

Turn with me if you would to John 17. I want to share with you today some thoughts and ideas that have been sticking with me and I've been mulling over in my mind for the last 8 or 9 months. These are some ideas that have gotten stuck in my head and have been rolling around for the last 8 to 9 months, and I want to share them with you today because I think that they have the potential to have great impact on the lives that we live as we seek to follow Jesus both as individuals and as a church, and I think that if we live this out it also has the potential to have tremendous impact on our community.

In the **chapters leading up** to this point in John's gospel Jesus has been sharing the Passover meal with his disciples, he has washed their feet, and taught them one last time. Before he goes out the garden where he is arrested (in chapter 18), he prays the prayer we find in John 17. He begins by praying about his mission to bring glory to the Father, summarizes what his ministry has been, and prays for his disciples that they would be protected "in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." (verse 11) He prays for that they might become holy, and then Jesus continues concludes with these words beginning in verse 20:

²⁰*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, (as an aside, notice here who Jesus is praying for . . . all those who will believe in me . . . **Jesus is praying for his followers**, the church down through the ages, including you and me . . . I find it quite humbling that in this moment, this time of stress, knowing what is coming, that Jesus is not just thinking of his beloved disciples who are present in the room with him, but of millions of people who would follow him down across the centuries, **including you, and you, and you, and you, and me and Brewster Baptist Church in the year 2005**)*

²¹*that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. ²⁵"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."¹*

Anybody able to stay with Jesus there? Jesus is praying for all of those who would ever follow him. Praying that they would be protected from the world and that they would be holy, which probably doesn't surprise us. These are often categories of things we find ourselves praying for, right? But Jesus doesn't simply end his prayer there, he concludes it with this abstract concept of unity and oneness. **Jesus' final prayer is for**

¹ John 17:20-26

his church and he lays out his vision for what the church should look like and how it should function. He's pouring out his heart and pleading with God "may they be one." I think that this puts us in an interesting position, because **we then have role to play in answering Jesus' prayer**, right? I also find it fascinating that Jesus seems to indicate that the oneness of his followers is his **strategy for evangelism** . . . "that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and love them even as you have loved me." So "oneness" not only answers Jesus prayer, it proclaims the good news of God's love to those who need to hear it.

If we're going to become "one," **we need to understand what Jesus means.** The greek word for "one" that is used here is "*hen*" (form of *eis*). This word is rarely used to signify the number one, but usually carries the sense of single, or unique, or only. By using it here, Jesus refers the disciples back to Deuteronomy 6:4, which reads: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one* (also translated "alone"). This verse is fundamental to the understanding of God in Jewish tradition. It immediately precedes the recitation of the laws given to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy. Even today, if you go to a synagogue, you will find this statement as part of the liturgy. "*Here, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*"

The Hebrew word for one, echad, that is used here is similar in meaning to *eis*, it means one, single, and unique, also but also carries with it a strong sense of unity of separate parts. For instance, *echad* is used in Genesis 2:24, when man and woman are described as becoming "one flesh." They don't physically become one being or one personality, but they are "one."

So when Jesus refers to this idea of "one" by asking that his followers would be one, as Jesus is one with the Father, Jesus is doing two things. First, he is making a profound theological statement about his own divinity, as Jesus states as a premise for his prayer that he is already one with the Father.

But Jesus is also making a clear statement about **what his followers should look like**, not just holy, as he prays in verses 17 to 19, but one.

So what does it mean for us to be one? I think that there are two ways in which we are called to be one. First, we are each called to be "**a person of one.**" Ok, sure, that's easy. I'm one person. I've got one body, one personality, one life, etc. See, I'm one. That's not quite it. Did you ever notice how people often behave one way in a particular situation or with one group of people, but a different way in a different situation or with another group of people? Or maybe you've even noticed this about yourself . . . Did you ever say or hear someone say; "it was like she was a completely different person"? Or "He just didn't seem like himself."? Or think that someone is a hypocrite because talk about living one way and then act another?

It's a common thing isn't it? **Our lives are fragmented, compartmentalized, segmented.** We behave one way at work or school, another way with our families, another way (or even ways) with our friends, another way in the community, and maybe

another way at church. There are some things we do that we wouldn't do if our mother or grandmother was present, right? It's like we've got different faces, different masks that keep others from seeing who we really are. Don't believe me? How many of us treat or speak to those we work or go to school with more kindly than those we live with? It's me too, it's all of us.

