

God, Man, and Mission

John 17:20 -26

Also Genesis 1:1-5, 26-28; Ephesians 2:14-22

Prayer

Grant us, O Lord God, the knowledge of your divine words, and fill us with the understanding of your holy Gospel, and the riches of your divine gifts, and the indwelling of your Holy Spirit. Enable us with joy to keep your holy commandments and accomplish them and fulfill your will, and to be accounted worthy of the blessings and the mercies that are from you, now and at all times.

Syrian Jacobite Liturgy

Not Alone

We come to Mission Month with questions. How can we evangelize more effectively? What are the spiritual issues of the rising generation? How can we grow our church? The more ambitious among us might be asking other questions. How can we raise up more pastors? How many churches can we plant in the next five years? Who can we send to help Pastor Johnson in Indonesia? Others of us come to mission month very differently. Some of us are asking, how can I talk to my angry parents or alienated children? What can I say to my colleagues who are angry with me for sharing the gospel? What good am I with my physical limitations? I've mostly been a failure as a Christian witness. How can I shrink into my seat until this series is over?

The underlying answer to our fears and concerns about missions is that we are not alone in missions, and the ambitious among us need to remember that even the apparently weak among us are essential. This prayer of Jesus, His last words before He was crucified, is about our unity with God and each other and the love of God in us. Jesus did not come alone to save His people. Jesus came with the Father and the Spirit. And when Jesus saved us, He did not leave us alone, but joined us to each other. Even better, Jesus joined us to God and gave us the love of the Father. Now that is good news! That is a gospel worth proclaiming!

Jesus and the Father

The gospels open with Jesus on mission. Mark's gospel begins with Jesus saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand..." (Mark 1:15) and Luke records Jesus saying, "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10) In John's gospel John the Baptist introduces Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Jesus was the first missionary. Jesus left home and went to a foreign land to proclaim the gospel and announce that God's Kingdom of peace and righteousness had arrived.. But Jesus was never alone. Jesus was not some heroic figure out there alone against the world. Jesus and the Father and the Spirit were working together in saving their people and establishing God's Kingdom. Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working...Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. (John 5:17, 19)

Jesus did not do His earthly ministry alone. Everything He did was with the Father and the Spirit. Now in this final prayer before His death, Jesus says this amazing thing in verse 21, "you, Father, are in me, and I in you," but that is only a summary of everything else that Jesus said in this prayer. The Father and the Son glorify each other. The Father gives gifts to the Son, and the Son carefully protects those gifts. The Son reveals the Father to the people the Father has given Him. The mystery of the Trinity is of three persons who are distinct, but are inseparably joined. The Trinity is one God in a community of persons. No human being can fully understand this. If he could, he would be God! The Jews saw a single man performing miracles, but the truth is that the Father and Spirit were working also. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." The work of Jesus was the work of the Father and the Spirit. There is no mission, there is no salvation, there is no church without the Father and the Son and the Spirit. This is more than saying salvation is from God. The God who saves is the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. We heard several weeks ago that our salvation was planned before the universe existed. Before God created the world, He chose us to be His children. In time He created us, called us, gave us new life, and baptized us into His covenant. This was not an accom-

modation to Satan's rebellion and man's sin. This was not Jesus growing bored in the carpentry shop and running of get Himself killed. This was not Plan Z. This was Plan A. God predestined us for salvation from before the beginning, and when it was time for God to enter humanity to save His people, He did not do it alone. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all working to save us, and they still are.

You and Each Other

You are not alone, either. God did not create isolated individuals. God created a man in His image, NTD , and a race of people came forth from him. Man in the image of the triune God is a race of connected individuals designed to love and support each other, but sin fractured and ruined the man who developed from Adam. Consequently, now we experience hostility and alienation from other individuals. Jesus prayed to the Father "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you," (John 17:21) and God has created a new man. Paul explained to the church at Ephesus, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...that he might create in himself one new man..." (Ἀνθρώπος) (Ephesians 2:13,15). Your salvation is more than forgiveness of your sins. Jesus has joined you to other believers in a community so solid, He calls it "one new man."

The church is not merely a social organism. It is that. Christians enjoy common activities, worship together, and support each other. Other clubs and organizations do likewise, and they are a great support and pleasure to many people. But the church is radically different. People in the church do not merely believe the same things, or worship the same God, or have the same commitments. Christians are *organically* united in a way not true for any other people. The unity of the church is similar to the unity of the Trinity. It is not the same. Christian unity is not identical to divine unity because man is not God. But man is made in the image of God, and the unity of man is the image of the divine unity. Jesus prayed, "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you." (v. 21) Just as! Christians are one *just as* God is one!

