

6.1.2025 Easter 7 / Senior Sunday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

“So that the world may believe”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today’s gospel reading is an excerpt from what is known as Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer,” the longest prayer by Jesus in any of the gospels. In his prayer, Jesus prays for his followers’ unity with God and with one another, that we might dedicate our lives to God in service to our neighbor, “*so that the world may believe.*”

Today we have heard the witness of two young men poised to graduate from high school and go out into an ever-wider world where they will encounter a diversity of people and challenging new ideas. Brady and Palmer, we send you with our prayers that you might continue to grow in faith and the many gifts God has given to each of you.

The words of Jesus’ prayer are meant for all of us, no matter where we are on our human journey, that we might live in unity with God. Jesus prayed not only for his disciples, “*but also on behalf of those who believe in me...that they may all be one.*” Jesus is praying for every single person throughout history who makes him the center of their life.

Brady and Palmer have both witnessed to their faith in unity with Jesus, a faith that also lives in each of us. The unity we share with God is not something far away in a heavenly kingdom or a distant mountaintop; it is a unity already existing within us through faith. In the waters of Holy Baptism, God’s grace and kingdom already dwell within and among us.

The purpose and scope for this unity is wide and far reaching. It is the entire world – “*so that the world may believe.*” Jesus’ earlier words in John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world*” help us to understand our unity as a church living out God’s love for the world. Jesus’ words of “love” and “world” are repeated themes throughout John, revealing God’s unity and purpose for all people.

The world is a big place. It is a very diverse and at times divided place. Daily we are confronted by this brokenness, and Jesus’ prayer for unity says something serious about the human condition across time. Jesus’ own age was a world of empire and colonization, of occupied lands and oppressed people. It was a world of many languages, nations, and religions. It was world that enforced one view of the state and one view of religion. In seeking to unify the world, the Roman Empire persecuted and oppressed difference.

Jesus’ prayer reveals our own need of unity with God. However, the unity Jesus prays for is not uniformity. Jesus prays that a diverse humanity find unity *in him*. Unity with Jesus never robs us of our personhood; rather, unity with the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a unity always found in diversity. The Trinity is a profound example of unity in diversity: three persons in perfect

union and work together. This inner unity of God reminds us that the gift of individual personhood has been created to know unity with God and with one another. Jesus' prayer is that we find ourselves within God's own unity *so that the world may believe*.

Each of us experiences this unity as oneness in Christ. Jesus shares our humanity and our baptism that clothed in him, we might find unity in his body the church. Jesus commissions the church to make disciples and baptize all nations and people. As Paul writes, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; slave or free; male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28). The diversity of our ethnicity, backgrounds, gender and identity are united in Christ, welcoming all people in baptism.

Like Brady and Palmer, I became conscious of my own unity in Christ in a congregation filled with many different people, unified in Christ in service to the world. The church is always a new creation, a new community in Christ, showing the world a unity only possible with God. Christ's body is God's living unity of love reaching outward toward the world. His body is represented by all nations, peoples, and identities unified in the humanity Christ shares with us.

Jesus reminds us that the world does not know this unity with God. The world divides people into a hierarchy of nations, marring the divine image that all people are children of God. The world demonizes enemies, forgetting we are to pray for our enemies. The world wages war while forgetting Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. The world ignores the poor, forgetting Jesus' call to feed the hungry, and often excludes the stranger, forgetting Jesus' call to welcome them.

Jesus prays for the unity of his church. In unity with God and one another, we are called to pray, feed, make peace, and welcome *so that the world may believe*. Unity with God leads to sharing in God's mission of love to a world in need of hope and healing.

Brady and Palmer, many years ago you were each baptized at this font and made one in Christ. You have been nurtured with the *agape* love of your parents and siblings. You have experienced unity with Christ's body the church, and today you have witnessed to your faith. Christ at the center of your lives leads you outward in God's love toward others. Today, with your families, we are proud of you.

As you prepare to begin a new chapter in your lives, remember that Jesus goes with you. Stay close to Jesus in prayer and in times of worship and he will give you unity among new friends and new communities. Stay close to Jesus and he will open your minds to new discoveries about yourself and the world.

Over your lifetime, stay close to Jesus. He lives in you *so that the world may believe*.
Amen.