

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Palm Sunday April 1, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 161, 473:1-2, 477, 472, 334.

Lessons: Genesis 12:1-4a, Ephesians 4:1-24, John 12:12-19.

Sermon Text: John 17:20-26.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today we celebrate the day Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem with palm branches and cheering. As he entered Jerusalem, Jesus knew what was waiting for him. He was to celebrate the Passover, called “The Last Passover and the First Lord’s Supper” with his apostles. And he knew he would die this week for the sins of all people.

Our sermon text is the last thing John records before Jesus led his disciples out to Gethsemane, and you know what happened there. In this chapter Jesus prayed first for himself, then for his immediate disciples – his apostles – and then for all believers, for all those who would be gathered by the proclamation of the Gospel.

In the verses between last Sunday’s sermon text and today’s sermon text, when Jesus prayed specifically for his disciples, he said ***“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.”*** John 17:6

Jesus had revealed the Father to those disciples. Literally, he had revealed the Father’s name to them. The name of God is not just the names used for God, but everything that reveals him to us, everything that has been revealed to us in the words of the Bible. But remember it is no coincidence that Jesus is also called the Word. In him and through him we know the Father.

These disciples were chosen beforehand by God the Father and given to Jesus. They saw what Jesus did, they listened to what he said, and held firmly to his word. That’s what distinguished them from the many others who rejected his word. They heard Jesus’ words and came to believe that his words came from God and that God the Father had sent Jesus, his Son, to them.

And now Jesus is praying for all ***“those who will believe in me through their message.”*** He prayed for us. Listen today how

JESUS PRAYS FOR ALL BELIEVERS

- 1. He prays that they may be united and**
- 2. He prays that they may be with him in his glory.**

Jesus begins: ***“My prayer is not for them alone,”*** that is, not just for the disciples with him at this time, for whom he had just specifically prayed. This was not the time for him to pray for the world. The disciples were his special charge, and they needed help and strength to face what was coming. Through faith they belong to the Son and the Father. And those disciples in faith had glorified Jesus and praised his name – and they would do much more of that after his resurrection.

Now Jesus was going to leave the world and go to the Father, but the disciples had to remain in the world. So Jesus prayed for them, placing them in the Father’s care. We also must remain in the world until Jesus calls us to himself through death or judgment day, whichever comes first.

“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.” How is it that we have come to faith? Well, the first answer is ***“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** (Romans 10:17 KJV) But how is it that you heard that Word of God? Someone obviously told you – and someone told them

and someone told them. That telling of the gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed from one person to another all the way back to the time of Jesus, and really, since the very first Gospel promise as recorded in Genesis 3:15. His apostles told – they proclaimed, they preached the Word of God, especially the Gospel, to people they came in contact with and that message has been told again and again. The pattern of one person telling another about Jesus Christ has continued, and will continue until the end of time – when Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead.

And what is the ultimate goal of all this? ***“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.”*** Jesus is talking about the glory which all believers will share with him in heaven, after he comes to judge the living and the dead on the last day.

At that time and place – in heaven – there will be the perfect unity Jesus talks about: ***“that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me.”*** There we will be able to see that perfect unity, because all believers and only believers will be with the Lord in heaven.

But even now there is a unity among all who truly believe. That is the unity of faith in Jesus Christ which binds all believers in The Holy Christian Church – that all of them may be one.

Jesus is praying for the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, which would be gathered from all nations. Through the testimony of the disciples, there will be others, many others who would believe in Him through the Word as proclaimed by the human servants of the Lord. And all these believing Christians of all times shall be one, they are one, they are united in the Holy Christian Church, what we call the invisible church through faith. We call it the invisible church, because it is faith alone in Jesus Christ which makes one a member of that Holy Christian Church, that communion of saints. And no one can see faith. We can only see fruits of faith. All those who have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior, who actually put all their trust in Him alone, are united. Even though they know nothing of each other, if they but have faith in the Word and in the Savior in their hearts, they are all truly one communion or gathering of saints. This unity of the Church of all places and of all times is a unity in God, in the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. It is as real and intimate as the union between those persons of the Godhead.

Believers – here and now on earth – gather around the Word of God and the Sacraments. They demonstrate their invisible unity by gathering in an outward, visible unity.

