

What Mother's Know—John 17: 1-11
7th Sunday in Easter—May 13, 2018

There is a joke about a boy who was watching his mother, a minister, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say?" he asked. "Why, God tells me." To which the boy replies, "Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?" I've done a lot of crossing out this week. This John passage is a tough one, you could go in a million different directions with it. But this being a Sunday about families, both of the church and nuclear kind, I chose to focus on verse 11 and Jesus' prayer that his followers might be one as he and God were one.

There must have been some division in John's community that prompted the author to include this prayer. A lot of the scholarship around the book of John believe that the letters of John arose from the same community as the Gospel of John.¹ In the books of 1 and 2 John, we get a picture of a community torn apart by belief – the disagreement appears to centre on whether or not Jesus was divine. It seems that the members of John's community have sacrificed right relationship for right belief. John's community fell into the trap that so many succeeding generations of Christians also have—believing that Jesus came offering information about God, when Jesus actually came offering relationship with God.²

We often fall into the trap of thinking that Christian community is all about believing the same things—having the same opinions about the church, the bible or social issues. We think agreeing on these things will make us a community – will make us one. It doesn't work that way. When we find ourselves divided, it's because we've let our egos get in the way and won't surrender our lives to God.

I previously worked for a non-profit organization whose work was to helping other agencies access government funding. Mark, one of my colleagues, returned to the office one time telling a story about "one of the weirdest meetings" he had ever attended. Mark had been helping a Christian based organization that worked with young offenders. They were trying to develop projects that would fit with the mandate of a new pot of money that had just become available from the federal government. The organization could submit only one proposal. At the meeting each department was promoting their own proposal. The meeting was getting nowhere. Mark suggested a break. But before they broke, one of the staff suggested that they pray. They prayed, and in their prayer they asked for God's guidance. Someone else suggested that they spend their break in silence in order to let the prayer sink in. That's what they did. When Mark re-convened the meeting some of the departments pulled their proposals off the table noting the merits of the others. Other departments started talking about what they appreciated about some of the other proposals. One department noted how much stronger their proposal could be if they partnered with another department. By the end

¹ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Abingdon Press, 1998, p. 251

² William Willimon, Source Unknown.

of the meeting, they had agreed on one proposal that was much stronger than any of the previous ones. Mark said he had never seen or felt anything like it.

The source of our unity is right relationship as arrived at through surrender. Mothers know the truth of this better than anyone does. Conformity doesn't hold families together; families are held together by love. In other words, families are held together by right relationship. Right relationship is made possible because a mother surrenders to something greater than herself.

As people on the Christian journey, Jesus is the model of what relationships that flow from surrender look like. They look like daily prayer and moment-by-moment prayer so that the relationship that is the foundation of all others is strong and stable. It is seeing the face of God in all people—lepers, prostitutes, children, foreigners. It is listening and being willing to be changed by the Syrophenician woman. It is empathy and compassion for the suffering of the woman about to be stoned to death. It is joy at a wedding feast or a dinner party. It is a deep sense of gratitude for life and all that had been given to him, even though he was considered poor and insignificant by many.

The possibility for unity, community, oneness is in us. We just have to get out of the way sometimes. This is the gift from God, not a set of beliefs, but an outstretched hand calling us into relationship, calling us to the knowledge of love. The only knowing that will ever make us one.