

United As One

Scripture/Text: John 17: 20-23, NIV

Preached at VAAC, Reveille UMC, Richmond, VA – June 19, 2021

Beloved, on last week in my office; I received an interesting email that challenged me on why I selected; “United As One” as our annual conference theme. The letter continued to state that this conference specifically is **not united** on the **human sexuality issues**; the writer continued to state that he could not believe that I would choose this theme on “**Oeness.**”

Interestingly, as I read the email, of course I had to agree with the writer; that **NO** -- we are not united around the **human sexuality issue**. But to be honest with you; we are not united on a lot of issues. But the question remains today and on this Christian journey **what does unite us? What does unite us?**

Beloved, does God not give humanity the freedom to choose and make decisions? Does God not give humanity the grace to feel passionate about certain life issues? Does God expect us to agree on all matters? **I don't think so.** But I want you to know; that I chose this theme – because in the midst of our lives, in the midst of 2 postponed General Conferences and a Jurisdictional Conference, in the midst of coming through the pandemic. I believe that God is calling us more now than ever to be “**one with Christ.**” Have you noticed on the logo – many hands,

many different colors of hands, and I shared with Maddie and the graphic artist that I wanted the hands to point up to God. And to use our one finger to God. To God we are one. I believe that God wants us to be “one with Christ.

Beloved, Dr. Kinney shared in his Bible Study yesterday and again this morning; that the 4 levels of **oneness are**

one with Christ

one with ourselves

one with our neighbor;

and one with creation.

Today, beloved in this sermon message; I would like to lift up for your hearing – **being one with Christ.** I’m just crazy enough to believe that despite our personal, social or theological differences; **NO ONE** can debate that we **ALL** **accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior** and we strive every day to be “an imitator of Him as the Apostle Paul states in Ephesians 5:1.

See below as we open this text for this morning we witness the **greatest prayer and the longest recorded prayer – prayed by our Lord and Savior --** known as (“**The Great High Priestly Prayer**”).

According to the scholars, this prayer was **intended** to be overheard by His disciples to bring comfort and hope to their trouble hearts. What is unique about this passage of scripture is that we witness the intimate conversation between Jesus and God.

First, we witness Jesus praying for Himself; secondly, he prays for his disciples and finally he prays for what the scholars suggest -- **“the future believers”** where the theme of **“unity/oneness” is often preached.**

Beloved when Jesus prayed for **Himself** – the reader quickly recognizes a tone of intimacy because the entire prayer is built around an **(I and You posture)** of communication. Jesus either speaks to God using second **person pronoun** or address God as Father.

In this intimate moment, Jesus hands those whom he loves back to God and **is bold enough to hold God to God’s promises for this community.** Jesus, **“the only Son,”** who is close to God’s heart, prays that God will be present in the life and mission of the faith community.

Secondly, as we walk through the text -- we witness Jesus praying for the Disciples.

Beloved, while we are not specifically told so; this prayer must have had a tremendous impact on the hearts of the Disciples. When they overheard the conversation between Jesus and God – I believed it brought them a sense of **peace**.

My brothers and sisters I can only assume with my Holy imagination that since this **prayer** has been preserved for us, that it was intended to bring peace and assurance to our trouble hearts “in times like this.”

Therefore, (IF) we believe in the **ONE** who prayed it and believe in the sufficiency of Jesus’ work on the cross; **why do we worry about this denomination; why do we put a limit to God about our own human limitations?**

Lastly, he prayed for ALL believers; (future believers) primarily concerning Christian unity/oneness. We’ve seen the term “unity” displaced throughout our annual conference this week in our worship theme. But, if we are honest with ourselves; – “unity” has varying degrees of interpretation.

It is vital that we recognize the vast difference between unity and uniformity. However, too many Christians think of “**unity**” only in terms of those who think and act like them.

Beloved, notice that **unity** is an important matter. Because, in the last moments of our Lord’s early ministry; he prayed for it. This prayer makes day to

day life possible; because as he moves toward his death, Jesus **entrusted his own future to God.**

We've wrestled and we've been stretched – but the question still remains – **how do we maintain this unity – in the midst of dis-unity?**

Jesus reveals this **“oneness” in the text as he prays four times; in verses 20-23.**

Beloved, I believe what is crucial for us the Virginia Annual Conference is:

Our oneness with God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit.

1. Our oneness with God – should motivate us to have a deeper relationship with God's Son. Not knowing **“about Jesus;” but knowing Jesus “personally”**. In these uncertain times, when can have **head knowledge only; but** when you have that **“one-on-one” relationship; the knowing** will move from your head to your heart and then your life will be **transformed** and you will be able to transformed other's lives. I firmly believe that **before** we can authentically love God and love one another; we must **experience the Lord for ourselves.** Jesus Christ, our Savior, our redeemer. Jesus Christ who died on the Cross. Jesus Christ who is the Master, Lord, Ruler and Owner of our lives. Jesus Christ as Paul stated in Ephesians 2:20 – “being the chief cornerstone; the rock foundation on the Church and our faith rest.”

2. Secondly, our oneness with God – we must proclaim Christ as the “**Messiah**” **in our own lives**. To proclaim is characterized to **declare formally or declare someone to be something**. Messiah is a Hebrew word. It means “**anointed one**.” It is the equivalent to the New Testament word “**Christ**” which also means **anointed**. Beloved, when we confessed Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior; we proclaimed Christ at that salvific moment as the Messiah in our lives. My sisters and brothers; that’s what we have in common. That’s where our **oneness lives**. That’s what is the **heart of the matter**. No matter how people characterized you or you may label yourself; I know that I am saved and better yet; you are saved. **That’s how WE ARE ONE**. One in Christ. One in knowing how to treat my brother and Christ. One in being the **representative** of our Lord and Savior. Beloved, let us **NOT fall for the trick of the Enemy** and be so **divided** that we can’t see the Christ in each other. The Christ that we ALL, said yes!!!
3. Finally, our oneness with God is that we are called; we are mandated to **share the Good News**. Share the Good News in season and out of season; that Jesus Christ (the One) is the Son of the Living God. Share the Good News that God so loved us; that God sacrificed His Only One Son. Beloved, we can’t get comfortable and rest on our laurels and don’t see that this sinful world is dying all around us. Our oneness, our priority is to “win souls for Christ.” I’m not

negating the importance this denomination has wrestled with for over 50 years over. But what I'm challenging us – can our **oneness** Virginia Conference be **making disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve.** Beloved, can I **oneness be Jesus. Can Jesus be the heart of the matter?**

Sweet Jesus

Mary's baby – Jesus

Advocate in the Courtroom – Jesus

Bright and Morning Star – Jesus

Creator – Jesus

Deliverer – Jesus

Everlasting Life – Jesus

Friend to the Friendless – Jesus

Good Shepherd – Jesus

Hope to the Hopeless – Jesus

Jehovah Jireh – Jesus

King of Kings – and

Lord of Lord

Mighty God

The Only One

Prince of Peace

Rose of Sharon – Jesus

The Lily of the Valley and Wonderful Counselor Jesus.

What's His Name -- Jesus

