

Sermon on Ascension - God is united and creates unity

John 17, 20-26



20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **21** 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. **22** I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— **23** I in them and you in me—so that they may be

brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. **24** “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. **25** “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. **26** I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

When a close relative has died, it seems to be common practice that people always want to do everything that the deceased had always wanted: "This is what she had always dreamed of .." would be the pious sentence from relatives . It is strange that the deceased person does not seem to get any benefit from the fulfillment of their wish. In fact the deceased cannot even know anything about the fulfillment of this wish. And yet people fulfill the wishes of the deceased with great zeal. They somehow have an aptitude to recognize a persons dearest wish only when that person is deceased. And when there is nothing more they can do for that person.

In today's sermon text we get an insight into the last wish of our Lord Jesus Christ. The situation is as follows: shortly before his execution and shortly before his death on the cross, he prays. But he prays in such a way that the disciples can listen in on his entire prayer. Otherwise John could not have written this prayer down. It is as if Jesus wanted his disciples to be fully aware of what he is praying for. He also wants us to know what his deepest wish is. In the first lines in John 17, he focuses entirely on the disciples gathered around him and prays for them. And then Jesus extends prayer and includes all Christians in all generations. We have just read this text about all the Christians in the world. So it is Jesus' prayer for us today. And what is Jesus' deepest wish for us today? He wants us Christians to be one! If we hear that wish, we must all be ashamed today because we have not fulfilled Christ's wish. The churches around the world are divided. And even in one single congregation there is unfortunately so much conflict and discord. It is a very sad fact that we unfortunately have to live with discord in the church, eventhough it was not the wish of our Lord. Apparently, however, Christian unity was very important to Jesus. What is more important, however, is the foundation of this unity. If we follow Jesus prayer, we come directly to our Heavenly Father. In the Heavenly Father we find the source and origin of unity that we should have. And in the unity between God and Jesus the unity among us Christians is founded. Without this unity of God, there is no unity among us Christians. It is worthwhile to look at the unity

of God for a little while longer. God's nature is in itself a miracle of unity. In God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we find three individuals in their own right. And yet they are so closely knit together that we can say in one sentence: God is one and God is also 3 persons at the same time. This is because there is no power struggle between God at all. God's person is in itself perfect unity. And God is not at all at odds with himself as to what His will and goal is. For example, Jesus completely subordinates himself to God's will, he humbles himself to the cross. And God exalts him again and Jesus takes his place on the right hand of God. As can be seen from this path of Jesus, God's nature is and has always been mutual love and sacrifice. Because love always needs a counterpart, God was never just one person. But at the same time, God was and is one.

The great miracle is that Jesus involves us Christians in this same God given unity. His will is that we are with God. Jesus' will is that we be filled with the same love and affection as it belongs to the nature of God! He wants us to be there with God!

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

The unity that Jesus addresses here is essentially connected to God. And it is the words of Jesus that connect us to this God. This means that we Christians do not have to wipe out all differences between the churches and form a large world church under all circumstances. That would not be a unity that comes from the nature of God. Our focus and our strength remain anchored in the nature of God and in his word, which he sends to us.

The goal of this unity is God's glory. The word glory is an important word in the Bible. Most people do not even know what this word actually means and confuse glory with earthly wealth, or fame. So we think that movie stars or billionaires have wonderful wealth and glory. But that is not the meaning of the word from the Bible at all. Originally the word had the meaning "weighty" For example: If something is very weighty, it is anchored in the ground and cannot be tipped over at all. Above all, the Bible has shown that God's Word is so firm and certain that it always does what it says. God's Word cannot be overturned. God created the whole world through his word. And we see this same glory in Jesus. Jesus spoke a word, then Lazarus got up. Even the sea obeyed Jesus' command. God sent the last word to us humans through Jesus. He has thus given us a firm foundation on which we can rely. Everything else in our world is uncertain. People come and go. People promise a lot and can break these promises just as quickly. In contrast to the word of man, God's word is firm and certain. Jesus' work for us on the cross is firm and sure. And this connects us to the Eternal God! We are one! This gives us God's glory!

One can also say that God's glory means that we are with God. God wants us to be with him and to stay with him. And this unity that we have in Jesus also has a promise. When the world sees the nature of unity we have in Jesus and in God, it understands that God loves them too! It is this language of love that everyone can understand. And that was also the task of the disciples to pass on this love .. Back then, when they looked up at the sky on Ascension day, they could have founded a place of commemoration and worship for Jesus. The disciples could have built a temple and could have spent the rest of their lives, contemplating the glorious Ascension of Jesus. They didn't do that at all. The angel appeared and told them: What are you looking at in heaven? ... go and do what Jesus commanded. Love the world as he loved you. Amen.