

**Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”**  
**“An Ancient Prayer for Us”**  
**Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.**  
**Sunday, July 25, 2021**

It is fascinating to consider peoples of the past who have sought to bless us in the present. We can think of parents who have done this for their children and grandchildren. E.g., I know my Dad gave his children EE Bonds to help pay for the college education of his grandchildren. We also see such a thoughtful focus from our forefathers in forming our nation. E.g., in our U.S. Constitution, dated March 3, 1781, the first line reveals its future focus: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” There is indeed great wisdom in trying to provide blessings for future generations and give wisdom and direction for them to follow. In our text today, Jesus in a sense does this— almost lays out a Constitution for us the Church— in His prayer centuries ago.

READ John 17:20-26 (pp. 111-112)

**CONTEXT:** Jesus is in the midst of His High Priestly Prayer. He has prayed for the Father to protect them from the Evil One and noted that His disciples protect the word they have received from Him on salvation. Now He focuses on future believers, like you and me.

READ vv 20-23. “Jesus basically had two prayer requests for the Church, for today and for the future. First, that it would be one, united in love, just as he and the Father are, so that the world might know Jesus as the One sent from God and that He loved them. Cf. 1:12-13; 3:16-17; 13:35.” To know the importance of unity sometimes it is good to reflect on what disunity looks like. Have you ever seen disunity? E.g., I recall an employee of a school I attended once said in disgust, “Not enough chiefs, too many indians”— meaning, there was no leadership and everyone was simply wondering around without direction. A school cannot survive well if there is no unifying leadership. E.g., I recall a woman who worked at a donut shop used to give free food to customers, and then her boss fired her eventually because of what she was doing! A business cannot survive well if employees are giving away the merchandise without permission. We can also think of what unity looks like. People are willing to give there all to the greater cause. E.g., I recall a player for the football coach Bear Bryant of the Alabama Crimson Tide had a defensive player who once made a big sacrifice in front of the Alabama sideline. The other team’s running back was about to turn the corner and outrun the defense when the Alabama player lunged for the running back and could only catch the back of the running back’s jersey by his pinky finger, and he had to make a split second decision— let go of the jersey and let the running back go free or stop the running back and destroy his pinky finger! He decided to go for the stop, and sure enough he re-arranged his pinky finger! Coach Bryant saw this and commended his player. This great sacrifice was for the team, to which he was committed. The theme of unity for Christians is not just

being part of a team, but being part of a family who loves and cares about each other, as Jesus describes here. This theme of united in love can be seen in that some the verb and noun form of the word “love” occurs five times in these seven verses (ἀγαπάω, 4x; ἀγάπη, 1x) and the word for “one” (έν) occurs four times. When that occurs in the Church, it is a beautiful thing that cannot be forgotten. I recall several times I have seen that in you. E.g., just this summer when a family attending our church was in need and about to move to another state, you responded with a very generous financial gift that meant a tremendous blessing to this family in their time of need. E.g., I will never forget how you were there for Elena and me last year during a very difficult time. And when the world sees this, they want to know more about it— because the world sees the beauty, the love, the caring, the joy in Christian fellowship. E.g., I recall in college at UNO there were a couple of Christian women in the university administration who became good friends to me and others in Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship. I and others would drop in unexpectedly and say hello to these women on the way to and from classes. One day one of these women told us, “You know what? A woman in my office says she sees all these people coming to see me and they have such a joy and warmth about them, and I want to know from where does this come?” And this worked as an opportunity to share the gospel! That is why Jesus says here that when believers are united the world will know the truth of the gospel-- that Jesus really was sent by God— and that God loves them. We recall Jesus’ saying in 13:35, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

READ vv 24-26. “Second, Jesus asked the Father that where He is, His followers would be also. Cf. 14:3; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.” We recall in John 14:3 Jesus said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” There is something special about being with the one you love. We see that

in pets, don't we? E.g., Kaylor loves her dog Susu, and Susu E.g., I recall when I was growing up I had a black and white "Snoopy" dog, a mut, named Rex; he loved us, and we loved him; I recall that at times at night he would sleep inside because it was cold outside, and my Mom would be reading the newspaper on the other side of the kitchen from Rex, so he would sneak through the kitchen—which was supposed to be off-limits to him—and come and just lie down next to my Mom, just to be near her. Perhaps you had a pet like Rex as well. And people feel especially this way. E.g., I recall when I was growing up I felt a certain comfort and peace knowing my parents were in the house, and I recall perhaps it was my first night of ever sleeping in the house by myself-- I believe I was in college—I did not like it! I turned on every little sound in the house, and it took me a while finally to go to sleep. This is kind of how it is for us as Christians in this world, which is not our home—but soon we will be home and in our Father's house, safe and secure! Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."

"What does a united Church look like for us today?" I would like to say two things. First, we are not to be united for the sake of being united. Recall that in v 6 Jesus commended the disciples for keeping His word, and Jesus prays for the Father to protect them from the Evil One in v 15. At times Satan will have his unholy way in the holy Church and disrupt things. We are to keep our focus on Jesus and His Word and His mission, not on popularity or fitting in with the culture or being liked. We see that struggle in The UMC right now, don't we? But what we find is there is a group in The UMC which is united in the gospel. I invite you to make plans for Tuesday, August 10th to go to the LA WCA's annual meeting in Lafayette for a lunch and meeting. Second, the Church united looks like godly, sacrificial, joyous love. We are willing to lose our pinkies for one another out of commitment to the gospel. Let us stay committed to Lake Vista

UMC's ministry and inviting people to become a part of it!