

**SAN MARINO CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Reflections by Pastor Donald Shenk
(Delivered on Sunday, May 28, 2017)

Text: **John 17:1-11** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

“Abba, the hour has come! Glorify your Only Begotten that I may glorify you, through the authority you’ve given me over all humankind, by bestowing eternal life on all those you gave me. And this is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent, Jesus, the Messiah. I have given you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. Now, Abba, glorify me with your own glory, the glory I had with you before the world began. I have manifested your Name to those you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me; and now they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you’ve entrusted to me does indeed come from you. I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me, and they received it. They know that I really came from you; they believe it was you who sent me.

And it’s for them that I pray—not for the world, but for these you’ve given me—for they are really yours, just as all that belongs to me is yours, and all that belongs to you is mine. It is in them that I have been glorified. I am in the world no more, but while I am coming to you, they are still in the world.

Abba, holy God, protect those whom you have given me with your Name—the Name that you gave me—that they may be one, even as we are one.

Reflections by Pastor Donald: “A Direct Line”

Whenever I’ve encountered this “other” prayer of Jesus we have before us today, I’ve been struck by how absolutely beautiful it is; not only in what it’s conveying but in the near poetry of the prayer as John interprets it and brings it to life for us. As I was working on what I would explore with you today, I decided to listen to this passage read from a number of different versions. Thanks to the internet it is quite possible now to pick most any translation and listen to a voice, in pretty much any language you choose, read the Bible to you. It helped me realize what a grace and light is brought to the words when we hear them read out loud. Especially as when we hear them from *The Inclusive Bible* and read in a young musician’s voice by our own Matt Ellison – thank you for that Matt.

HEARING the words of this prayer a few things happened for me and I wonder if they happened for you today. What greater example can we have and what greater experience can be had than realizing that here is Jesus praying for US. Can you imagine being at that table with these *comprades* you’ve learned to know and love as you’ve walked the walk with this extraordinary man and now hearing him reaffirm once again his one-ness with God and his exceptional love for you? What greater gift is there than that?

Here we have a prayer not only of blessing but of instruction. Jesus lets us know that at the same time He is speaking to God he is speaking to us and providing a platform of understanding that will help not only his disciples move into the next stage of their lives, especially when he is no longer with them, but will help all of us to believe and move forward all these centuries later.

Most importantly, I believe, he prays for us a prayer of protection that WE may be one even as Jesus and His Abba are one. Here is the crux of the whole prayer, I think. The understanding that we are all completely consumed in God and God is made manifest in the Christ and all of us. This is the very definition of atonement, the reconciliation of God and humanity through Christ – all you have

to do is break down the syllables and it's right there – at – one- ment. God coming to us in human form that we might understand the oneness of God within each one of us.

We're tying up a ribbon today. Did you know that? Here's how:

On the first Sunday of this month, I spoke about the way the church is built by acts of kindness as we peered into the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and witnessed the first church experiencing koinonia, or a shared life, wherein they built a community based on Christ's teaching of sharing with those in need and building each other up in the Spirit of the Christ, breaking bread together and showing kindness to one another.

And now here we are on the last Sunday of the month looking at this teaching of Jesus, embodied in his prayer, letting his disciples and all of us know that when we come together and work together and believe together in Christ's name we are at one with each other and with God. And what marvelous and miraculous things can happen then.

We've witnessed them in our midst, haven't we? Broken bodies brought back to life, sagging spirits lifted high, rocky relationships mended, and souls realizing they're more powerful together than they ever can be apart. When we see ourselves as Christ sees us – as one with God and all that has been and will be created – how can we ever see ourselves as something other than beautiful and loved?

The transcendent Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk and priest who became a noted yogi, (how's that for a spiritual path?) spoke of this kind of amazing love in this way:

"Love is invisible, but it is the most powerful force in human nature. Jesus spoke of the Spirit which he would send as Truth but also as Love. "If anyone loves me, my [Abba] will love him and we will come to [Abba] and make our abode [there]." This is the love, the prema and bhakti, which was proclaimed in the Bhagavad Gita, the compassion (karuna) of Buddha, the rapturous love of the Sufi saints."

"Ultimately" he wrote, "a religion is tested by its capacity to waken love in its followers, and, what is perhaps more difficult, to extend that love to all humanity. In the past religions have tended to confine their love to their own followers, but always there has been a movement to break through these barriers and attain to a universal love."

This is the kind of love Christ was holding out to his disciples and God is holding out to all of humanity. Can we love unconditionally like God can? Can we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us as Jesus did? Can we move through our lives with all the challenges and disappointments and sorrows that befall us and continue to be at one with God and show love to all of God's creation?

Only through the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit and the one who has shown us how to love and loves us in the same way.

"I am the one who makes you to love;
I am the one who makes you to long;
I am the one, the endless fulfilling
of all true desires"

wrote the magnificent mystic Julian of Norwich so many years ago.

"Only our personal experiences of unconditional, unearned, and infinite love and forgiveness can move us from the normal worldview of scarcity to the divine world of infinite abundance," says Father Richard Rohr. "That's when the doors of mercy blow wide open! That's when we begin to understand the scale-breaking nature of the Gospel."

By showing us such love and letting us know how to show it ourselves, Jesus is demonstrating for us in his prayer that we have a direct line to God. There is no need for a stand in, no need for a priest or minister or some enlightened being when you want to connect to God. Just pick up the phone, dial a prayer and know that you won't be getting some impersonal recording with a dozen options to choose from, you'll be getting the real deal, the Operator Herself, always on, always connected, ready to give you the answer and to assure you of Her presence every moment of every day.

"There is much to be said for seeing Christ in each other, but there is also something to be said for seeing ourselves as God sees us, with steadfast love and compassion, and with hope, too, for the future and what is yet to be," states Rev. Kathleen Matthews in her commentary on our text this week.

"We are a strange mix of over-confidence and anxiety; yet this quiet but powerful prayer of Jesus offers an antidote that both comforts and challenges."

"Have we trials and temptations, is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged; take it to our God in prayer!"

Let me leave you today with a particularly potent piece of a prayer from Ted Loder's "Guerrillas of Grace, Prayers for the Battle," which means a lot to me and I hope will to you:

"O Eternal One, it would be easier for me to pray
if I were clear
and of a single mind
and a pure heart;
if I could be done hiding from myself
and from you, even in my prayers.
But, I am who I am,
mixture of motives and excuses,
blur of memories
quiver of hopes,
knot of fear,
tangle of confusion,
and restless with love, for love..."

Come, find me, Lord.
Be with me exactly as I am.
Help me find me, Lord.
Help me accept what I am,
so I can begin to be yours...
attentive enough to listen
as you call me out of the tomb of my timidity
into the chancy glory of my possibilities
and the power of your presence.

Amen.