There is a 50 kg. bar in the weight room at Kampung Warisan. I do not know about you, but I cannot pick up a 50 kg. bar with one arm. But if one of you helped me, one of us on each end, we could do it. Two individuals could cooperate to lift the 60 kg. bar. That is not an illustration of Christian unity. When Christ saves us and brings us into the church, it is not as isolated individuals. There is another way to lift the 50 kg. bar. I can do it with both arms. It takes some effort, but if I concentrate and put both arms in place, I can lift the 50 kg. bar. Now that *is* an illustration of Christian unity. The church is simultaneously one man and distinct persons, just as God is one God and three persons. And just as God does mission as a complete God, all persons involved, so the church does mission as one man, all individuals together.

A common mistake in evangelism and discipleship is trying to persuade new believers of the importance of Christian fellowship and of joining a church. As St. Cyprian said and John Calvin affirmed, "He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother."¹ Now of course we do not presume to know what the Spirit is doing, or to know who is elect. And in saying there is no salvation outside of the church we do not mean a particular organization. It is another way of saying what Jesus is saying in this prayer: those who are saved are joined together. This is not an add-on to salvation. This is what salvation is. This is the "communion of the saints" that we confess in the Apostles Creed. Salvation is being incorporated into the church, not CDPC or the Presbyterian Church or the Methodist Church or any particular organization, but the people of God. Now, such saved persons will join some particular congregation, or they will turn out to be frauds.

¹ "Habere iam non potest Deum patrem qui ecclesiam non habet matrem." Cyprian, "The Unity of the Catholic Church," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, translated by Ernest Wallis, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), p. 423.

Salvation is not an individual matter. Individuals do matter, but salvation is accomplished by God, received by individuals, and experienced in the church. This is why the gospel includes a call to be baptized, and we see the apostles in the book of Acts always baptizing people who profess faith in Christ. Baptism is the work of God incorporating someone into the church. A gospel which calls people to believe in Jesus but neglects the call to baptism is an incomplete gospel, and anyone who is a real Christian is already in the church, the community of persons analogous to the Trinity.

Another common mistake in discipleship is to urge Christians to be united. This is a foolish misunderstanding borne of distress at the shameful ways Christians treat each other. All efforts to unite Christians will be a frustrating waste of energy because Christians are *already* united. The problem is not *achieving* unity, but *acting* in unity. When Christians slander each other or mistreat each other, they are denying the gospel and hurting the people of God. The truth is that all Christians are joined together, and to act otherwise is to live a lie. Jesus prayed to the Father that all His people may be one, and the Father granted this prayer. If anyone claims that Christians are not united, he is denying Christ; and if anyone slanders or mistreats other Christians, he is attacking Christ. Paul gives the human body as an analogy of the church. Paul explains that the human body has different members who perform different functions, but they are all part of the body and are all necessary. So the church is one man, or one body, with many members who are different and who perform different functions, but are all part of the church and are all necessary. The problem in the church is not unity. The problem is denying unity by our actions. This is why the success of evangelism is connected to the unity of Christians. If Christians slander or mistreat each other, they deny the gospel and attack the Christ they proclaim with their lips. Non-Christians immediately spot the vile hypocrisy this is.

Jesus is not alone. Jesus is one with the Father and the Spirit, and they work together to save their people. You are not alone. You are one with other Christians, and you work together to save the lost. This is wonderful and confusing, but the next point is unbelievable.

You and God

You are with God. “Of course I am with God,” you are thinking. “God is present everywhere, and Jesus promised to be with us until the end of the age. Also, the Holy Spirit is with us.” Yes, this is how we think, and we are right. God is with us, Jesus is with us, the Holy Spirit is with us. But Jesus asks for something radically new and different here. Jesus asks for us to be with *Him*. Actually, that is not quite right. Jesus asks the Father that his people “be *in* us.” (v. 21) God is not only *with* us, and we are not only *with* God. We are *in* God. This is a profound mystery. Peter says something similar in his second letter, “[God’s] divine power has granted to us...his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of *the divine nature*.” (2 Peter 1:3-4) Now we know from the rest of scripture that Peter does not mean that we become divine, as the Mormons teach. Peter is stating the same thing as Jesus, that we join the fellowship of the Trinity. If the Trinity itself is mysterious, this is even more mystifying. How can mortals join the divine Trinity? This raises many impossible questions, but the important point is clear. Our relationship to God is not a casual acquaintance. We have deep, intimate fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Is this what you have? Is this what you want?

We need God. Everyone needs God. You have to be spiritually blind not to know you need God, and spiritually insane not to want God’s help – and most people *do* know they need God and want God’s help. Hindus want God’s help, Buddhists want God’s help, Muslims want God’s help, Christians want God’s help. Most people want God’s help, and God is happy to help us. God sends sun and rain, He makes plants grow and flocks fertile. God gives us husbands and wives and children. But it was never God’s plan merely to help people get on with their lives. God’s intention was to mingle with His people, and that is what we see at the beginning. Adam and God were together in the Garden. They talked together, they named the animals together, God was present when Adam fell in love with Eve. God and man were together. They were friends.

