages to come will come to Christ and the Christian faith. And then Jesus prays in verse 21 these words, "that they may all be one" where He prays for those in the distant future who will, one day, embrace the Christian faith. Looking closely at our passage today, I ask, were these the words of a Dreamer or were these the words that pointed to not only a possibility but a reality?

If you don't mind, please take your bulletin and look with me for just a moment at the Apostles' Creed, and, in particular, the third line from the bottom, the end of the line where it says, **the holy catholic church**. Now a number of people reading or reciting this Creed, might, at first glance, reading these very words could say something like, "But I thought you were a Presbyterian Church, not catholic." But let me draw your attention to the letter "c"- you will notice that it is not a capital "C" but rather a lower-case "c," and there is a difference. The word spelled "catholic"- small "c" simply means **universal** not Roman Catholic- capital "C."

It is easy to see how this can be confusing, wouldn't you agree? What we are looking at in our passage should give us a view of what the church should be. But all this said, we want to get to an understanding of what Jesus is praying for as He thinks about future generations of believers, as He thinks about you and me. What does it mean, "That they all may be one?"

First, **what this unity is not**. This unity is not about a unity of administration or organization; it is not ecclesiastical in nature or a formal arrangement or an outward appearance. This unity is not a forced conformity and it does not mean uniformity. The reality is this- Christians will never bring all their churches under the same organizational structure. Christians will never gather together and worship God all in the same way- there will be worship services that are very structured and what we would call very liturgical with a Postlude and Call to Worship and all the other parts that go into a more formal type of worship and there will be worship services that are more free spirited where you might even see hands raised and hear

people say out loud, "Amen" and the like. And guess what? Christians will never believe precisely the same things- for instance there are those who only believe in "believer baptism" where the person comes forward on their own to be baptized while others believe in "infant" or "covenant" baptism where a parent or parents or a guardian or guardians bring the baby forward. And then you have us "schizophrenic" Presbyterians who do both. And there are those who sprinkle- we Presbyterians do and there are those who only immerse the person in a big tub of water. The point I want to make is this-Christians will not be able to agree on every issue you can think up that is played out in the local church. That is not what Jesus is talking about in our passage.

So what is Jesus talking about? Second, this unity that **Jesus is talking about is a Christian unity which rises above, which transcends all the differences and brings Christian men and women, Christian boys and girls together in what? In Love.**

This unity is founded in a unity of personal relationships.

Relationships. I wonder if many of the problems that people face or get caught up in, I wonder if many of the problems ministers face or get caught up in, I wonder if many of the problems people in churches face or get caught up in could be diverted or slowed down or resolved prior to them becoming an issue or catastrophe if those same people had a strong, personal relationship with someone or a group of someone else's? Folks, God created us to be in relationship with Him and with each other. And it is when I have those personal relationships, when I have someone or those someones who I can turn to and find support and encouragement and help, this makes me a better person, it makes me a better Christian. And don't you know that as we have made some significant changes in recent months as it relates to Sunday morning and our worship and Sunday school, one of my fervent prayers is for the unity of our church founded on our personal relationships. That even though these changes have stretched some more

than others, Pastor included, that we would be able to be united in our purpose- to make disciples for Christ, to be united in our mission, to be united in our ministry.

And yet I only have to move in and out of religious circles to know that we have, at times, missed the mark. Christians are still divided because we have loved our church organizations, our creeds, our own rituals more than we loved each other. Maybe it is more natural for people to be divided rather than united, and yet it shouldn't be that way in the church that Christ established. **And yet maybe one of the main obstacles to the unity that Jesus prayed for is our own selfishness.** For some people it is only about them, or rather only about Me. And guess what? Our sense of "community" is on a constant decline. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putman discusses the decline in community life over the past four decades. The title of his book came from the "trivial yet telling example" of the percentage of adults who today belong to a bowling league which is about ¼

what it was in the 1960's. And yet here are other statistics that might speak to the move away from "Community"- the percentage of active membership in local clubs and organizations like the PTA is 1/2 of what it was in the 1970's. People volunteering in a political campaign where they are stuffing envelopes, making phone calls, and going door-to-door is about 1/2 what it was in the late 1960's. And people today are not visiting friends like they used to, not having friends over like they used to- folks, our sense of "Community" is on the decline. And there are a host of reasons from TV to dual career families, to... well you fill in the blanks.

And yet there are places where the church is coming together and uniting. When I look to the work of denominations and churches engaged in mission work, whether it is overseas missions or even missions in our own country you see a different model. You see different Christian denominations, different Christian organizations partnering together in the name of Jesus because they need to support each other in sometimes

difficult and even hostile environments, or because of resources, whether it be people resources or financial resources. And besides, more and greater things can be accomplished by working together than by working solo. And there is another plus to this unity- because of established personal relationships others, those outside the Christian community are visibly able to see a united witness for Christ and how Christians can, should, and do love each other.

The unity that Jesus spoke of has as its example to follow, it has as its blueprint to mirror, the unity between God the Father and God the Son. I mean, look at what Jesus is saying in the second part of verse 21 and verse 22 when we read, "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. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one."

And so what Jesus is saying is just as the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father, so we too are to live within that unity. The unity of personal relationship between Jesus and God was based on love and obedience. And this unity for which Jesus prayed for us should be a result of our love for Jesus. It truly is a heart to heart relationship.

And what is the result of this unity? The world may believe vs.

21. When the love of Jesus is perfected among the people of God in a deeper unity which is very visible, the world is challenged. For the church then becomes a witness to the world and that same world will come to know that Jesus has been sent by God, all because of our witness and our example that we love one another. And "what the Incarnate Son of God had once been to the Jewish people, the church is now to the world—the incarnate love and glory of God." (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, p. 505)

At lunchtime a group of leaders from our church and the Church of the Holy Spirit Anglican Church will get together for our monthly meeting where we fellowship and get to know better people we have been fellowshiping with, well, some of the group, for years. They are Anglican and we are Presbyterian. They are charismatic and we are reformed. Many of them raise their hands in worship and yet, with our people, the only time you might see them raise their hands is if they have to go to the bathroom, no, only kidding. We are different and yet the same because the major thing that unites us is, who? Jesus! We continue to talk about ways we can partner in ministry and what we can do together that we couldn't do separate and if we did, it would not be as effective.

Friends, in a divided world, in a divided society where divisions have become so obvious, running down so-called "religious" lines, there is absolutely no reason, no excuse for brothers and sisters who claim Jesus as Lord not to work together, not to come together under the Lordship of Jesus

Christ and seek the unity that Jesus prayed for. I mean, if we are one in faith, there can be no final reason why we may not be one, also, in our life, one in our fellowship and one in our worship.

This prayer of Jesus- was it just a dream, was it a possibility, could it be a reality? May it come to pass, Lord, may it come to pass. Amen.

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Introduction: People who are “Dreamers”

Our passage today is known as Jesus’ **High Priestly Prayer**

The Apostles’ Creed- “the holy catholic church”

“catholic” means _____

What does it mean, “That they all may be one?”

First, **what this unity is** _____

Second, this unity that **Jesus is talking about is a Christian unity which rises above, which transcends all the differences and brings Christians together in what? In** _____

This unity is found is founded in a unity of personal

One of the main obstacles to the unity that Jesus prayed for is our own _____

Bowling Alone, by Robert Putman

The unity that Jesus spoke of has as its example to follow the unity between God the _____ and God the _____ vs.21-22

What is the result of this unity? The world may _____ vs. 21

Conclusion: This prayer of Jesus- was it just a dream, was it a possibility, could it be a reality?