

Text: John 17:18-23

Title: Worldwide Christianity

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

Preacher: Rev. Dr. William Lewis, Senior Pastor

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Our sermon text today comes from Jesus' prayer with the disciples right after the Lord's Supper and right before he is arrested and the passion begins. So it is a very significant prayer and I am going to pick it up at verse 18 where Jesus is talking to the Father. Hear the word of the Lord.

**As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.**

**0''My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

This is the word of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do ask that you would teach us now from your word and help us to unite our hearts with all the Christians around the globe today who are seeking you and sharing communion. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Three blind men in the New Testament who had been healed by Jesus heard of one another and decided to get together to Celebrate Christ's love and share their testimonies. Bartimaeus began Gentleman I was outside the city of Jericho when Jesus and a mob walked by. I cried out Son of David have mercy on me. Jesus stopped. He asked me what do you want me to do for you? I said Rabi I want to see. Jesus said, go your way your faith has made you well. At that moment I was healed and could see. So I've come to the conclusion that when it comes to healing blind men, Jesus uses our faith and His word and that's how healing occurs.

For some odd reason the other two men were not enthusiastic. The man from Bethsaida began his testimony, gentlemen my story about how Christ healed me isn't anything like that. Jesus took me out of the city and He spit directly into my eyes. Then He touched my eyes with His hands. I was expecting instantaneous healing, but I opened my eyes and would have rather remained blind—it was awful I saw men walking around as trees. I thought if this is what it's like to be healed by Jesus I don't want it. Then Jesus repeated the process spitting in my eyes and touching them again. The second time I opened my eyes I could see. So I'm convinced when Jesus heals blind men it's with spit and its always in two stages.

Well the third man was visibly upset. He said gentlemen I seriously doubt the validity of both your healings. When Jesus healed me he used saliva, but He didn't spit in my face He spit on the ground and mixed it with dirt making little mud packs which He put on my eyes. Then He told me to wash in the pool of Siloam and commanded that I wash the mud out there. As I washed out

the mud I could see. Therefore, I'm convinced that when Jesus heals blind men, He uses mud and the holy water of the pool of Siloam.

Needless to say the outcome of their conference was devastating. Forgetting their common bond in Jesus, the three ex blind men went away divided. Limited to their own experience they created their own peculiar doctrine and three distinct denominations: The Spitites, the Mudites, and the Bartimites. The Spitites making their sacrament saliva—believed everything happens in stages. The Mudites made a sacrament of Mud and the Holy waters of the pool of Siloam. The Bartimites focused on their charismatic leader Bartimaeus with no sacraments at all—only Christ's words and faith.

While we might laugh there are literally 22,000 different Christian denominations—segregated over various issues, some significant others trivial. Our Presbyterian Denomination battles over liberal and conservative ideologies.

If we are not careful the outcome of the disagreements can lead to focusing on our stances--neglecting our primary calling to introduce people to Jesus Christ.

As the Russian Revolution was sweeping across that nation The Russian Orthodox Church was meeting in Council and with a great revolution going on all around them, they had a heated debate on the color of the vestments whether they should be purple or white. We have a way of getting caught up in our arguments and don't see the world to whom we are called to reach.

Which leads us back to our text where the theme of Christ's prayer for His disciples is unity. (a rare word in scripture). Unity is the cry of just about every people group—whether it is by race, religion or nationality. Philosophers, political scientists & revolutionaries call for unity. Social harmony was the Greek ideal for their golden age; in fact Plato sketched out a communistic utopia. But as you know from History unity when attempted doesn't last for long. Why?

For unity to exist a common purpose and goal needs to be shared. But whenever sharing is involved original sin raises its ugly head and thwarts the one for all motto and replaces it with all for one—me.

This is where Christianity creates the ultimate community as we are called to not just please ourselves, but bear one another's burdens. 1 John 4: informs us that it's our love for one another that is the only measurable way to confirm our love for God. Love is the secret to Unity. We don't have a choice with those in the church... 1Cor.12 says God has placed everyone in the body, so if someone gets on your nerves it is your calling to get along with them. C.S. Lewis points out that we have to love them but we do not have to like them. Although I've found praying for people has helped me like those difficult to love.

