

"Life is Filled with Loneliness & Separateness, Therefore"

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Feb. 3, 2013

John 17: 20-26

Chapter 17 is a prayer said by Christ at the Last Supper. Some commentators call this The Real Lord's Prayer, since it's a prayer that he himself prayed. What we call the Lord's Prayer could be called the Disciples' Prayer, since it's the prayer he gave to his disciples to pray, including us. Either way, this prayer in John 17 is an amazing prayer. As you will hear, it echoes down through the centuries, as he prays for those who would become his followers because of the testimony of his disciples. In many ways he's praying for us. Let's take a look:

John 17:20-26

"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 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. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 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. 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. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 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."

This message is entitled, "Life is Filled with Loneliness & Separateness, Therefore" Let me start with two stories.

I was attending a musical in college. It was extremely funny & well done, and filled with belly laughs. Sitting directly in the row in front of me was one of my professors. I was sitting with friends, he was sitting by himself. He was a very nice man, known as a bit of a loner. The seats in the theater were on a very steep slope, and so I couldn't help but notice his reactions all night. Whenever something really funny happened he looked around to catch someone's eye. He was looking for someone to share the laugh with. And of course most people go to the theater with someone and so he could hardly find anybody to laugh with. And it reminded me how much we need each other. And how life, like laughter, is meant to be shared.

Yet life is filled marked by loneliness, separateness and isolation.

My other story is from Rabbi Harold Kushner (the author of Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?). He tells the story of a Rabbi who snuck out on Yom Kippur and went golfing. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, the most holiest of days on the Jewish Calendar. There were services planned for all throughout day. But there was a small break in the afternoon between services, and so the Rabbi quietly went out the back door and drove to a local golf course to play a few holes. He didn't have time for 18 holes or even 9, but he still could play a few enjoy it. Well, on the very first hole that he played the Rabbi gets a hole in one. He is ecstatic and leaps in the air. And just as he is leaping the angels in Heaven begin to have a conversation with God.

"That's not fair, Lord, he's golfing on the Day of Atonement! How could you let him make a hole in one! He shouldn't even be out there enjoying himself."

God just looked at the angels and says, *"Relax, who's he gonna tell?"*

(What good is a hole in one if you can't tell anyone?)

God made us relational beings. We need each another - to celebrate one another's joys to lighten one another's burdens. To share life together.

Life is filled with loneliness & separation, but that's contrary to our nature. The first book of the Bible says, *"It is not good for the man to be alone."* The word there for man is *"adam."* It doesn't just mean a man. It also means mankind, humankind. "It is not good for humans to be alone. We're designed for relationships. Yet, life is filled with loneliness and separateness. We're relational beings in a world that tends to isolate us; the "tilt" is toward isolation, away from each other.

This is why we have church. This is why we need church.

Humorist Harry Golden once asked why his atheist father went to temple every Sabbath:

"There are many reasons why one would go to synagogue," he answered.

"Take Silverberg. He goes to talk to God.

Me? I go to talk to Silverberg."

Church and Synagogue are about both - God & Silverberg. And many, many times God comes to us through Silverberg. So it seems to me that a thriving, vibrant church has to have these two ingredients -Silverberg & God. Life is filled with isolation, therefore we must cultivate relationships - nurturing, edifying relationships. And what better place to do that than church?

I once heard a story about a church committee and a gentlemen who served on the committee named, Fred. Fred was always there, always helpful, always good-natured, just the kind of guy you'd want on any committee. Then he missed a few meetings in a row. It turned into 3 or 4 straight monthly meetings. The members asked if anyone had heard from Fred. No one had. "We should call him," they said. Then the next Sunday the pastor announced that Fred's wife had died after a difficult year-long struggle. And that group of disciples thought long and hard about the quality of their fellowship. And as their story was told throughout the church, the congregation did some soul-searching as well about the authentic relationships they were building or not. And they began to open their meetings not just with a brief prayer asking for help, but by taking prayer requests, sharing joys and concerns, just like on Sunday mornings. It only added a few minutes to the length of their meetings but did it add depth to their relationships. It deepened the friendships around the table.

Life is filled with separateness.

Church is about connectedness.

Life is filled with individuality.

Church is about community.

It seems to me that that's what Jesus was talking about around the Table a long time ago.

"Make them one Father, so that the world may know that you sent me. Make them one, just as you and I are one. Because if there's a sense of oneness, then our divine energy and love is flowing among them - I in them and you in me."

But not only that - *"If there is oneness, they will draw others unto me."*

He states this twice in the prayer: *"Make them one Father, so that the world may know that you sent me."*

Community is contagious. It's what people need. It's what people are looking for - God & Silverberg.

Think about it.