It's part of the fall. If we go back to the beginning in Genesis chapter three, the first consequence of the eating the fruit, the first consequence of the fall is what? They saw they were naked and they were ashamed, and they sewed together **fig leaves** to cover up. We still do it. We still sew together the fig leaves to cover up. To keep people from seeing who we really are.

"I can't let them see that, they might not like me . . . they might think I'm a bad person. . . they might think I'm not as perfect as I seem." It's fig leaves. It's not part of God's design.

And the problem is that when we live this way our lives are based on deception – on **making ourselves appear to be people that we're not**. We have to remember who we've let see which face, and look and sort who's in the room before we can act or speak. It gets tiring. It's not how God made us to live. We're not meant to be "multiple people" we're meant to be "one person." If we really think about it, we all know this. The frustration caused by hypocrisy by others being "a person of many" is universal. People reject Jesus because they see followers who are hypocrites, just like they are themselves.

I think that one sense of the "one" that Jesus is calling us to be deals with this. Jesus is calling us, **Jesus is pleading for us each to be "a person of one."** I think it's interesting to note at this point that the people that Jesus has the most trouble with, that frustrate him and make him the most angry, are who? The Pharisees, hypocritical religious people who aren't "one person" but rather say one thing, do another, and yet in their hearts is something different.

Jesus is "a person of one." He doesn't hide or cover up. He is consistently the same person in every situation, motivated by love and compassion. If we're going to be followers of Jesus, **becoming one person is the goal**. One person who has one face for every situation. One person who speaks the same no matter the audience. One person who acts the same no matter who is watching. One person whose words and actions are consistent with what is in their heart. Had enough yet? This feels like enough of a challenge, doesn't it? The good news is that Jesus says, "I in them," meaning that we're not alone. **It's hard, painful work becoming one person, but we're not alone**. Jesus is at work in us, working to make us "a person of one," and as we're about to get to, we can help each other to become one person.

I think that there is another sense of in which we are called to be one, perhaps this is more obvious, but I believe that Jesus is also calling us to become "**a community of one**." Jesus desires his followers to be one, again not in the sense that

we become some weird creature that has one massive physical body that has 500 heads, or even in the sense that all become the same. It's not like the Borg on Star Trek, these space aliens who are completely uniform in every way and travel around the galaxy trying to make every group of people like them. Incidentally, I love their motto, catchphrase, etc. "resistance is futile, you will be assimilated." Maybe the assimilation team needs to make that their slogan . . . or maybe that sends the wrong message . .

Team sports

God does not call us to be copies of each other, he calls us to be united.

The Apostle Paul writes, ²*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* ³*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* ⁴*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—* ⁵*one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶*one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*²

We are one with each other, whether we realize it or not, because as followers of Jesus we are united with Christ. One of the tragedies of the story of Christianity, is the way that the church has become divided into factions, who refuse to acknowledge other factions as part of the same church. We are called not to simply be one as BBC, but as a church as a whole. **We are to be united as one with believers in all places, and in a mind blowing sense, united with believers at all times down through the centuries and into the future.**

And as the church is one, Jesus tells us that it allows the world to see God's glory and know his love. Think about it, which would you more likely listen to or want to be a part of: a group of people who are proclaim God's love, yet are divided and fractured among themselves, or a group of people who proclaim God's love, and live with one mind and heart as they seek to love one another and all those they come in contact with?

Strategy for Evangelism

How then do we live out this oneness? How to we become "a community of one"? In the passage I read from Ephesians, Paul speaks of being humble and patient, bearing with one another in love. Elsewhere, in Philippians 2, Paul tells us that

*"¹If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. . . ."*³

As we seek to become like Christ, we become one in spirit and purpose as we

² Ephesians 4:2-4

³ Philippians 2:1-4

take on his attitude. How do we become a community of one? **It's just love.** We put aside our selfish ambitions that say, "this is what I want." We put aside our vain conceits and let people see us how we are. Love. We love one another enough that we are willing to set aside the interests of our own kingdoms, in favor of the Kingdom of God.

It means we have to set aside the idea that this is my thing, my issue, my problem. It's ours, because when we are one. It's not yours or mine, it's ours, because it affects us all.

