

Seventh Sunday of Easter

ONE IS NOT THE LONELIEST NUMBER

John 17:20-26

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

20“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21that they may all be one. As you, Father, 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. 22The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

DIAGNOSIS: Out of Many, Concern for Just One

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *One Is about Me*

In America people are not told to be one with other people, but rather “be all you can be,” “grab all the gusto,” to get the best out of life for yourself, to be a winner, live up to your

potential, and to ask, "What's in it for me?" Or we ask it this way, "What are you doing to make me happy?" If we are fans of a sports team, we may cheer with those on our side, but we cheer against others. We may join a club, but with volunteerism becoming less and less a part of people's lives, we are becoming a part of a very small part of our community. We are even less together in economic terms, where people complain about the cost of welfare but not about the wealth of the very rich. For example, the total national cost of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is less than the investment income of just three wealthy men in a single year. And with people firing guns at each other in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Liberia, there is no being one with one another. With religious tension in Egypt between two different religions, there is no being one with others when some beat up others. Headlines say that a bombing at a marathon race in Boston was done for religious reasons. And little children playing with toys will say, "Mine!" We teach them well.

In the Christian churches, we believe that being one with Jesus is not enough. There must also be oneness in opinion about abortion and gay relationships. And if a member's church holds a different opinion than the individual's, then that matters more than being one through faith in Jesus. So either members leave their congregation, or the congregation leaves its denomination.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *We Trust the Wrong One*

We completely trust the promises we are taught. We are promised that life is ours by the way of being all we can be, and we trust that promise. We are promised life if we win and others lose, and we trust that promise and feel it when we lose. No one talks in terms of promise and trust, no one says that our religion is individualism, but it is there, we feel it in our hearts when we win and when we lose. (So preachers need to show

people that they do have trust in other things. Name it as trust.) And in the very terms of “win and lose,” we have pronounced a judgment on all of us, so that judging and condemning one another is also just part and parcel of all we do and what we trust. We do not even notice we do it, or we think that such judging and condemning is the norm, how life is supposed to be. It is written on our hearts. And we trust it.

That law of judging and condemning is also written on the hearts of church members, who trust that faith in what the Bible says, or in the law, is the foundation of their faith. Trust is in doing what they think is right, rather than in Jesus death on a cross. (Most people think they go to heaven when they “pass away.” Faith in Jesus is not needed. It just happens.)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Death Ends the One*

Then people make a sign of the cross when they win, as if winning is how they are one with God, not realizing that a cross and winning are opposites. With so much trust in ourselves and what we do, it is no wonder that others are hungry, without health insurance, working with minimum wages, or without jobs. Our lack of love for others is proof of our not loving God. We are not one with God when we are not one with our neighbors. We do not know God (v. 25). Since we are not one with God, death has the final say. Death is the final event that takes us away from being with God forever. And nothing we do can change that.

When church members trust something in addition to Jesus on a cross, they echo Paul’s analysis that “Jesus died for nothing.” Without Jesus’ death, then we do not have Jesus mediating for us between God and us. We have our own actions as mediator. However, if we trust one part of the law, we must keep it all. And here also we do not know God as one with Jesus, and death again has the final say. And all we have done makes it that way.

PROGNOSIS: Out of One, Concern for Many

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The One Dies to End Death*

Jesus also was subject to death, even death on a cross. But the Father gave him life, and by giving Jesus life, they are one. The Father is in Jesus and Jesus in the Father. Jesus knows the Father (v. 25). By the new life given to Jesus, to know Jesus is to know the Father. Jesus and the Father are one. They are one, not as a fact, but one in order that we may be one with them also.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Trust Jesus Who Is One with the Father*

To believe Jesus is from the Father is the challenge Jesus gives us (*The Gospel According to John*, XII-XXI, Raymond Brown, p. 778). The challenge is to recognize God in Jesus, to recognize God not in winning, not in the gusto of life, not in nature, but in Jesus. The challenge is to recognize God in Jesus' mercy, in his forgiving us, in his welcoming the poor, in his eating and drinking with people who did not trust God loved them, who trusted judgment and condemnation and that such judgment and condemnation were for them. The challenge is to see God in Jesus when Jesus is on a cross, when Jesus is raised from the dead.

So to be one with Jesus in his new life is the chief proclamation of the church. All other proclamations of the church, in order to proclaim trust in Jesus, need to be connected to Jesus. So when the church talks of other issues, other articles of faith, they need to be connected to Jesus, like spokes on a wheel held in place by differentiating between Law and Promise. Trust is in Jesus and love is for others. We are one with God, not by having one opinion about immigration policy, but by one faith in Jesus alone.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *One Is for All of*

Us

Life in Jesus—his giving us mercy, forgiveness, and love as a gift so that we now give mercy, forgiveness, and love as a gift—is to be visible enough to others in order to challenge all who see that mercy, forgiveness, and love, to believe in Jesus, to recognize God in Jesus. As we are one with Jesus and the Father by the life Jesus gives us, those who trust Jesus have been given Jesus' glory and so the challenge to believe God is in Jesus comes through those who trust Jesus (*The Gospel According to John*, Brown). We now live, not grabbing the gusto, but by offering mercy; not by asking what's in it for us, but by asking how we may serve others. We live in Jesus, not expecting or demanding others make us happy, but by giving others our love in Jesus as a gift. Early Christians were seen to give up their food so others could eat. That challenged people to see God in Jesus. By our love for others, coming from faith in Jesus, let others see God in Jesus.