

Easter 7, June 2, 2019 (Jn 17:20-26; Ps 97; Acts 16-20-34; Rev 22)

Does it make you want to laugh—or *cry*—when you hear the words of Jesus in today’s gospel text? *I am in you, and you are in me, and we are in them, and they are in us, and we are in each other. . . .* It sounds like one big happy family!

How do we move from these confusing theological words in John to finding help for our own lives today? What does it mean *for us* that Jesus and the Father are one? What difference does it make to us that Jesus wanted his friends to “be one”? one in God the Father? one in him? one with each other? What difference does all this make for our *faith*? for our *lives*?

I struggle with John’s concepts, and I won’t try to explain to you something I can’t put into words. Instead, I want to share one image, talk about one story, and invite your participation in a reflection.

First, the image: When my son Paul was taking karate lessons in eighth grade, his teacher demonstrated how he chopped bricks in two. His point was, you don’t aim *at* the brick. Instead, you aim the entire strength of your blow at a point two feet *below* the brick. If you focus only on the object itself, your stroke won’t have enough power to hurt anything except your hand. But if your focus is *beyond* the object, you can achieve your objective. – Hold that thought for the next five minutes!

Now the story: In this prayer during his Last Supper, Jesus prayed not only for his disciples, but also for *us—for you*. **My prayer is not for them alone**, he said to God. **I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that they may all be one.**

Do you see yourself in that prayer, as one who has believed through the word of those first disciples? *All of us* have come to faith through both the power of *the Word* and the power of the *Holy Spirit*.

We know the wonderful story of Jesus—**Emmanuel, God-with-us**—because the people who knew Jesus in his lifetime told and wrote the story. We know the amazing grace and saving love of God because of the people whose lives were changed by his resurrection.

The powerful impact Jesus had on the lives of his contemporaries is evident in today's reading from Acts. This story took place maybe twenty years after Jesus' resurrection. Paul and Silas were arrested for disturbing the peace in a Roman city, Philippi. They were thrown in prison and put in stocks in the most secure room.

Remember who Paul was. We first met him as Saul, the Pharisee, who was zealously persecuting the earliest Christians. After his dramatic conversion to belief in Jesus, he became the most outspoken missionary and evangelist for this new faith. He couldn't wait to tell the story of how Jesus had saved him, and all of us, from our sins! Even in prison, under threat of death for proclaiming his faith, he and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.

A violent earthquake, obviously orchestrated by God, set these missionaries and all the other prisoners free. The jailer woke up in terror—if his prisoners escaped, he would probably be executed! But Paul and Silas weren't interested in escaping. The jailer called for light, meaning torches, *and instead he received the light of **salvation** for him and his whole family.* **Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!** they told him. Words of comfort. Words of hope. Words of promise.

Let's go back to my karate image, of aiming *beyond* the brick in order to break it. Jesus spoke to Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus, not to save *Paul*, but so that Paul might be his instrument in saving others. Jesus prayed with and for his disciples during his Last Supper not so that they themselves might be saved by being in him and in the Father and in each other, but so that they might be *witnesses to others about the truth and power of God's love*.

And now for the last piece of this sermon, a reflection: Jesus prayed for his disciples *that they might be one in witness to the world*, so that the world might believe that God sent Jesus. His prayer concludes with these words to God: **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 and that I myself may be in them.**

Here's the deal: the love with which God loved Jesus *is* in us, as is Jesus himself. We received that love in baptism, when we were *sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*.

Do you realize how important that is? How *transforming*? God gave us his only Son to save us—*all* of us! And the mission of the church, Christ's body, is to make sure the whole world knows it!

It's like the karate brick. If God's love stops with *us*, it hasn't really accomplished his objective. God is aiming *through* us at the rest of the world. The ones we pray for regularly: the homeless, the hungry, the abused, the neglected, those in war-torn lands, the sick, the dying, the grieving.

But God is also aiming at others we *don't* so often name: the grumpy clerk in the store, the drug addict and the pusher, the high-school dropout, the veteran suffering from PTSD, the rapist, the random shooter, the mentally ill woman who literally tries to bite the hand that feeds her.

God is aiming at people who come to church alone and leave alone, never having felt the warmth of Jesus coming to them through the friendliness of others. God is aiming at people who don't believe they have anything to offer, either to Jesus or to the church (which is his body). God is aiming at people who feel so unworthy, they fear to receive the Lord's Supper because they think they might dishonor God. God is aiming at people who are afraid, and who don't know how to ask or pray for the peace which passes all understanding.

God's love is aimed at *you*. And when you've accepted enough of his love to get you started on the road of faith, God's love is aimed *through* you at *others*.

Are you there yet?