John 13:34-45 Love is our testimony to the world. There should be no need for evangelism campaigns. Because people will be anxious to join the body of Christ when they see our Christian love--caring for each other and sacrificing to bless another. But if we possess such an incredible calling why does the church struggle? When I served a church in England three theologically distinct denominations combined forces: The Presbyterians, Congregationalists and

the Church of Christ. The reason they united was because the secular mind set had so infiltrated the culture that apparently few feel the church is relevant for their lives.

In America there are close to 80 million professing Christians that do not attend church. People who classify themselves as Christians and yet see no need for institutionalized religion. Many of these people suffer from a virus called Mordicus Sabbiticus. It only lasts 24 hours. It's weird you feel fine all week then it hits on Sundays. Of course it doesn't affect the eyes so you can still watch T.V. or the appetite so you can go out to eat. It doesn't affect the hands so you can still golf or garden, but it keeps you from church.

Although I did hear about one person who overcame this sickness, a woman whose husband went to church every Sunday. She had the condition that prevented her from going. Then one afternoon at their hairstylist her friend asked, who was that pretty recently widowed woman sitting with your husband at church? Next week the miraculous occurred her condition that prevented her from going to church for years was suddenly in remission.

People stay away from church for the wrong reasons. I don't like the church because the pastor's so negative—he preaches against sin. This is our unique calling to inform the world of God's moral standard and telling them about the alternative to the destruction of our sinful behavior.

Others will say Church doesn't do anything for me. Wait a minute, the purpose of the church is to worship God—to learn about His will & acknowledge all He has done for you! Church is not a self service center. We gather for the purpose of responding to God's grace and recommitting ourselves to Him.

As American Church attendance declines annually and appears to be going the way of Europe—5% of the English go to Church/3% of the Swedes 1% of the French I panic over the future of the church!

I remember going out in London to what was supposed to be the happening spot. It turned out to be a Gothic Cathedral with spectacular spiritual art work designed to enhance the worship of God but now it was the backdrop for a night club, a dance floor replaced the altar, a bar and tables where there were once pews. I felt sick at the victory Satan enjoyed over the church.

The fact is Christians are the most persecuted group on the planet. More Christians died in the last century than all other centuries combined. Today all over the world Christians are being abused for their faith. My Missionary resources report: In Vietnam Christian women are forced into prostitution, in China Christians are submerged up to their nose in sewage, in Africa believers have body parts amputated, in South America they are fed to wild boars and angry bulls. Even worse is the present assault on Christianity by the academic elite who are writing best sellers like the Atheist manifesto, the God delusion & God is not good... and making statements like the Great unmentionable evil at the center of our culture is monotheism—stating that Christianity is an anti human religion.

I asked a Princeton professor friend what he considered the most dangerous threat to Christianity—the atheists movement, Radical Islam? Modern Humanism? Liberal Theology?

The judgmental fundamentalists? He said the greatest danger to the church is a slack commitment to Christ by Christians.

But he cautioned me from getting too worried and told me that when he was a child his family vacationed at the beach every summer on the Jersey shore. Every day it was his delight to build elaborate sand castles. One particular summer bullies walked the beach every afternoon and would take great pleasure stomping upon his day long effort. Well it was the end of the week and he built his last sand castle, but this time he laid a foundation of cinder blocks and rocks. When the bullies approached he ran away and when the bullies started stomping their feet met their match!

Such is the foundation of the church—even the gates of Hell cannot prevail over it! I get nervous because of the secularization of our country until I realize that Christianity has survived century after century of persecution as governments have tried to eradicate the church from the earth, but we are still here. The Romans are gone the Communist and Nazi's gone. We continue because we are established by the founder of the world—almighty God. His purposes will not be defeated by mere man.

Your presence here today is a celebration of the love of God in Jesus Christ who unites us with those around the world who are lifting up the precious name of Christ thanking the Lord for His grace.

Today we unite with Christians all over the globe some suffering torture and abuse—but praising Him anyway. Others who don't have enough food but are still thankful for God's eternal life, some giving their lives so that others might hear of Jesus sacrifice and love...The Christians of all time who invested their lives into our world so that you and I can enjoy the presence of God here and now

Let's stand with them, serve with them pray for them and support them and together be the body of Christ.