

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. 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.

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.”

May the Love of Christ Be Known

So that others may know God's love through you
So that you may be united to your God and Savior

After holding her child in her womb for months, the mother now holds her newborn in her arms for the first time. The mother looks down upon that child and what is her wish. The mother's mind is flooded with nothing and everything at the same time. She can barely take it all in. A rush of emotion suddenly surges. All the hope and dreams that she has for this child come at once and then just as suddenly they slide away as a single thought comes to the forefront of her mind. *Above all I pray that my child will be loved.*

On the night before he died Jesus had his mind on us. He looked down through the ages, he looks down through generation after generation of unborn believers and he prays for us. And in his great love this is his wish, this is his request to Almighty God on our behalf: that we might know his love, that we might know the love of the Father, and that others may know God's love through us.

John chapter 17 is sometimes called Jesus' High Priestly prayer. Like the Old Testament priest used to go before God to make intercessory prayers for the people in the presence of God, Jesus calls on his Father and prays on behalf of his people. As Jesus prays he has his disciples in mind. He prays for Peter, James, and John and the rest and he prays for their well-being. He prays that God would not take them out the world, but that he would protect them and leave them in this world so that they might carry out this mission that Jesus gave them. That they would proclaim the gospel so that others could know the love of Christ through them; in their lives and in the message of salvation through Christ alone that they would proclaim.

But as Jesus prays for his disciples he not only prays for those who were with him. He not only prays for those men he had called to follow him, for the women who had come to faith, and the others who listened to his preaching and teaching and followed him on foot. On that night before he died, he prays for whomever would hear his word and follow in the future. He prays for those who would believe because of the faithful witness of his disciples. He prays for all believers. All who are believing and who are being brought to faith and kept in the faith still today, Jesus prayed for you. Jesus goes to the Father on our behalf. Imagine that, the LORD of the universe and his son have a heart to heart talk, and they talk about you. Know that you are loved!

As a mother who looks down on his child Christ he looks down on upon us, and he knows that while we bring him great joy we will also cause him great heartache and pain. He knows that of all the sin that we would commit, all the trouble that we would cause him, but all that is forgiven and swept away by the strong and consistent current of his love. Like a mother who looks down at that newborn child held close to her chest with such a tender love and affection, so the Lord looks down on us throughout our lives. He looks at us through the waters of baptism and sinners are now declared saints. We are forgiven. We are cleansed. We are his own dear children. We are loved. God wants us to know his love and so he sent his Son. The Son wants us to be united to God so he prays to the Father that we might know his love.

The LORD pulls us close with these wonderful truths, and yet our guilty conscience pushes it all away, “How could he love someone like me.” The LORD is persistent, he wants us to know his love and to live in that love. The devil wants us to ignore it, to dismiss it as impossible or foolish. He wants us see that love as ordinary or unnecessary. And it may even happen that the devil begins to use you and me to spread these lies. As you drift away from God, the devil may use that to eat away at the faith of another or keep people from believing all together. When we forget or neglect the fact that God pulled us close in baptism it becomes less important to bring our children to baptism. When God is not a regular fixture in our house, when family devotions are skipped or never made part of the routine it not only has an effect on us but on our family on our children. If we see time in God’s house as unimportant or as a chore that has an effect on our children, on our neighbors, on family, and friends. Such a loose connection to Christ benefits no one, instead it can have a harmful effect. This is not the will of God that we might know him in general terms and keep him and his commands at a distance. No this is the will of the devil.

So what is the will of God. The will of God is reflected in this prayer of Jesus. What is his will for you? On the night before he dies Jesus has you in mind and what does he pray for? He prays for a close connection, and intimate connection between you and God.
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.*** Jesus

prays that we may be united. ***That they may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.*** Jesus prays that believers would be united. That we come together. That the word might unite us. That we would do what we are doing today, celebrating that we are united by one faith, one Lord. We proclaim his love together as we pray, as we sing, as we look to the font and the altar together. We confess and celebrate one faith, one Lord, one Baptism. We are strengthened in this bond as we come to worship. We are united to each other and united to Christ as we learn more about our God. And as this connection to God is deepened and strengthened that has a benefit on those around us. It starts in the home. Our family, our children or grandchildren will be able to see our faith and know the love of God as we pass that love on down to them. Our neighbors and our friends when they know that you are a member here and participate in worship regularly that may lead them to think about their connection to God. And isn't that the kind of thing that Jesus prayed for when he said. ***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.***

As we come together for worship, as Christ is present in the home, as we proclaim and live in the love of Christ, our Savior's prayer is answered. We become part of this great cloud of witnesses that proclaims that God did this extraordinary and praise worthy thing, that he sent his Son to save us. We confess and proclaim the truth that our God's love is real and is precious and relevant. As we live in the love of Christ his kingdom comes, and his will is done among us. Christ's prayer is therefore answered among us.

But notice how this all goes back to a personal and intimate relationship with God. Jesus wants us to know God and his love. He wants to have his love in us. Our Lord Jesus wants us to know God and to have his love in our hearts and so he prays to his Father that the gospel may be proclaimed. 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.”*** As Jesus prays, his desire, his prayer, is that we know God and know the love of God like he knows and has experienced the love of God. Think that through for a moment. Think about how intimately Jesus knows God, and how intimately he knows the love of God. Jesus wants you to know the love of the Father like how he, the eternal Son of God knows the love of the Father. That's pretty incredible to think about. God the Father, and God the Son, knew and experienced perfect love and unity and harmony with each other since forever, since before time began. In his prayer Jesus makes it clear that he wants this intimate connection, this loving unity, that he had shared with the father before the creation of the world. Jesus wants you to have that kind of bond with your Heavenly Father. And that's why he comes to live and die and rise again. In his unfathomable love, he gave that up that perfect unity as he left his heavenly home for a time. He left his Father's side in heaven and he became one of us so that we might know the love of God, that we might have a taste of unity with our God now, and know it full forever in our home in heaven.

God the Son loved you that much, and God the Father loved you so much that he took his only begotten Son and reached down into this world of sin and trouble and pain and he gave him to us. He sent him here for you, to live and suffer and die in your place. The Son left his Father's side. The Father gave his own Son over to be sacrificed in your place so that you might be at his side forever. How great is the love of our God! How great is the love of Christ!

As a mother looks down at her newborn child a bond is strengthened and a loved is shared. A love exists that can never really be quantified, but there often remains that wish: *I pray that my son would somehow know how much I love him. I pray that my daughter would know how much I love her.* And so what is the follow-up on a prayer like that one. The mother tells her children that she loves them. She says it out loud. She writes it down. She shows it in the many things that she does for them.

As Christ looks down upon us with eyes of love he looks upon us with a love that can never really be fully quantified, but this is his wish, this is his prayer. That we might know his love. That we would know his love more and more and live in that love and proclaim and express that love as we live in the precious bond that he gave us in baptism. We are his forgiven and holy and beloved children. On the night before he dies for our sins he prays that we might know his love and experience the love of the Father. And so what is the follow-up on a prayer like that. In his great love he tells us again and again in his Word how much he loves us. He says it out loud as his Word is spoken by his ministers, and by fellow Christians. Our God and Savior writes it down and gives his love to us in book that we call holy so that we might read about how his love is describes in so many different ways. He expresses his love in Baptism and the supper and shows it to us in the many things that he does for us.

This is the will of God and prayer of your Savior, that you may know the love of God and learn of him and his love for you your whole life through and that you may experience it in full when your Savior brings you to our home in glory. Dear child of God, know and believe that you are loved by God! Amen.