Then Adam ruined it all by forming an alliance with God's enemy Satan. The rest of history is the story of how God is restoring His friendship with man.

People commonly think that God wants obedience from people, and they think that the point of Christianity is to make people obedient to God. Perhaps *you* think that the essence of the Christian life is obedience to God. If so, you are way off the mark. God has been very clear about this. God has often said that His aim is *fellowship* with man. God did not establish a covenant so that people would stay in line, and God did not hand down laws to control people. The goal of the covenant, in God's words, is "That they may be my people, and I may be their God." Friendship, fellowship, intimacy is God's desire for His people. Now there can be no fellowship without obedience, but obedience is not the point. God is not a tyrant who extracts submission from His slaves. God is a Father who loves to play with His children. When Jesus prays for us to be in God, He is asking that we join the community of the Trinity. The Father answered this prayer, and we are now with God, not in some official sense, as you would be with the Prime Minister when you visit Parliament. We are with God the same way the Father and the Son and the Spirit are with each other. We are part of the heavenly community. Do you live this way?

Sadly, many Christians live as though they are outside of God. Many Christians live as though God is in heaven and we are on earth, separated by nature and eternity. We hope to be with God in heaven when we die, but even then we expect God to be on His throne and we to be somewhere else. Meanwhile we struggle on our own here on earth, and cast desperate prayers to heaven for help to get us through this life. This is awful! This picture is so sad and so untrue. We are not alone on earth, even when there are no other people around. Life is not a struggle for survival until we get to heaven, and in heaven we will not be parked in our own corner. When God saves someone, He brings that person into the community of the Father and Son and Spirit, and that changes everything about how we live.

The Christian life is not a struggle to obey God's laws until we get to heaven. Christianity is not about achieving a high moral standard. The Christian life is not measuring up to the demands of the church and the expectations of other people: how to dress, how you look on social media, how many church activities you do, how often you pray, how much you read the Bible, which Christian books you have read, etc. The Christian life is being *in* God. This means that whatever you do, wherever you go, God is sharing that experience with you. God is your companion, but more than a companion. God is joined to you, like a husband or wife. Is this how you approach each day? Or are you living in practical denial of the truth?

What we are saying can give the impression that you have personal, private, even selfish intimacy with God – and there is an aspect of truth in that. God loves each of us individually. God knows and enjoys your accomplishments and quirks – just as your husband or wife does, and He accepts your weaknesses – just as your husband or wife does, and God is with you personally and individually in all you do. But remember that we are more than individuals. Christians are *one new man* in Christ. We are permanently, inseparably joined to each other. And so in this prayer, Jesus reveals that His people are *one man in God*. We are joined together with each other and enfolded in the community of Father, Son, and Spirit. This changes everything about how we think, how we live, how we love, and how we do mission.

Mission of God

True missions is not the church identifying a need for the gospel, finding and training missionaries, and supporting their work. Missions is God seeking His chosen ones among the lost and bringing them into His Kingdom. Missions is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, along with their people, infiltrating the world to find the ones chosen before the foundation of the world, and bringing them home to their Father, their Older Brother, their Life-giving Spirit, and all their friends and relatives in the new man. For us, at CDPC on this bright Sunday morning, God is not putting before you the question, will you become a missionary, or will you go to a foreign land, or will you share the gospel with your friends and neighbors. God is not necessarily asking you to do more, or to take up some new task, or embark on a dangerous enterprise. The message of

Jesus in His last prayer before His death is, Wake up! Look around you! Do you see that you are joined to other Christians? Do you know that you are embraced by the Father, Son, and Spirit? Are you aware that you are already caught up in missions? Do you know that missions is happening all the time, everywhere? Do you start each day jumping into God's mission in your neighborhood and around the world? The question is not will you become a missionary. The question is are you engaged in the mission God has been doing all along? Or are you sitting on the sidelines while everyone else is engaged?

The truth is that you are now, in fact, mingling with the Father, Son, and Spirit who are constantly doing missions.. Does it not feel that way? Do you have trouble seeing the one new man God has created? Does God seem distant? Sometimes we do feel alone from God and others, but it is not true! Such feelings are deceptive. If we live by those feelings, life becomes a drudgery of struggle to obey, to reach some impossible moral standard, to fulfill the expectations of other people. Missions is God saving the lost and building His church. We are already part of missions because we are in God. God goes with us, and we go with God wherever we go. You may choose to become a missionary to an Orang Asli tribe in a remote jungle, but it was God who chose to go there and is taking you with Him. You may choose to share the gospel with your colleagues at work, but it was God who chose to enter your office and reveal Himself, and you are part of God's mission because you are in God. You may sense God calling you to join Pastor Johnson's ministry in Malang, Indonesia, but God is already there, and you are there in spirit. We are with Pastor Johnson because we are joined with Him as one new man in Christ, and because our spirits go in God wherever He goes.

