

Senior Recognition Sunday  
Sermon delivered 5-16-10  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Neal Collins, Pastor

**John 17:20–26**

*[Jesus prayed:] "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> that 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.<sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one,<sup>23</sup> I 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.<sup>24</sup> Father, 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.<sup>25</sup> "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me.<sup>26</sup> I 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."*

**Graduation**

Today is Senior Recognition Sunday. Today we have a ceremony, along with parents and graduates, giving thanks and blessings to each other with blankets being wrapped around the graduates to help remind them of the love and power of Jesus and their home congregation. The Gospel this morning is the graduation exercise for the disciples, as Jesus gives his commencement speech in the form of the High Priestly prayer in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel, that they "may be one".

Graduations have a way not only reflecting on the present moment, but on all of life's transitions. Today we focus on the graduation from High School, but there have been many graduations in these young people's lives. Let us step back and embrace the meaning of the word *graduation* from Websters Dictionary. Not only is graduation the reception of an academic degree, but also an interval on a graduated scale. Looking back on the intervals of their lives, we see a whole series of graduations - from the womb to the world, from home to school, from being driven to having a license...these are all important events on the graduating scale.

Some synonyms for graduation are words like: kickoff, beginning, show time, start, and ceremony. These words are not endings, but beginnings. A whole new chapter of their lives is beginning, with a continuous flow of new chapters as they face the world of decisions on school, work, marriage, family, children, community, purpose, focus, and meaning of their lives. I pray they will be as blown away as we have been! Those of us who grew up with the typewriter, a rotary land phone, transistor radio can see the changes; they grew up with Facebook, iPod, Twitter and computerized everything. They will live to see a world we never dreamed of seeing.

**As One**

Jesus knew his disciples would enter into a different world than he shared with them. He prepares them, in chapters 13 to 17, for graduation into this new world in the upper room. He speaks of being betrayed, a new commandment, Peter's denial (13), going to the Father to prepare a place for them, sending the Holy Spirit (14) being the vine and they the branches (15) their sorrow will turn to joy (16) then for 26 verses he prays for them and for us, protection from the Evil One, that they may be One, the love God loved him with may be in them (17) then he is arrested. This is Jesus graduation speech to his disciples.

Jesus says, "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word that they may be One as you are in me and I am in you..." Let us clear the deck on this prayer for oneness. Each of us has a unique DNA. God has made us this way. So, what does Jesus mean when he is praying that we are ONE? Is this a desire for us to be Stepford Christians? Some of us remember the Stepford wives, perfect and obedient on the outside? Let us go back to the Upper Room for a moment. Jesus is not only praying for the 12, but the impact of the message they would carry to the world, and all future generations. The oneness and the unity Jesus is praying for is that they, and we, may be one in God as he and God are one in each other.

How are they ONE? They are ONE not in a Stepford sense of the word, but ONE in Love. This love, and the power of this love, is a gift of God. Love does not follow the law of nature, or the spirit of limitation. If you have more than one child, does your love for one deprive the other child of love? Jesus doesn't pray for theological agreement, creeds, or dogmas, but does pray that world knows the love of God for them. Now we are never taught to love. We are given examples of love, we see behaviors of love, and we know about romantic love. However, in a practical sense, love speaks to each of us in a different way. How do you know you are loved?

### Love

Last week a parishioner shared with me a book they were reading on love called *Love Speak*. The author contends that each of us know we are loved when someone does an act of kindness for us, affirms us, wants to be with us, touch us, or maybe give us gifts. Many times we give love in the same way as we value being loved. It is important to know how others want to be loved in order to express love. What is love other than God accepts you and we accept each other?

Paul speaks of this love and oneness of being in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Corinthians, a time where there is a lot of conflict. You know this chapter of "If I am able to speak in the language of men and of angels but have not love I am nothing." He concludes this chapter by saying "Faith, Hope, and Love abide and the greatest of these is Love". A three legged stool as the foundation of life not only for our graduates, but for us. Faith in God, not as ascent to some theological formulas, but the one in whom you trust, we all trust something to get us through and out of this life. Faith is about trust, along with hope and love. It is a foundation, so that every morning we don't have to re-invent ourselves, our purpose, or our lives, for we sit on a three legged stool called faith, hope, and love.

### **Faith and Love**

The parents of a young man named Mitch discovered what happened when this foundation is missing. He lacked direction for his life. As a college student, his father went to visit him and asked Mitch if he had any vision for his life, and asked what he want to be in ten years. “Slowly and with deliberation, Mitch replied, “I want to be a consumer. I want to consume as much as I can of as many different things as I can for as long as I can.” (p.43, Armchair Economist, Landsburg, 1993)

Faith and Love need the spirit of hope to be an adequate foundation. The opposite of hope is despair and cynicism. Hope is a priceless gift for our graduates, and for us. Sooner or later all of us hit the roadblocks. Cynicism, in an article that Doug Dockter showed me on one visit, recognized that cynicism is caused by a broken heart. The most difficult thing to do is to believe again. You may not have a choice about having your heart broken, but you do have a choice to hope and believe again, or take the escalator down to indifference and despair.

### **Hope**

Hope is a powerful force, and it can determine and make a difference in your life. Dr. William Buckholtz, as quoted by Norman Cousins in the *Biology of Hope*, says, “I was eating breakfast one morning, I overheard two oncologists discussing the papers they were to present that day and the American association of Clinical Oncology. One was complaining bitterly, “You know Bok, I just don’t understand it. You and I use the same drugs, the same dosage, the same schedule, and the same entry criteria. Yet, I got a 22% response rate and you got a 74% . That’s unheard of for metastized lung cancer. How do you do it? The other Doctor responded, we both used Etoposide, Plantinol, Oncovin, and Hydroxyurea... You called yours EPOH. I tell my patients I am giving them HOPE. I tell them it is experimental, but I tell them with it, there is a chance, some hope.” Hope is vital in health, happiness, and well being, whether you are 16 or 66.

### **Faith, Hope, and Love**

All of you have these gifts of faith, hope, and love at your disposal, as well as Jesus who prays for you, and invites you to be one with him and the Father in this love. There is nothing they cannot heal in your life, there is no cloud so dark their light will not shine in your life. There is no despair they cannot heal. There is nothing “separating you from this love of God”. Regardless of where you find yourself this morning, know God desires to make a home in you. Regardless of how joyless you may feel this morning, burdened with despair, pain, or indifference, the love of God in Jesus the Christ can restore you to the fullness of life through faith, hope, and love.