

Sermon
Knowing God
Pastor Lisa Giacomazza
Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church
May 21, 2023

I have always been fond of music, as those of you who know me might imagine. I'm sorry – fondness is far from the right word...I have always felt a spiritual connection to music. I can't really explain it entirely but if you do as well, you will immediately get my drift on this. I started singing along with children's shows like Sesame Street and Mister Rogers and loved the songs we sang in Sunday school. And when I was a kid, your kindergarten teacher played the piano so a part of the day was spent singing ...together.

Singing is a unique part of who we are. Even if you can't carry a tune, you can enjoy listening to it or even singing along – somehow your instinct kicks in and your voice soars. And for those who struggle to stay on tune, thank goodness for Rock and Roll and Blues where it became less about the notes and more about the passion.

Singing hymns is an integral part of our worship not because of the words or the notes but because it connects us and makes us one in a way nothing else does. If I sing a note and someone else sings this note and someone else sings this note and we sing them together, it makes a beautiful sound – sort of magical really.

When Jesus prayed his final prayer it was also magical because this time he didn't go into the wilderness or to a quiet room or to a mountain to pray to God – this time he prayed in front of the disciples and he prayed *for* them. Hear our Gospel from John 17:1-11....

Inspired by the beautiful commentary in [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#) on John 17:1-11 by Linda Lee Clader, Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor of Homiletics, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, CA.

John 17:1-11

17After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6”I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Each week in service we recite the Lord’s Prayer but in my opinion this is a much more profound and important prayer...Next week we celebrate the birth of

the new church exploding into mission with the gifts of the Spirit. Today, we pause for a moment to hear again this prayer Jesus prayed for his disciples, a prayer we claim as his prayer for us as well.

There is assurance and certainty in Jesus' prayer. Jesus has made his Father's name known to the disciples. He has given them knowledge of the truth...now he prays, in their presence, for their protection...and for ours. And Jesus asks protection for them for a particular purpose, "so that they may be one, as we are one." Because it is part of Jesus' prayer, that prayer for unity can also offer us assurance and certainty, but for many of us, it may also raise questions. Can we see any evidence that Jesus' prayer was answered?

In some ways, the first part of the prayer is the easier part – that we would become one with God as He is one with God and God with him. We all spend much time on our faith, working to be in harmony with God – we dedicate ourselves to mission and ministry – we may spend time in private prayer – ground ourselves in our ritual of weekly worship – no matter which path we follow toward oneness with God, the Holy Spirit can act in our lives to draw us closer, and to reveal to us the presence of God that is already nearer to us than our own heartbeats.

Yet, the prayer is also asking us to become one with each other – and this is where the pain for the disciples and for us begins. And it begins with the church. We have created all this division in how we follow Christ, right?! There's methodist, catholic, presbyterian, unitarian, Baptist, Wesleyan, and on and on. We argue over who can be ordained and what words we can use when we pray. We argue over alliances, how our church participates in secular life and how it interacts

with government. And please as we reflect on this, keep in mind – this is nothing new.

Arguing started almost the moment or actually just prior to the ascension with the question that the disciples asked Jesus. “Is this the time you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?” Already vying for position. Not, is this the time you will restore the Kingdom to your people...no. And so it began and continues today.

It is not possible to have an intimate relationship with our Creator and not have that intimacy with all of creation. If we try, we will suffer. It cannot be reconciled. God is the center of us all and when that is evident, there is true peace and harmony – not in the world, in us.

So because we have set ourselves into this world of divisions and segregations, does this mean Jesus’ prayer was not answered? Did God deny this? After all, we have everything we need to achieve this...we have been given the great advocate – the Holy Spirit – that leads and guides us to unity, to justice.

Yet, the prayer was not so we can be one...it is so we can be one **like** God and Jesus are one...and what if that means movement and rhythm – an interweaving or even a dance. Perhaps what we do toward oneness is the prayer. Joyful interplay – working together, praying together. It is possible this is what Christian unity looks like- or even interfaith unity looks like.

For me, it’s a feeling...my soul knows when there is connection, when I am in the right space to be part of that dance. Sometimes I need to create that space, sometimes I need to host that dance.

Do we find all this movement exhausting constantly trying to find ways to connect? Ways to appreciate and understand rather than divide? Some of us were raised to believe that there is only one way to worship – a right way...only one way to believe our way. But what if the dance is a new way? What if it opens your heart and mind to a higher level of appreciation and understanding – even a stronger connection to God?

Singing...notes, dancing around each other – filling an emptiness with meaning. Touching us in a way nothing else can. Imagine that feeling expressed through an invitation, a handshake, a hug. An invitation to worship, to know God.

Knowing God...it's something we work toward our whole lives, most of us. What I love about this journey is I learn from the most unlikely of moments. I feel God in a conversation with a stranger – a cashier, a waitress, a nurse in my doctor's office. Why would we limit ourselves into thinking there is only one path to oneness when God is everything?

Just one voice singing in the darkness...all it takes is one voice...singing so they know what's on your mind and when you look around you'll find...

Amen