

June 1, 2025

Seventh Sunday of Easter

“Unity in His Glory”

John 17:20-26

*“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...”* These words of Jesus’ high priestly prayer He prays just before His arrest in Gethsemane are most comforting for you and me because Jesus is praying specifically for us, we who have believed through the Gospel proclamation handed down to us from those first apostles. Jesus is the one facing agonizing torture and death, but we are who is on His mind. He is doing it for us, that we would be saved for eternity in His kingdom. He is praying for us. And when Jesus is the one praying, it’s a pretty good but the answer will be “yes”.

The words of Christ that follow are so concise yet theologically loaded it is difficult to preach on the whole reading so I’m focusing on verse 22: *“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one...”*

Unity with Christ who now reigns at the right hand of the Father in glory—this is indeed good news for us. We try to imagine such glory and our minds fail us—we know our imaginations can’t even come close to what the very presence of Almighty God would be like. We rightly look forward to that time when the plan of redemption is brought to its final completion and we dwell, sinless and holy in God’s glory, once again fully sharing His image.

But we do look forward to that. It’s not yet. And it is important that those who follow Christ understand what it means to share in His glory in this life.

In John’s Gospel again and again Christ speaks of His being glorified, and the place where He is glorified is His suffering and death on the cross. He is glorified in obeying the Father’s will and serving unto death. His glory is His service. His glory is His sacrifice.

Obviously, we know this. We praise Jesus with all sort of hymns about His sacrifice. Most of us really like a song called “The Wonderful Cross”. The foundation of our faith is Christ crucified for the forgiveness of our sins.

But the way our fallen nature wants to understand this is: Christ was glorified in His service and sacrifice for me so that I don’t have to do any of that stuff. I get to reap all the benefits of His work, but I’m not called to emulate that work.

That’s wrong. That’s not what Jesus says in His prayer: *“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one...”*

Y’all know those uncomfortable words of Jesus from Matthew’s Gospel: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* Following in Christ’s glory is following in Christ’s glory...the service and sacrifice of His cross—His selfless love. We are not in the final glory of God in paradise yet. We are, like Christ was, in the fallen world but not of the fallen world. Here we are to live and love as Jesus has, serving others as more significant than ourselves. The apostles who were with Jesus as He prayed these words went on to living serving and sacrificial lives, most dying for the sake of the Gospel. But this prayer is *“for those who will believe in me through their word.”* This selfless, loving glory of Christ is also ours.

I think we all find that a little disturbing. I hope it’s not disturbing because you are unwilling to follow God’s call here. I’d like to think that everyone in this church, if God’s will were absolutely clear, would be willing to give up whatever He asks. If not, please do some prayerful soul-searching and repent of your love of the world.

I think what most of us find disturbing is that when we look around our lives we don't see a whole lot of sacrifice, or clearly see where we should do so. We live in one of the most prosperous countries on the planet. I've got a nice house, a Jeep, a pick-up truck, four lawnmowers and an ample gut that denies any sacrifice. I think most of us are willing to serve if asked and able...but we're pretty busy and there aren't opportunities for service jumping into our paths. I think this disturbs us because it looks like we're doing the faith wrong. We don't feel like we're bearing much of a cross.

Of course we're doing the faith wrong. We're sinners. This is why we need a Savior. The self-centered sinful nature clinging to us doesn't want a cross, doesn't feel like serving others and hates to sacrifice. So there's that truth. This is why our faith involves continual repentance to Jesus.

But we overcome all that by turning into and tuning into the glory of Christ's cross, the glory of Christ Himself. Christ has accomplished our becoming unified with Himself, with the Father, with the entire body of Christ in the universal church. By faith we know that, despite ourselves, Christ has joined us to His glory by grace. It is in reaction to this divine reality that we then are enabled to joyfully bear our cross, whatever that may be.

But I have to admit, this is real dicey. We feel like maybe we should serve and sacrifice more for God, right? But if I determine to serve more and sacrifice more to the glory of God, is it really to His glory or have I turned it into a good work of my own I'm raising up before God—is it my glory and not His?

No. I think the better way of living this out is to focus on this unity Jesus prays for: *“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.”* You do stand unified with God in Christ by virtue of your baptism; by virtue of the faith that has received His wonderful promises. Live in this unity wherever God has placed you in life. Yes, stop focusing on yourself alone so much and focus more on your life in Christ at work, at home, at school, out shopping, socializing with friends, bumping into your neighbors, etcetera, etcetera.

What does that mean? Simply put, you have received Christ's love; reflect it. Smile, be kind, do not sin, if you do then ask forgiveness. Be more aware of the needs and feelings of those around you with genuine concern...kind of like Christ was focused on you as He approached His own suffering and death. Get over yourself and think about others...because Christ was and is this way about you.

This isn't easy. It takes continual practice and intentionality and you'll never get it down perfect. But you can do this because you are joined to Christ! This is not something you're doing to gain salvation. It's what you do because salvation in Christ is already yours! It is His glory!

We get things all backwards. We see service and sacrifice as burdens when we're focused on the world and us in the world; the lesser glory of a fallen world. But when we see the reality of us in unity with the risen Christ in His kingdom forever, service and sacrifice here is just our wonderful calling because we are forever in Christ! And yes, it's a constant struggle between the one and the other, but as we're continually turning in repentance to the glory of Christ's cross, we are forgiven, and we continue in unity with God despite any failures.

This is a tough teaching; a tough truth. But you can walk in it. Not because of you; because of the perfect Son of God who has joined Himself to you, serving and sacrificing to make you His own. That is His glory. He enables you to live it.

Amen.