

John 17:20-26. ... **That you may be one, as I and the Father are one.**

Some of you may remember that around this time last year, Jay and I travelled to Hawaii by cruise ship. The cruise was 19 days - it was blissful (fter we'd navigated the cyclone that struck us on the first night!). There were three Sundays during the trip. As the first approached, I looked forward to the Sunday service which I assumed would be offered. I was quite diasppointed when the programme for Sunday arrived and there was no service. But being the eternal optimist I thought - "It will be tomorrow then" - because we crossed the international dateline that night and so we got Sunday twice! But there was no service the second time around either! Not to be put off, I sought out the cruise director the next day and offered to conduct a service on the third Sunday, as there was obviously no chaplain on board. There were a few hoops to jump through, but thanks to the wonders of satellite communication and Bishop Stuart's enthusiastic co-operation, we managed it, and the following Sunday, I was able to conduct an ecumenical service in one of the ship's lounges. It was just lovely. There were 40 or so people from all over the world, and across all denominations. As we worshipped and prayed together, here was an instant bond, because we all served the one Lord Jesus. We had some wonderful fellowship together during and after the service.

I share that story with you this morning, because in this experience, I catch a glimpse of the deep intimacy and love that moved our Lord Jesus to pray for his disciples and us in this prayer we've read this morning.

Isn't it amazing to think that Jesus comes to his Heavenly Father, praying fervently and passionately – for us personally?

He asks the Father to give us some incredible things.

First of all, Jesus asks the Father to give us *intimacy*. Jesus asks his Father to give us – his people - friendship, closeness, companionship, empathy, love – all those things that the psychologists tell us every human being cries out for. He prays that those things will be given to you and to me - for each other. Those words aren't mentioned specifically – but that's what he's asking for, because he's asking that we become ONE.

When Jesus prays that for us – he isn't asking that we become the same – he's praying that we become united. Connected. Bonded. That's why when Paul talks about the intimacy of an ideal marriage, he talks about it in terms of the love that Jesus has for his church.

One of the things that continues to thrill me is the bond that exists between Christians, no matter where they are. I'm sure you've experienced the same thing - encountering Christians perhaps on a trip or an outing, maybe on the other side of Australia, or even the world, and discovering that instant connection. It is an amazing thing, isn't it?

Some years ago, when we had our music business, I would fill in whenever a staff member was ill and couldn't take the mobile music classroom out to teach the keyboard classes in the schools. The way our business was structured, there was always a three hour gap between classes mid morning. I was filling in on the Campbelltown truck one day, and was wondering what to do with myself for three hours. It was too far to go home. I decided to go to the pool shop in Camden (we had a pool back then). The lady behind the counter admired my cross...and within minutes, we'd each discovered the other was a Christian. There was that instant connection again! It was a slow morning in the shop. We shared a cuppa and talked about our faith, our families, our jobs. It felt like we'd known each other for years! Marilyn is still a really close friend.

So many people in our culture today are crying out for intimacy. Loneliness is one of the great curses of our age. In our fast-paced technological society, we can easily lose our connectedness to our community and our families. In our own community here in Bodalla & Narooma, there are single parents, widows, widowers, single men and women – who are starved of the love and companionship they were created for. God longs to meet their need, and if we are willing, will use us to do it.

Jesus offers deep and abiding relationships to all who will follow him. He prays that we will become ONE.

Jesus then qualifies that request further, by asking that we become one, in the **same way that HE AND HIS FATHER are one.**

Think about that for a moment. How would you describe the relationship that Jesus has with his father? Or the relationship he and the Father have with the Holy Spirit? They are one in that they are on the same page as it were. They are one in that they are in perfect harmony with one another. They are one in that there is perfect love between them. Yet they are not the SAME. This is one of the central tenets of the Church's belief in the Trinity. There are three members of the Godhead who are distinct, yet unified.

Jesus is praying for some amazing relationships to happen between us!

But wait - there's more! **Jesus then prays that HE WILL BE IN US**, as the Father is in him. That means, that he's asking that we will experience the same intimacy with him – our Lord Jesus – that he experiences with his Father.

Stop for a minute, and think of the person in this world that you love the most and are closest to. I'm sure that if it is a long-term relationship, you almost know what that person is thinking at times.

These days, both Jay & I sometimes fish for words. We're getting older.... We'll get out half a phrase and stop, but each of us still knows what the other wants. That's a type of one-ness. Close, intimate, trusting relationships give us a glimpse - just a tiny glimpse –

of the sort of intimacy Jesus enjoys with his Father. Jesus prays that we will know him as intimately as he knows the Father.

How intimate is our relationship with Jesus? Is he a distant sort of figure that we worship on Sundays and respectfully ask to watch over those we love, or help us when we're in trouble? Or does our relationship with Jesus go deeper than that? Is he someone we can talk to anytime; unload on, yell at, even? Is he our first port of call when we are struggling – or our last? Do we speak with him often, or only sometimes?

The relationship Jesus has with his Father is a relationship characterized by deep trust, a sense of peace, willing and joyful obedience, closeness, and intimate communication. Is this what our relationship with Jesus is like? If not, it can be. Jesus asked his Father that it would be so. He prayed for us, that we would know him as he knows the Father. If God is going to answer anyone's prayer, he's going to answer the prayer of his beloved Son!

If our relationship with Jesus a bit shallow or jaded this morning, then let's come to the Father in prayer, and drink in what our Lord Jesus has asked him to give us. It's there simply to be received.

Jesus then prays that we will be brought to complete *unity*. Unity is a natural follow on from intimacy. If we know and love someone deeply, it's natural to want to remain in harmony with them. None of us wants to fight and argue with someone we love.

The deepest desire of Jesus' heart is that we, as his people, live in unity. That's not to say we all have to agree on everything, and believe the same things. But it does mean that despite our differences, we can live in harmony with one another.

That means that there may be times in our life as a church that some of us may need to defer to others. Where we might need to be willing to allow others to have their way, for the sake of harmony in the body. Or we may simply need to agree to disagree, and love each other anyway.

A number of churches, in their Ecumenical conversations, have adopted a motto which is attributed to St Augustine: ***In things essential – unity; in things non-essential – liberty.*** It's a wise saying which if we can adhere to, will pour oil on troubled waters.

As Jesus prays for us to be one with one another and one with him – and as he prays for us to live in unity with one another – there is an amazing outcome.

To live in harmony with one another, as Jesus is in harmony with the Father, causes the world to know that Jesus is sent by God, and that his love is real.

Remember the chorus we just sang? “By this, shall all men know that you are my disciples – if you have love, one for another.” Love is like a magnet. People are attracted to it.

If we truly live as Jesus prays we will live, the church cannot help but grow. God created us for intimacy – and in particular, intimacy with himself. If the love of God is evidenced in our community, between each other, and towards him, people will be drawn to the church and as they are touched by God’s love through us, they will want to stay.

What Jesus is asking his Father for us – his followers, is a very precious gift indeed. All the more so because as the Son of God, we know Jesus prayers are answered. These things he has asked for us and for his church are there, waiting to be received.

Are any of us feeling a tad lonely this morning? Are we troubled or afraid? Or perhaps dissatisfied with our relationship with God? Then let’s remember that Jesus prayed for us - and prays for us. He continues to intercede for us at the Father’s right hand. He has prayed, and continues to pray, that we will be one with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and one with him.

Let’s give thanks.