

These are exciting times for us at First Trinity.  
We are about halfway through a mission and values process.  
We are involving new people and energy in leadership.  
The Wise Women are on a mission to get all congregations in the Metropolitan Washington Synod praying for our city and surrounding counties.  
We are learning what it means to live closely with our brothers and sisters from the First Congregational UCC community.  
We are exploring our own redevelopment possibilities and how to best make a positive impact on God's world in which we live.  
We continue to look for new ways to share God's love and news of God's coming kingdom to the world.

These *are* exciting times – they are not necessarily easy.  
Exciting times feel risky b/c the church does have many opportunities, directions, but there may not be unanimity about all that. Change and decision-making can threaten the comfort and the unity of most groups, even congregations.

Jesus knew that his disciples were in a similar situation.

After 3 years of teaching his disciples, Jesus knows he's going away.  
The disciples' challenge is how to stay together, how to stay unified in the hope and promise that Jesus gave them despite the apparent failure of the cross.  
How will they keep their fellowship together in the face of fear, threats, loss of leadership?

He knew that they would face hard times, a harsh world.

So, Jesus prayed. Jesus asked God for two things. First, Jesus prayed for unity of those who believe in him. And second, he prayed that unity would help the disciples spread the word that Jesus came from God because God loves us.

He prayed on behalf of his small band of disciples *and* those who will believe through the word of the disciples – that’s us friends, in case you missed it.

Now, since John is best read aloud, and often, in order to understand, here is part of the prayer again:

“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.  
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,  
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.”

Are you beginning to hear the two things that are very important in this prayer? John has something very important to tell us in these verses, we know. If only we could follow the long, convoluted sentences and who is in who. John’s point is so important that he falls over his words to write it again and again – so much so that it gets very confusing.

However, the takeaway message is that unity of the God’s faithful people is important to Jesus. What does this unity look like?

Our unity is to be like that which Jesus shared with God – this leads us to the Trinity. And that ought to clear up any confusion right there!! The trinity is a rich symbol of diversity--God's own self as plural and diverse and yet as undivided--each part is necessary to the other, literally complementary--one part completing the other.

Jesus is not praying, I don't think, for his followers to be the same, to become clones of one another. Just as the trinity is made of unique yet unified parts, so is to be our community.

Jesus lived and taught the unity that he wants for us.  
Jesus called disciples to him to teach and proclaim the kingdom of God.

He brought together people from different regions,  
different trades and backgrounds and  
made them his group of trusted students and companions.  
He taught them, he sent them out together;  
he made them work together, he shared meals with them.  
It wasn't always smooth.

There was a slow learning curve;  
the disciples were challenged to feed thousands  
with nothing in their lunch pails or coin purses.  
They were challenged to understand a new commandment  
and to see the revelation of God and the glory of God.  
They hungered for the hope and promise of  
new life that Jesus offered them.

We could say the same for our community that gathers here.  
We come from different parts of the city,  
different countries, with different experiences and positions in life.  
And, yes, we have a slow learning curve, too.  
And, yes, we are challenged to live out a new commandment  
to love one another as Jesus loves us.  
And, yes, we hunger for the hope and promise of  
new life that Jesus offers.

When Jesus knew that he was going away, he prayed for his friends.

Jesus knows humanity after all.  
He knows that we worry, get scared, and  
Can be overcome with greed, power, envy and jealousy.  
So, Jesus prays for unity.

Jesus would like for us to have  
similarity of purpose and intention for one another.  
A unified purpose and intention of love.  
Jesus asks God to gift those first disciples and us  
with the same love and unity that he shares with God.

Jesus always reminded people that it was God who sent him;  
That it was God who was his source of being.

Jesus has already passed on something that God gave to Jesus.  
Do you remember what it is?  
Glory – Jesus says,  
“The glory you have given me, I have given them”.

Glory radiates the presence of the divine.  
The glory of God is seen in Jesus’ humble life and ministry.  
Jesus grew up a carpenter.  
He called fishermen, tax collectors and sinners to work with him.  
He healed the sick, forgave the sinners,  
restored the weak and marginalized.  
And, finally, Jesus glorified God on the cross.

What becomes clear in this prayer is that  
Jesus wants his disciples and us to know,  
*and* to tell others that it was God who sent Jesus.

Jesus was not some random, witty, charismatic man with the ability to  
perform miracles who happened to gather a following.  
No, Jesus was sent by God.  
He is God’s gift to humanity.  
A gift sent to reveal our Maker;  
to show people the Creator who knew and loved Jesus even before  
the foundations of the world were set in place.

It's easy to focus only on the unity within our midst.  
But we are directed not to ourselves, but outward to God.

And, here is where it gets easy to miss  
a key point of this whole section.  
We don't often stop to think of the  
enormous scope of God's salvation activity.  
God was..."before the foundation of the world".  
Jesus was...also, before the foundation of the world.  
The first chapter of John says  
"All things came into being through him..."  
God and Jesus together created the foundation,  
set the world into place.  
Not only life, but light,  
in the person of Jesus was brought into the world.  
Born to Mary and Joseph,  
the fullness of God in Jesus walked the earth  
healing, feeding, teaching, loving, forgiving.

Jesus gave a new commandment –  
"Love one another as I have loved you".  
Let this love bind you together so that  
all will see the source of our being he says.  
And, let that love help you to reach out to  
a world that does not know its Creator.  
Reach out in glory – not the kind of glory with  
big, splashy gold or marble columns,  
or headline grabbing pronouncements of judgment  
on this group or another.  
But, quietly, humbly help the poor,  
those who strain for any tidbit of  
good news or a caring, forgiving hand.  
In this the glory of God will shine for the world to see.

Immediately after the sermon we will sing "Blest Be the Tie That  
Binds". A hymn about sharing each others lives – the good and the

bad. In our singing we ask that we are bound together in love like that which Jesus and God share. And, we pray as Jesus prays for us.

The closing hymn is “We All Are One in Mission”.  
It’s a reminder as we leave that  
Our unity is not meant to serve only ourselves.  
We are not meant only to meet once a week to  
shut out the outside world.  
No, our unity, rich with a diversity of many gifts,  
but united by Christ, provides the strength and  
the energy to show Christ’s love to the world,  
to witness in God’s name.

These *are* exciting times.  
There are many opportunities, many ventures – new and old –  
to which we are being called.  
And, many are we, many our gifts,  
so rich in diversity yet united in Christ.

May our purpose and intent to love one  
another bear witness to the world in humble glory.

Amen.