

Text: John 17: 21-26

### Jesus Prays to Equip a Great Church

How would you answer the question, “What makes a great church?” I think a lot of churches are like Charlie Brown from Peanuts. One day Charlie Brown just could not handle it any more. Life just didn’t have any purpose or meaning so he went over to Lucy’s psychiatrist stand. You have to be pretty desperate to go over to Lucy. At her psychiatric booth she was charging the fee of ten cents for her services. Charlie sadly said, “Lucy you are going to have to help me out, I don’t know anything about the purpose or direction for my life. Lucy stared at him in her know it all, sarcastic way and said, “Charlie Brown, life is like a deck chair on a cruise ship. Some people take their deck chair to the back of the ship, unfold it and they sit there looking at where they have been. Other people take their deck chair to the bow of the ship, unfold it, and they look and see where they are going. Now, Charlie Brown, life is simple, where is your deck chair set up? That look of desperation, and frustration was on his face and he scratched his head and said, “Lucy I haven’t even been able to get my deck chair unfolded.”

When a church is like Charlie Brown she doesn’t know where she has been and she is even less sure about where she is going. In John 17, Jesus prayed for us and for the church. He gives us some clues about what a great church is to be like. First Jesus by his own trust in God the Father makes it clear that this prayer is prayed with confidence that he will receive what he has prayed for. He knows something and that is, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus is the over-comer of the world. So the first quality of a great church is that she is confident that Christ has already won the victory for her.

Next Jesus adds, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. Jesus had prayed for the church before this when he commended Peter’s confession of faith and assured that he would build the church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. The great church uses that same confidence in Christ’s promise to reach out and touch others with that word of Christ. There are people in our community who have not been touched sufficiently with the word or the love of Christ. The great church will take that word in speech and action to their neighbors. Help the poor, the needy and the disabled. Show the love of Christ but also tell them what Christ has done to overcome the world—he suffered and died on the cross and rose from the grave to give us forgiveness of sin and life everlasting.

Even before his crucifixion Jesus prays as though he has already fulfilled the Father’s purpose. He is reporting back and saying, Father, what you have given me to do I have done. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them.

Eight times in this prayer, Jesus reports back to the Father and says I have done what you have asked me to do. Jesus asks that the work He started will be continued in the church. The great church will continue what Jesus has done by bringing his love even if it requires sacrifice to carry it through. We have recently joined with eight other churches in the Mineral Area Ministerial Alliance, MAMAS for short. I have been attending meetings. Praying for this ministry. We have raised funds for them to buy

storage for their store over on Rivermines. I have heard a few people ask what MAMAS is all about and what we are doing as part of that alliance. But not too many people here have gotten truly involved in that ministry. I have known only one other member that has gotten involved by helping at the store. Perhaps this is an area where our love for Christ can really be shown. Some more of us need to get personally involved in that kind of ministry.

The great church will continue that ministry of Christ and will sense, and feel, and experience, and know His glory. The word glory in the Greek comes from the word doxon like the word doxology, the song we sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." It means the visible manifestation of the power and the glory and the radiance of God. In essence Jesus was praying to the Father and asking that they might see manifested in their midst His splendor, His power, and His radiance.

The great church reveals that there is glory in the midst of his people. When we hear the word and respond in loving appreciation for Christ's sacrifice that is glory. When we take and eat the body of Christ at the communion rail and take and drink the blood of Christ from the cup of blessing he has blessed, that is glory. When we sing praise to Christ for all he has given and shed for us on the cross that is glory.

Glory is experiencing Jesus in our presence, not a program, not an order of service, but experiencing the presence of God. If there is anything beautiful about this service today, it's Jesus. If there is anything beautiful about the worship, it's Jesus. If there is anything beautiful about the message this morning, it's Jesus. If there is anything beautiful about the prayers, it's Jesus. And if there is anything that we should have in our hearts today, let it be that same spirit the Greeks had when they came to Philip and Andrew and said, "We would see Jesus." We come here to see Jesus manifest in the midst of the believers. And if you come with that sense in your heart, Jesus will come and meet your personal needs here, what ever they may be. When He is lifted up, all kinds of beautiful things begin to happen.

Jesus prayed that we would not only sense the presence of God, but that we would follow the Word of God. "For I have given them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. When the disciples received the word of God it gave them a meaning and purpose for life. They understood and when they understood that Jesus truly came from the Father in heaven, it gave them motivation for life. When they believed the Father sent Jesus it gave them a sense of mission for their whole lives.

Along with the word comes the truth, God's word is truth and it is the only truth. The truth is that Jesus, the living Word of God, saves us. That same living Word unites us in the love of God. Jesus prays that all of us may be one, "Father, just as you 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." We are united to proclaim clearly the message of Christ, so the world may believe. Our true insides are no longer just flesh and blood. Christ is in us and we are in Him. Spirit filled Christians, united in doctrine, responding with Christ's love, and guided by a purpose they truly believe in, can do anything. The problem in too many churches is that people want to beat the big drum, few want to dance to the music, and nobody wants to play second fiddle. But when you get the body of Christ united in love, then God begins to do great things.

The great church knows that it has a mission to carry out. Jesus said, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. And the purpose of sending us is to seek and save those who are lost. But simply coming on Sunday morning and sitting in a pew for an hour and eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ does not fulfill that mission. Our mission needs to take place outside these doors. Some churches have sign at the exit to their parking lot that reads, "You are now entering the mission field." The great church doesn't just put up a sign it equips its members to do what that sign says and get into the mission, the purpose of life Christ has given you and me to fulfill. Now if I could get each one of you alone today and ask you a personal question I would ask, "How do you plan to fulfill the mission God has given you to do?" How many would have an answer? How many would say Pastor, I want to become a student of the Word? How many would say, "I want to be united in the fellowship of God and fulfill my place in the body using my gifts for the benefit of all here and out in my community?"

I would be the first to admit that I haven't done all that well in those areas of my life in mission. I miss opportunities to share the gospel all the time. I study the word all the time but many times it goes in one ear and out the other. I want to equip you for that mission God has given but I often neglect to follow through. I am a sinner first and foremost. But I have a Savior who is first and foremost in my heart and mind and I seek his will before my own at least most of the time. We should all repent of our failures and seek the word and the sacrament that heals us and brings us peace. Then we will be part of a great church not because of what we do or have done but because of what Christ has done to save us and continues to save the world as he lives in us and works through us.