Do you know what is the really troubling us today? It is not whether you will participate in the mission of God. You are part of the mission of God. You are either a willing, eager part, or an unwilling, resentful part. The real issue is faith. Do you believe that you are joined to other believers and as one body we are in God ministering in the world? Or do you doubt God? Are you willingly sharing in the mission of God, or are you trying to be a good person and win the praise of others? Are you glad that God has brought you into the community of the Trinity, or do you wish He had just saved you and left you alone? Are you resentful that God has dragged you into His work? Are you thinking, "Go ahead and save the world if you want to, God, but leave me out of it?" Are you thinking, I am not strong enough or skilled enough for this?

Strength and Skill

You do not have to be strong or skilled. God has made you to be a unique person, and God is pleased with His work. Like all creatures, we train our bodies and minds to achieve our full potential, but the full potential of each of us is quite different. This was the apostle Paul's point in using a human body as an analogy of the church. We are all different, and we are all necessary. Just as a body needs eyes and ears, feet and hands, so the church needs teachers and carpenters, pastors and accountants. And just as a body functions poorly when one part does not do its job, so the church functions poorly when one part does not do its job. If the church is to engage in missions robustly, every member must do his or her part. We cannot call a man from another world to come help us lift the 50 kg. bar of missions. We are the only man God has in this world, and we have to use our own two arms to lift the 50 kg. bar of missions, and that means each one of us playing the role that God has made us to play. You are not alone! We are all in this together. We are more than friends and partners. We are one man in Christ, and together we joyfully participate in missions.

Does this sound like work? Even as a united body, does the mission of saving the lost sound like drudgery? Is call of your heart, "Take me, Lord Jesus!" Unfortunately, perhaps, Jesus specifically said that He was **not** taking us out of the world. We're stuck here, because Jesus wants us here. Jesus' final request in this prayer is that we receive the love of the Father – and we have. Missions is hard work, but it is not burdensome because it is a work of love. God is on a mission to save the world because He loves the world. God is saving you because He loves you, and God has included you in the community of the Trinity because He loves you and wants you close to Him. This is why missions is a fundamental and constant part of your

life, because you are always in the God who is on mission. Missions is hard, but love makes it bearable.

All this is true, but this is not what Jesus prayed for. Jesus prayed for the love of God to be *in us*. We are in the love of God, and also the love of God is *in us*. That means that we are not just tagging along with God as He loves the world. We are not observers pitching in here and there. We *share* His love for the world. Perhaps you have known a bit of this. Perhaps you have loved a non-Christian friend or relative. Perhaps you have loved a crusty Christian whom no one likes. Perhaps you have loved ornery children. Or perhaps not. How can we say that the love of God is in us when clearly we often do *not* love others? Are you more often impatient and annoyed with people than loving toward them? Where is this love of God in you? We know that the love of God is in you, not because of observable evidence, but because of the word of Christ. Jesus specifically prayed for this, so it is true. The problem is not to gear yourself up to do some strange thing. Jesus calls us to believe in Him. God has placed His love in you, that is true, so act on it. When you do not love others, you are denying the truth and living a lie. You *can* love others because it is your nature. The world, the flesh, and the devil will lie to you and try to persuade you that you do not have it in you to love others, but their words are all lies. You have the love of God in you, and that love makes you a joyful participant in mission with God.

Conclusion

You are part of God's mission! The good news, the gospel, is that God is using you to save the world. God chose you before He created the world, and in time God called you to be His Son. But you are not an isolated individual. God has made each of you a member of the new man in Christ. Even more amazing, God has brought us into the community of the Father, Son, and Spirit. This God who called you is always calling His chosen people in all times and all places, and He does it together – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit together with His body on earth, the new man in Christ, the church. Today, right now, even here in this congregation God is saving His people, and look around – He is using all of us to do it. The Lord's Day is a giant celebration of God's people together with God. The rest of the week our bodies will be in different places, and Pastor Johnson will return to Indonesia, but our spirits are all one. And as one body we carry forth the mission of God.

Isn't this over whelming? Is this too hard to believe? Is this too good to believe? The gospel is always too good to believe. If it is easy for sinful people to understand, it is probably not the real gospel. Rejoice in God's unbelievable salvation! Let us pray for God to continue opening our clouded eyes and softening our hard hearts to believe this gospel – to believe that God is in us loving the world and is using us to save the world.

Prayer

Ascription

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City Discipleship Presbyterian Church, Subang
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Ἀνθρῶπος

Jesus was not alone
You are not alone
We are with God
God's love surrounds us
Glory later
Glory now, with suffering