You are gathered here today as part of a visible Christian church. This visible church is one which we claim and confess preaches, teaches, and strives to live the Word of God in its truth and purity. Every one of us strives to live and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity. In that way we witness to the world. This is not a perfect unity, but we strive for unity. God encouraged us in our Epistle lesson: ***“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*** (Ephesians 4:2-3)

Christians, by the calling from the Holy Spirit, show this unity in what they say and do. Their every word and deed can serve to impress men with the power of the Word of God in them. But it serves especially to build up that communion of their hearts and minds before the Lord, since it places them in contrast to the world.

And in this way also the unbelieving world gets some idea of the truth of the Christian religion and of its superhuman power. Some unbelievers will always, by the grace of God, form the right conclusions as to the mission of Christ and as to the certainty of God's love toward them, and come to faith through the power of the means of Grace, that is, through the Gospel in Word and sacrament.

Jesus wants and prays that believers may continue to be one as he and the Father are one. When believers come to faith in Jesus, they become one with him and the Father. This is not the absolute oneness of essence that belongs to the Father and the Son. And it is not merely an outward unity. It is the spiritual oneness of all who have eternal life in Christ.

Three times Jesus pleads with his Father ***“that all of them may be one,” “that they may be one as we are one”*** and that they may ***“be brought to complete unity.”*** Jesus is that serious about the unity he wants Christians to enjoy and rejoice in.

And each of those three times he emphasizes the unity of the Father and the Son. The first two times he uses the picture that Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus. So that we do not mistake that picture, he

describes that unity ***“just as you are in me and I am in you”*** and then he emphasizes it in this way: ***“I in them and you in me.”*** Then the third time he stresses that unity with the Love of the Father for Jesus: ***“that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*** Could the unity of Jesus and the Father be any clearer? And Jesus uses that unity and mutual love of the Father and the Son as an example, a model, an illustration of the love that Christians should show one another here on earth.

And we are to seek outward unity, too, as a reflection of that spiritual unity we have with God.

That is the kind of unity God commands in 1 Corinthians 1:10: ***“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”***

Unity – that they all may be one – that is what Jesus wants for us.

That unity is expressed in the confession and the testimony of the believers. Through that confession and testimony – OUR testimony and confession – much may be accomplished for the Savior and His glory. To this end the Lord has given to His disciples the glory which He has received from the Father.

God creates that unity. Man can destroy that unity. For that reason God gives us words such as these: ***“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”*** (Romans 16:17-18, NIV). ***“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”*** (Romans 16:17-18 KJV)

Where there is not unity, there is disagreement, bickering and even fighting. As an earthly example, we see that among America’s political parties right now, not only at the national level, but at the state level, and if you pay attention, even at the local level of government and among those who want to be governing.

Scripture is filled with examples and admonition and encouragement and ways to illustrate, to show, to live that unity, such as Ephesians 5:21: ***“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”***

Jesus and his Father have complete unity. They are completely united on their mission, and Jesus submitted to the will of his heavenly Father to accomplish his mission. His mission or goal? To live a perfect life that could be imputed or charged to our lives and then to die to pay the price, to be punished, for all sins of all sinners.

Jesus Himself had gained believers, his apostles, through the preaching of the Word. In their interest He had addressed a large section of His prayer in John 17 to His heavenly Father.

As Jesus prayed for his disciples and for men, we must apply that prayer to ourselves.

As a teacher of God’s Word, I am desperate to teach “everything” in the Word of God. It is a matter of life and death. I want those who hear the Word of God which I teach to learn “everything”. But that isn’t always the case. Just as my teachers of the Bible surely wanted me to learn everything, I didn’t. They did provide some foundation and some tools to help me learn God’s Word. In studying the Catechism, you all learned some tools for learning and especially for remembering God’s Word.

And so, just as Jesus prayed for all of us, so we all pray for one another, that we remain steadfast and true, firm and strong in the confession of this church. As our Savior prayed for us, we pray for one another, that we all are diligent in the use of the means of grace, and that we live in such a way as to honor the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word and deed remain true to the Triune God, even unto death. May we all by the grace of God and with the help of God remain faithful! Amen.