

„That we may be one” John 17:20-26

20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may 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 to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:20-26)

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

We have this wonderful Gospel text for today. These words are not just a description of what Jesus did when He was still among us, these words are Jesus' prayer which He prayed for us before He was arrested and delivered to execution.

Prayers are very rich and often use poetic language and intense, saturated expressions. Such language sounds beautiful, but there is this one „but”. Sometimes it is not easy to understand what is meant by these uplifting words. What would they mean in plain everyday language?

What is this? „The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.” “That they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

I'd guess that we don't know right away what exactly all of this mean, and it wouldn't be that easy to explain it. Let us try to unpack what Jesus was praying for, when He prayed that *we may be one*? What does it mean for us today?

This is not an attempt to exhaust everything that Jesus was praying for. To get the foundation clear, I'd propose that when He was praying for our oneness He was praying for at least three things.

First, He was praying for the proclamation of the Word so that it results in us becoming one in our understanding of God's truth. *Second*, He was praying for our life; so that the gracious attitude He showed towards us, we could show forth in our lives. *Third*, He

was praying for Father's love, so that it would continue to enable us to live as His Children, in the same way as Jesus did.

First, for the proclamation of the Word. Second, for our lives. Third, for the Father's love. Let's begin with the first, the proclamation of the Word. We need to read a couple more verses for a better understanding of why Jesus was praying for the proclamation of the Word. "Sanctify them in the truth; for your word is truth." (John 17:17) "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63)

On that night Jesus was praying for all His disciples, including us. He prayed that we may be one, and He also made it clear that we can become one through the listening to His words, for the words of God are truth, and they are also the spirit and the life for us.

Our God is speaking God. He does everything by speaking. We need to remember it. He created everything by speaking, He also saves us by speaking. By speaking His words He also makes us one.

Put it other way, the message of God, the speaking of God reveals us the truth about God, the truth about us, and about what God has done for us. When we are made aware of this truth, then we are sanctified by the word and the Spirit, then we can become one. There could be no other foundation, if we want to be one, but the truth as revealed by God's word.

What does it mean practically? What is this truth, and how does it makes us one? Without the word of God, without the Bible, by our natural faculties we cannot know anything about God, except, that there is something higher. Without the word of God we cannot know who we are and what our condition is. Without the word of God we cannot know what God's attitude towards us is.

Only God Himself, through His speaking to us, reveals that He is our gracious Creator, that we are His fallen creatures, enslaved by sin and the death, without ability to change these condition or liberate ourselves from them.

Through His speaking God reveals His attitude; that He loves us so much that He gives His own life in exchange for ours; so that we can again know Him as He is, - gracious, generous and loving Father. That we can again be free from the slavery to sin and so that the death cannot triumph over us anymore.

This truth is revealed to us through the word of God, the Bible. His words are the truth, the Spirit and the life. Practically for us it means that if we want to know the truth about God, there is only one place to seek for it, His own words. If we want to know the truth about ourselves, to know what is wrong with us, why is it so that even if we know what is good, we still desire to do the opposite? Why do we so often make wrong choices even if we know that the consequences will be harmful for us and for others? There is only one place to seek for the answers, His own words.

We may wonder whether there is a solution for our situation? What is God's attitude towards us? Why did He come as a man Jesus? Why did He die? Why is this so important for us? Again, the true answers to all these questions are given by God in His words.

As we learn the truth as God Himself speaks it to us, we are formed and shaped to see the world around us through His eyes. When we have this common foundation, i.e. the truth revealed in the words of God, only then we have a chance to be one.

On the other hand, if we don't have this common foundation, how could we even dream about being one? What if some are not listening to the words of God, but have other authorities? If some would say that we are not that bad, we are not exactly dead in our sins, and others would reply that God says "None is righteous... no one understands; no one seeks for God. We are dead in our sins." (Rom 3:10-11, Eph. 2:1) Two views. No unity. No oneness.

If some say that by trying hard and living a decent life we can get into heaven anyway, for all good people go to heaven, and others would listen to the word of God that "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8-9) Two opposite views. No unity, no oneness.

If some say that we can be Christians wherever we want and there is no need for a congregation or the Divine service, and others would reply that Christ says: "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me...for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5) Again, two opposite views. How could we be one in such a situation?

Summarizing on this first part, Jesus prayed that we may have this one foundation, this one shared view on the reality around us, this one true understanding as given to us in the words of God. We could have it, indeed, if we devote ourselves to listening to the word of God in the divine service, in Bible studies, in home devotions, etc.

But this is not all we need to become one. Here is more. This is the second thing Jesus was praying for. Our lives. Jesus prayed. "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one." These are not easy words to understand either. What is this glory and can it help us to be one?

We know what the glory is in this world: splendour, power, influence, popularity and possessions. Jesus also had some of these. He cast out demons, rebuked the storm, fed thousands, cleansed the temple, etc.

Is this the glory He is referring to? There are quite a few among the Christians who believe that these are the signs of the true glory and we need to be able to repeat them if we want to be a 'real church'.

