

“That the World May Know”
Acts 1:4-12; Romans 12:3-13;
John 17:20-26

May 8, 2016
Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

Happy Mother’s Day! It is a day that has developed around the idea of appreciating the mothers in our lives. As we do that, it’s interesting to think about what that means. I think about my own mother, and one of the things she always looked forward to was when she could have her children around. When we were younger, that was often. In later years it was generally around some kind of holiday. She always seemed to really enjoy having us all there for that time together to recognize again how we’re one family, especially when it was a harmonious time together. We being human beings, that doesn’t always happen, but she really looked forward to having the family all together.

It’s interesting as we think about the idea and the reality of mothers and mothering, that God doesn’t seem to mind identifying with that idea, the idea of a mother comforting a child, for example. In Isaiah 66, verse 13, it says “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you. You shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”

God is very willing to allow the love a mother comforting a child to reflect who God is, and it goes both ways, I think. When Jesus is talking about everybody being one, I wonder if it doesn’t reflect on that idea of my mother wanting my family to all be one, to be together.

As we begin to think about this idea that Jesus talks about of us all being one, I think about that idea of being a family together, partly because I was trying to figure out what it means when Jesus says I am in you, you are in me, God is in me, I want you in me—all this “being in” language. I was tempted to go back to the Greek and change it to “with” because it makes more sense to me, but it really has that sense of being “in.” So let me try to think about that in a couple of ways.

The first way was thinking about being in a family. We are different. Paul talks about all of us being members of the body of Christ, this family together. That’s one way we can think about being in the same thing together. God and Jesus are in the family of God, and we are invited to be in that family as well, and to know the love of God that is present in being one.

It’s always a little difficult to simply think of “being one” as being family because family is not always harmonious. If you have experience with a lot of families, or perhaps your own, or perhaps you just know your own sets of dysfunctions, I’m not sure I want to compare God’s family to a human family, but it feels like God does bring us together, draw us in, and make us one as in a good family.

So that’s one way that I think about this, that we are in God in that we are in God’s family. But there are other ways we can think of “being in” as well. For example, I think about how my mother is in me. Whenever something goes wrong and I happen to say

something like “fiddlesticks,” I know exactly where that came from. It’s my mother in me. There is that way in which those people who are important to us, particularly our parents, come out in who we are.

We were with the mother of a friend of ours recently and we could see some of the same mannerisms. It’s like we could see her mother in her. That’s another way that I think we can begin to think about what it means for us to be in Jesus or for Jesus to be in us. We begin to see the characteristics of who Jesus is begin to come into our lives.

We sometimes think about mentors as being people who shape us and begin to be part of who we are. They are in us. Because we had a memorial service for Norman Lewis this week, it made me think of how she was a mentor to some. One of the notes she kept was: *Christian people are characterized as those who do more good than is required of them. They help more than is expected of them. They give more than is asked of them.* I think she tried to live that out. It was the faith in her that she felt was being expressed as she tried to live that out. Then as we allowed her to be in us, we learned to have the same way of expressing our faith.

So it is partly this idea that as we assimilate who Christ is in us, Christ becomes part of us. I think Paul is trying to help us see that when we do that, our lives look a certain way. He says, “Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection.” We could go on through the rest of that passage from Romans, but it’s talking about how our lives look when Christ is in us. We’ve assimilated his teachings within us. So we are in the family of faith. There’s a way that Christ is in us as we take his teachings in and recognize the love of God that allows us to be God’s people.

I think there’s another way we might think about Christ being in us. I think that’s the mystical approach. It’s recognizing that not everything God does is external, that is something we learn. Sometimes God touches us in internal ways, in touching our feelings or our thoughts, giving us moments of joy or of direction or of guilt, even. But there’s a way that as we open our hearts and minds and lives to God, there’s an “in us” that happens in that way as well.

As Jesus talks here, as he prays for his disciples, he prays that “in us” piece is there and that out of that “in us” we become completely one. One family, one body, one people—God’s people. As I read this and think about what it means, it doesn’t mean being all the same. Paul talks about us all being different. We have different gifts, but we’re members of one another. There’s a sharing of love, and we become completely one. That’s a high calling, and there’s a sense in which we could look at it and say how wonderful it is that we can become one, become a nice happy family and that’s a joy.

Sometimes it feels a little bit like “Well, that just about being a nice place to be.” Who doesn’t like a nice place to be? But it can also begin to feel a little bit like it’s “us,” and then there’s all of “them.” But I don’t think that’s what Jesus does here at all. The interesting thing is that it feels like he’s saying being one, being this family together,

being God's people, is pleasing to God. That in itself is enough to do it in my mind. If it's pleasing to God, then I want to try to figure out how to be the one people God wants us to be.

But he doesn't even stop there, really. He goes on to say, "...that they may be completely one so that the world may know." It's as we begin to accept and work into being that body of Christ, being the family of faith that is pleasing to God, that the world may know the love of God that came in Jesus Christ, which is in us, which we share.

That sounds so wonderful, but then I ask the question, what do people know about who we are? What's the perspective? How do they know us? It's so fascinating today to hear so many people who will say, "Can we come inside the church doors? Is it safe in there?" Some of it is simply because people haven't been here before. Some of it is some kind of reputation that churches have gained. It doesn't sound like the reputation that Jesus is asking for, however, and I struggle with that. He's asking us to be a place where the world may know the love of God.

There were a group of students who were looking at organizations on campus and they were told to go to the Campus Christian Center. They said, "Can we go there? Is it a scary place? Will it be OK if we go in? Is anybody going to jump on us?" It makes me sad. How are we showing the world that we are one in a way that shows the very love and grace of God who has come to be among us?

I think God invites us to recognize that just as God would comfort God's people like a mother would comfort her child, there's some way in which that love can be expressed in who we are as a body of Christ. I feel like I still have a lot of work to do to figure out how better to let the world see a community of faith that is one because of the love of God in Jesus Christ, that reaches out, that embraces in service, that does more good than is required of them, does more than is expected of them. May God work in our lives that we may be one and show the grace of God so that people will know who God is because of who we are. Amen.