Sermon John 17

Intro

Good morning, my name is Rhys. A warm welcome to any visitors here today joining us at Westlake church. We are currently going through a sermon series in the gospel of John and we've reached the end of chapter 17, so please do open your bible if you have them with you to chapter 17.

I wonder if you look to the news this morning when you getting ready to come to church? If so you might come across some of the disunity in the world I mean honestly you don't really need to turn on the news or read the news to see the disunity all around us whether it's between two persons or two nations we live in a fractured and broken world.

And to add to that here in the west we also live in a very individualistic society. Technology means that we can be connected to others more than ever but the same time we can isolate ourselves more than ever. It's possible to order a package on the Internet without even leaving your home you can order food to your door and ask them to leave it at the mailbox.

It means that you can get through your day without actually having to interact with any other people face-to-face, a world of convenience with increasing isolation.

These past couple of weeks we've been looking together at chapter 17. Going through Jesus's prayer verses. 1 to 5 Jesus prays to the Lord for himself then versus 6 to 19 we heard Jesus praying for the disciples and this third part of the prayer it gets interesting for us because this is where Jesus prays personally for you and for me.

So just before he gets arrested and taken to be crucified what is it that Jesus wants us to receive from the father what is it that Jesus prays for us personally?

V20 I do not ask for these only. [That's the disciples] also for those who will believe in me through their word.

.Jesus trusts the message of the gospel to the disciples so that it will be passed down through generations of believers and if you've heard the gospel today the good news that Jesus saves us and renews us so that we can be with him forever, then this prayer is for you. And if you haven't then its also still for you. Which we'll see in a later point.

So what is it Jesus prays for you and me as he approaches his final hours.

He prays for unity not once not two times but 3 times, verse 21 verse 22 and verse 23

Why is it that Jesus prays for unity 3 times instead of praying for two other things for us as well?

Well let's take a closer look at this passage this morning and get into it with 3 points on unity. Unity that reflects the trinity, Unity through sharing in Christ's glory and Unity so that others will see.

Unity that reflects the trinity

Near the house that I grew up in in Wales there is a lake and I remember taking Keturah there for a walk one autumn. The lake was completely still and in it were upside down trees, a beautifully clear reflection.

I wonder if you've ever been out in creation and been stopped in your tracks by an amazing reflection. Standing on the edge of a body of water or sometimes even just a puddle and seeing a clear, mirror image of what's before you.

Jesus' prayer for all believers here is that would they would have a unity that reflects the relationship between God the father and son.

v21..that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us,

Look at the trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they glorify each other. It's not about them being the main one, it's about them sharing glory, love, perfect relationship [and it's done] in perfect unity.

I think this is a wonderful, blessed opportunity for us as believers for us to see what is happening in the throne room of God when Jesus prays for us. We are being given an insight into this beautiful, unselfish love that the trinity shares and that they, the Godhead want us to share in as well.

God doesn't need us to worship him but as his love overflows for the other members of the trinity it overflows into us to be able to join him and be a part of this wonderful sharing. Gods family, Christ's kingdom, the church body in perfect unity, sharing this gift from God.

Pastor John Stott put it like this:
The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead.

One of the reasons for this is that we are welcomed into this relationship, we are represented in the trinity by Jesus before God the father. The interceding high priest, the one who gathers us under his wing like a hen gathers her chicks. And the Holy Spirit confirms that as He works within us.

The unity of the church then is to be a perfectly clear reflection of the unity of the godhead. [where we reflect His love to each other and and glorify Him as He works change in Us and others around us.

But you might be sitting there thinking but hang on a minute the church's history is filled with disunity, split churches, arguments over doctrine or as was the case in the church I grew up in whether it was really appropriate to have a drum kit in a church?!

In the youth group here at at Westlake, one of the things that most often brings disunity is which football team you support, or to be honest whether its even football or actually soccer..!

Look back with me at v 20, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

The key here is that our unity is based on their word, that is the the scriptures, the apostolic teaching - we are to be united in the gospel.

A church that reflects the Trinity is one centred on the gospel

The gospel needs to be at the forefront, that is what makes us family, that is what needs to shape everything about who we are and what we do. The Gospel unites us, the gospel brings that unity.

It's important to note that it's not about uniformity but Unity - It's not that everyone has to be exactly the same and agree on every tiny detail but we need to not let secondary issues divide us.

If a secondary issue is raised to be on the same level of importance as the gospel itself or distracts us from the gospel and the apostles teaching then churches split.

When it's not the concerning the truth of our salvation we need to put aside differences, to be humble and loving with one another and focus on the truth that unites us.

Not just truth but love needed -

This Unity is marked by love; v23

..that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

V24, This love that was before the foundation of the world.
The perfect loving relationship of the trinity What Jesus says here is just staggering,
…God the Father loves us as he loves Jesus!!!

If we truly believe that our Heavenly Father loves us as much as his only begotten son that should change how we treat others!
This is a love that cast out doubts and offers us the security needed to fulfil Jesus's commandment to us in

John 13:34..

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

If we love one another like this then we reflect the trinity and we will enjoy unity like the trinity.

This love also has to be worked out practically like for the early church in acts sharing their possessions with one another.
As an international church we don't all live in the same village we are quite spread out geographically but we do have a helpful app! the marketplace on the app is certainly one way we see people sharing things!
If you don't have the church app do think about downloading that, it is a way that we can keep in touch locally even if we are apart geographically.

So to conclude this point, Christ prays for the church to be united as the trinity is united. A unity then that is centred on the message of truth and demonstrated in love, even when there are disagreements on lesser points.