They are not listening carefully what God is telling us. They may be listening to what the world is calling a glory. So what is this glory that Jesus gave us and which is supposed to help us be one?

Remember, we talked about it just a couple weeks ago. On the night when Jesus was betrayed, when He had received from the Father all authority, He washed His disciples feet. Then, preparing soon to be arrested, mocked and crucified, He said that now “God is glorified in Him.” (John 13:32)

There was no higher glory for Jesus as the death on the cross on behalf of us. This was the way he broke the bondage of sin and death. This was the way He restored our broken relationships with God the Father; our oneness with God the Father.

The apostle John wrote in the beginning of His gospel that they “have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) They saw Jesus, they saw that He humbled Himself to the death on the cross, giving His life sacrificially so that we can have the chance to be one with God again. This is the glory Jesus was praying about.

But what would it mean for us, for our oneness? How can we show the same glory in our life? Let’s take just a brief look at what hinders our oneness. If we go back to the very beginning of the Bible, we can read about the Fall.

Adam and Eve lived as one with God and with one another. But as soon as Adam and Eve wanted to be like gods themselves this oneness was broken. Adam and Eve where hiding from God, they knew that they had sinned, they felt guilty and they wanted to flee from God’s presence. Their oneness with God was broken.

Their own oneness also was broken. Initially Adam said that Eve is “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” (Gen 2:23) Remember what happened when sin destroyed their oneness? ‘I’m not guilty. This women which you gave me, she did it.’ (Gen 3:12)

This is our situation. Our oneness is shattered by sin. Our relations, even the best of them, are fractured, separated, and divided; we are alienated from one another by sins that we have done, or that others have done to us. Our relations even with our closest ones are often arrogant or even hostile. Sometime we prefer to ignore those who remind us of our guilt, or those who have sinned against us. We are living in the broken world. Broken by sin. Without oneness.

Jesus came to restore the goodness of God’s creation. As Paul wrote “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.” (Col 1:19-23) That was His glory.

Now we are reconciled to God through Christ. Rejoice! Our oneness with our heavenly Father is restored by what Jesus did for us. Here comes the hard part. Jesus prayed that we can live as He lived, that we can show forth the same glory as He did, which means - that by our sacrificial actions we would help to restore the oneness of humanity.

This is not enough for our oneness that we are learning the truth from the word of God. We cannot be one without the foundation of God's truth, but this is not enough for our oneness. Our relations are still broken by sin and that's why Jesus gave us, or showed us His glory, so that we can follow His example.

We become one when we forgive one another and accept other's plea for forgiveness. This is the way we restore the brokenness of God's creation. This is how we can become one. By removing fractures and division caused by sin. Asking for forgiveness and accepting it. Being ready to be humble, even to be humiliated, if this is what it takes to restore the brokenness in our relations. Thus showing forth the glory of God in our lives. Jesus restored our relations with God, and He wants to help us to restore our oneness in all our relations.

I know that it may sound beautiful and noble, if you think about it theoretically. Yes, let's go and do it! But, let us be realistic. This can be one of the hardest things we have ever done. This requires a lot of strength, a lot of humility. Readiness to give up my own ego to restore back what sin has broken.

Sometimes it may feel like we are betraying who we are by giving in to those who have done wrong to us, or by asking forgiveness from those who fully deserved our bad attitude. Let us be realistic – it is very hard.

That's why Jesus is praying for the third thing. For His Father's love. "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

It is very simple. The name signifies the person itself. When Jesus said that He revealed the Father's name it meant that He revealed what our Father is heaven is like; that He is loving God, that He sends His Son for our sake as our Saviour, that He is not only our Creator, but also our Redeemer.

The Father's love enabled Jesus to complete His mission, to restore our relations with God the Father. Now Jesus prays that the same love would help us to complete our mission, to restore our relations, broken by sin.

Jesus promised that He will continue to reveal to us Our Father's name, our Father's love to us. When we receive such sacrificial love, when someone gives up His life for our sake, when someone daily cares for us even when we are hostile or ignorant towards Him, such sacrificial love changes everything.

That changes our weakness into strength. This love fills us and flows over. It purifies our hearts, it changes our wills that we are willing to be one, even if it is hard. For we know what is waiting for us. Jesus returned to the Father to receive the same glory which He had before the creation of the world, and He has made us heirs of this glory. Everything is prepared and waiting for us. We don't have to merit anything.

When we know this, then we can do our best to restore the brokenness of creation at least in our relations with people in our lives. For God loved and forgave us first. We may not always succeed, we may fail. Even Jesus love is so often rejected. This wouldn't be surprise.

But by doing it, as Jesus prayed, we'll give the testimony to this world, 'that the world may know that, indeed, God sent Jesus and loved and continually loves us even as He loves His only-begotten Son.'

We can join Jesus prayer, that we may be one, by listening to the words of God which are truth, by restoring this broken creation by the power of forgiveness. All of this not on our own, by only by the power of Father's love.

May we, indeed, be one.

Amen.