

WEEK FOUR



IN UNION WITH THE CHURCH

Jesus Prays for the Church
John 17:1-9, 20-23

Opening Ritual:

To begin class each week, have a cup of water and a bowl. Invite everyone to take a deep breath as the leader slowly pours the water into the bowl.

Then pray aloud:

God of Water and the Spirit,

May we be open to the new things you are doing.

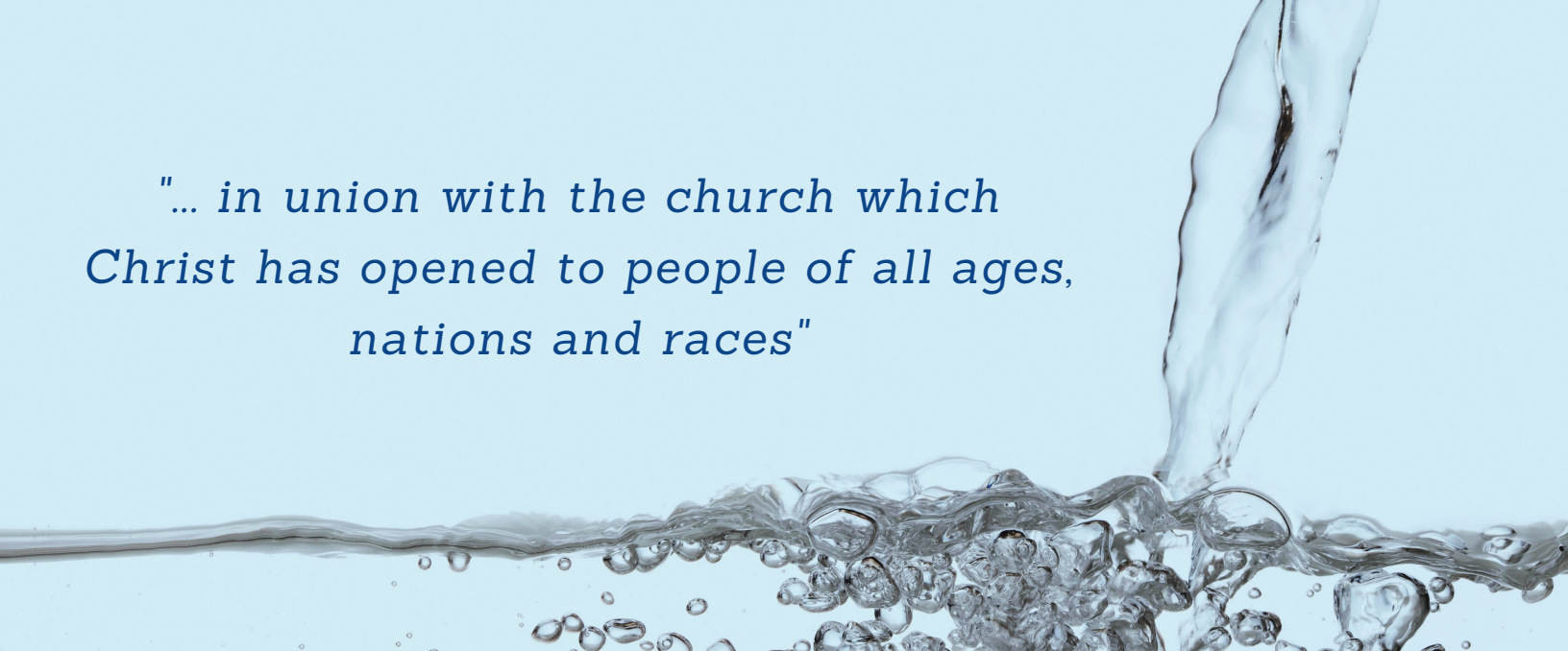
*Reveal to us today what it means be in union with the church,
which Christ has opened to all. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 17: 1-9, 20-23

1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. 6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 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. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 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.

Discussion:

- Have you ever considered that Jesus prayed for us?
- What does it mean to be glorified by God?
- Jesus teaches that, through him, we are made one with God. What do you think that means?
- According to the final verse, God loves us as much as God loves Jesus. Think about that for a moment. Does that bother you? Does it comfort you?



*"... in union with the church which
Christ has opened to people of all ages,
nations and races"*

Pastoral Reflection:

The Gospels tell us that Jesus went off by himself to pray. A lot. Throughout his life, he practiced a holy rhythm of ministry and prayer, doing and being, working and resting, immersing himself in the crowds and withdrawing himself into the wilderness. Sometimes when he withdrew, he brought people with him; but many times, he went alone.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus' prayers were like? Don't you sometimes wish that Peter had had a tape recorder or a cell phone? What exactly did Jesus say? Did he talk at all or just rest in silence? Did he hear God's voice? What were those times of communion like between Father and Son, between Creator and Christ, between Lover and Beloved?

In today's scripture reading we actually get to overhear an intimate conversation between Jesus and the One whom he called Father. It comes at the end of his farewell speech to his disciples in John's Gospel. His farewell words begin in chapter 13 and continue until chapter 17, when Jesus stops talking to his disciples and turns his face heavenward. With the disciples, we overhear this intimate, loving prayer that flows from Son to Father. We get a glimpse of the communion of love that we call the Trinity.



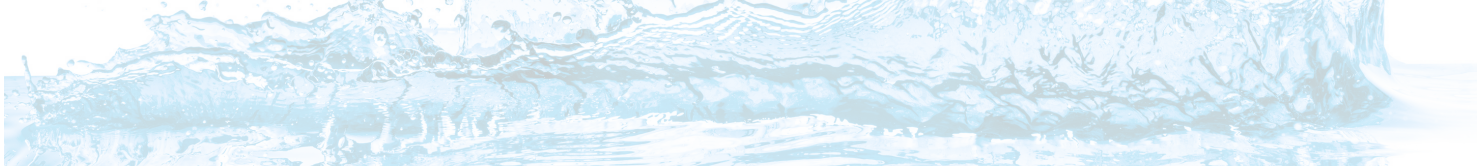
And what do we overhear? What is Jesus praying about? He is praying for us. He is praying that his followers will know the eternal love that flows between himself and God. He prays—not once, not twice, but three times—that all of his followers will be one.

One of the key things to recognize in Jesus' prayer is just that: it is a prayer to God. He is not instructing the disciples that they need to try harder to get along with each other. He doesn't tell them that they need to figure out how to agree on everything. He is placing them in God's hands as he prepares to make his way to the cross. And he prays that God will work to make them one.

That's very reassuring to me. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to make us one. To be sure, we participate in that work. We do our part to "love one another" as Christ has loved us, but we do not have to grit our teeth and figure it all out ourselves. God is already doing the work. In fact, if the letter to the Ephesians is to be believed, the work has already been accomplished. We're already one.

What would it look like if the followers of Jesus all over the world believed that we were already one? How would that change how we treat those within the church with whom we disagree? How might it change our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world? What would it be like to live as if "oneness" has already happened?

--- Rev. Dr. Carol Cavin-Dillon



Connection:

- What does it mean to be in union with the church?
- Do you think our church is truly open to people of all ages, nations, and races?
- What would it look like if the followers of Jesus all over the world believed that we were already one? Would it change the ways we interact with one another?

Closing Ritual:

At the conclusion of class each week, invite everyone to stand, Then say aloud:

*Members of our Beloved Community,
Will you, in union with the church, be open to people of all
ages, nations and races?*

In response, invite each person to touch the water on their way out the door, saying **I WILL!**



I WILL

IN UNION WITH THE CHURCH