You might be thinking unity sounds great, but it's not something that comes natural to us, as we look around we are all so different! Can the French and the English really get along? Can a welshman really stand next to an English man and sing together?… so how can we be unified in this way? Which brings us to the next point.

Unity through sharing in Christ's glory

When I look out of the window during the week I often see groups from the local garderie walking past, on their way to the river. Groups of 8 or so preschoolers, their teachers keeping them together as a group trying to get to the same destination. How do they do it? They give them one of these…. Thing they all hold onto that keeps them united..

Jesus gives us the greatest gift to keep us united, he gives us himself, and he gives us his glory…

V 22, The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,
Jesus shares with us, the glory He receives from the Father.
Sharing in Christs glory means that we share in and reflect his character, his essence. Think about when Jesus was most glorified, through his death and resurrection. The glory he shares with us is not a self seeking glory but one of sacrificial and humble service.

And this is how we overcome our natural differences.

Sharing in Christs glory also means we have his presence with us, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us which is what makes this supernatural unity possible. In his letter the the Ephesians 4:3 Paul challenges them and us to be 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

As a Christian you find yourself in relationship with people that you wouldn't normally be in relationship with because of our Spiritual union with Christ. Christians of different class, nationality and experience are one because of our new identity in Christ.

In Revelation we are given a Glimpse of heaven - John talks of seeing every tribe, tongue, nation… Rev 7:9-10 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

This unity is something that needs working at,

Jesus prays v 23 that they may become perfectly one,

The more we become like Christ through transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the more united we will be until we and our unity is perfected when Jesus returns.
And that is a challenge for us today to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. To allow Him to change our thoughts to be more like Him. And Though our sinfulness for now means we cannot attain perfection yet, we know that Jesus is victorious and that perfection is coming.

So don't be disheartened but also don't Seek to be destructive to unity, it's important to confess our failures and flawed motives to God and draw together.
It also doesn't mean that we just run away from conflict but we should do everything we can in the name of Christ, keeping unity of spirit in the bond of peace. This answers Christ's prayer.

John Wesley and George Whitfield were both prominent theologians and evangelists in the 1700's but they disagreed on matters of doctrinal importance. It was very public and even reported in the newspapers.

One day after Whitfields death, a woman approached Wesley and asked this:

"' Dear Mr. Wesley, may I ask you a question?'

"' Yes, of course, madam, by all means.'

"' But, dear Mr. Wesley, I am very much afraid what the answer will be.'

"' Well, madam, let me hear your question, and then you will know my reply.'

"At last, after not a little hesitation, the inquirer tremblingly asked, ' Dear Mr. Wesley, do you expect to see dear Mr. Whitfield in heaven?'

"A lengthy pause followed, after which John Wesley replied with great seriousness, 'No, madam.' "His inquirer at once exclaimed, 'Ah, I was afraid you would say so.'

"To which John Wesley added, with intense earnestness, ' Do not misunderstand me, madam; George Whitfield was so bright a star in the firmament of God's glory, and will stand so near the throne, that one like me, who am less than the least, will never catch a glimpse of him.'

Why could he say this? Because as we were reminded earlier, it is about unity in Christ and he was humbly praising Wesley's gospel work and the secondary issues that they disagreed on. He knew would not affect his salvation.

For our last point then, why is it that unity is so important that Jesus repeated it three times?

Unity so that others will see

Many of you know that our second son Micah was diagnosed with a critical congenital heart condition when Keturah was 36 weeks pregnant. Keturah was hospitalised and on the Friday we were told that on the Monday, the best surgical team would be gathered and she would be induced.

What happened that weekend was beautiful. We sat in the corridor outside the ward and received visitor after visitor from the church. Living in HK we were thousand of km away from our families but our family in Christ was there with us. Feeling the pain, sharing the burden, bringing us food and gathering around and praying.

One of the nurses called K to go back into the ward for some checks and the nurse took her to one side and said “but you are foreigners, who are all these people that keep coming and what are you doing with them?”

They are our fellow Christians, she replied, they have come to pray for us and the baby. The nurse said nothing but was visibly moved by what she had witnessed..

Jesus repeats in his prayer that the unity of the church is to show God to the world…

V21 so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

V23 so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Think back to the example of the reflection, when the world looks at the church - and we know that it does! - the world should be breath taken by the beauty of the unity that they see so that they want to look up and believe in Jesus and know his love for themselves.

Turn that on its head for a moment, Jesus is saying, unless the world sees an inexplicably united community, the world will not believe the truth claims, we will discredit the gospel.
We have a wonderful responsibility to make Jesus name known through our witness as a church so that many more can come into the kingdom of heaven.

For those of you who aren’t yet Christians here today, remember I said this prayer was for you also. Jesus prays that as you look at Westlake church that you will see love and unity and want to know more about this gospel message that unites us. I pray that’s true for you today.

Conclusion:

Jesus continues to interceded, to pray for us from his throne in heaven and has given us his Holy Spirit to renew our minds to rid us of fear, to help us let go of bitterness and anything else that hinders us from unity. He continues to work on us and he will never give up on us so we can continue to be a united church moving towards one another in love.

Dear Father in heaven,

We thank and praise you for your love for us, though we were your enemies you made a way for us to be sharers in your perfect love, relationship and unity. May we, with the help of the Spirit be peacekeepers, may we speak the truth in love and build one another up. Lord we ask that you would transform each of us more to Christs likeness and unite Westlake Church more deeply each moment. Protect us from the evil one and his attempts to bring disunity. Challenge our hearts where we have selfish ambition and let us reflect you and show you to the world. Amen