An **ancient rabbi** (Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) who lived shortly after Jesus told this story: There are a group of people in a boat, and one takes out an awl and begins boring a hole in the boat beneath his seat. The others said to him, "What are you doing?" He replied, "Is that any concern of yours? [I am not boring a hole beneath your seat] but only under mine."

You see the problem there? **If we are one body, if one of us struggles, we all struggle. If one of us celebrates, we all celebrate. If one of us stumbles and falls, we all stumble and fall. If one of us becomes more like Jesus, we all become more like Jesus.**

See here is where becoming a "person of one" and "a community of one" are inextricably linked. We can't fully be a community of one, unless we are all a person of one. We need you to be you, and you to be you, and me to be me. If we're all going to be one together.

There are some big obstacles on the road to becoming one, both as individuals and as a community. The first is it means we have to be **willing to tell the truth.** We can't be one person if we aren't willing to be truthful about who we are. Hypocrisy is a form of deception, because we have all these different faces, because we're trying to pretend that we are someone we aren't. So we have to be truthful. We have to be willing to say, this is who I am. These are my faults. These are the things I struggle with and battle every day. This is who I'm trying to be, but I'm not there yet. It's scary, because it means we have to trust each other that we mean it when we say we love each other, that God means us when he says he loves us. It's scary, and it's hard, but if we are going to be the person of one that Jesus calls us to be, we've got to start by telling the truth about ourselves.

The second big obstacle to being one, is that **we have to handle our differences in a loving way** rather than in a way that leads to more conflict and factions and sides. The world has seen plenty of that. It's not any different from the way everyone else lives, just turn on any **reality TV** show. Somebody does something or says something or someone perceives a slight or a tone in another person's voice, and what do they do? If they don't just explode on the person, maybe they turn to this person over here and say, "Did you see what they did/said?" "Did you hear how they talked to me? Did you see how they looked at me?" And person A tells person B, who

tells person C, and pretty soon there's an army gathered ready to go to war. Sound familiar? It's not just on reality TV, I suspect that some of us have lived this.

In **Matthew 18**, verses 15 to 20, Jesus lays out the way that his followers should behave in these situations. Just a warning, it's hard. Jesus says, "*If your brother sins (some translations say "against you"),^[a] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.*" So if someone sins, maybe even against me, or to stretch this out a bit here, maybe I just perceive that my brother or sister has sinned, maybe I'm just concerned about what I've been witnessing when I've been around them. I'm to go to them and talk about it with them, because the assumption here is that I love each other enough to want to help my brother or sister. Maybe I missed something and it's not what I think it is, maybe they aren't aware of what something looks like, but this is how Jesus says to handle it. Not talk about it with everyone else (because that's gossip), **talk to them.**

And "*If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.* ¹⁶*But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.*" So I meet with my brother or sister, and we aren't able to get things resolved, so we get one or two others to meet with us to mediate and help us sort this out, and maybe they'll help us to communicate better with each other, or maybe they'll point out where one or both of us is in error. ¹⁷*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church* (church in this context being the immediate circle of believers that you are journeying with, not the inquisition here); *and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

We often read this last part and think that Jesus is telling us to throw them out of the church, but remember the fundamental assumption is that I/we love our brother or sister enough to want to sort it out. How does Jesus treat tax collectors and pagans? He loves them, he eats with them, he spends time with them, he pursues them.

The most basic thing we must do if we're going to be one is live out love: (If we have any questions about how to be one, we should always refer to love) Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:

¹*If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,^[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.*

⁴*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

⁸*Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.*

¹¹*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.*

When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.⁴

Jesus' desire is that his followers would so reflect and manifest his love that they would become as one. That the church would be so consumed by the love of God that it would become the driving force of our lives. That we would love and care for others as Jesus did, that we would teach others how Jesus has taught and is teaching us how to live. That we would love one another so much that we would be able to tell each other the truth about ourselves and about each other.

Churches can survive poor attendance, poor giving, tragedies, etc. The things that damage churches and even kill them are failures to be one. Factions, gossip, dissension, deception, hypocrisy, These are the things that kill churches.

The world has seen that . . . called to be different . . . One as an Evangelism Strategy

As we become persons of one, as we become a community of one, Christ is glorified and the world comes to know God's love. Unless you and I are willing to live out the teachings of Jesus and become one . . . the world will never discover Christ.

To a certain extent, we have the power to answer Jesus' prayer

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13