



“A SACRED REVOLT”

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 17: 20-26

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

Sunday, May 29, 2022

The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

John 17: 20-26

17:20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,

17:21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, 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.

17:22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one,

17:23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

17:24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

17:25 "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me.

17:26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

The Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

Oneness

“So that they may be one, as we are one.”

The Gospel writer of John puts these words about being one in the mouth of Jesus—a prayer for his followers as he neared the time of his execution by the Roman state.

Jesus' prayer was not just for those people who surrounded him at the time. It was for all those who would come after—believing in Jesus' truth through the words that would be passed down through the generations.

This prayer is about love—the one-ing that defines us because of Divine Love. The Gospel writer of John connects the flourishing of that love in the human family to the knowledge of it—and to the reality that this love is what makes us one.

“... so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Attaching this “one-ing” to knowledge of Jesus' divinity set the course for how the centuries unfolded and for how this oneness lands in this moment, in our time.

There's a lot of architecture and there are many artifacts of how this oneness has been appropriated by the powers and principalities since then. By Rome, by Constantine, by Popes—like Pope Nicholas V, and Pope Alexander VI, and by those who colonized the world—Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, and by those who colonized this country—corporations and landowners and the systems and governments that built up from there.

Powerful factions seeking more wealth and more power in the Roman Church are who overlaid it all with God's blessing and will—and who evoked the concept of oneness to make a virtue out of conquest and colonization. Three papal bulls in particular need to be a part of your lexicon—we need to understand that Jesus got kidnapped by the powerful, and used to prop up power hoarding sanctified by the trappings of the church with the Doctrine of Discovery.

Even the US Supreme Court evokes the Doctrine of Discovery as legally binding in cases as recent as 2005.

(Put up the slide about Doctrine of Discovery Papal Bulls)

- ***Dum Diversas*** (Pope Nicholas V, 1452): “to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue” and “whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery” and to “convert [all possessions and territories] to his and their use and profit.”
- ***Romanus Pontifex*** (Pope Nicholas V, 1455): sanctification of seizing of non-Christian lands and restates the right and legitimacy of enslaving non-Christians.

- ***Inter Caetera*** (Pope Alexander VI, 1493): one Christian nation did not have the right to establish dominion over lands previously dominated by another Christian nation, thus establishing the Law of Nations.

Keep learning and growing, GCPC, in your knowledge of how the world has been divided up for the concentration of power and wealth. No life is untouched by this brutal project of accumulation. And the words of Jesus were stolen, too—and deployed to give God’s blessing to genocide, slavery, violence and terror. Oneness became a way to cloak domination in the trappings of God’s will for the world, and justify violence as a way to enforce oneness.

This project is still underway—still holding Jesus captive and enforcing with terror—keeping people mired in poverty, stress, division, misinformation, and frequent displays of violence and the proximity of the possibility of violence are some of this project’s most effective tools.

We are living in the wreckage of how the distortions of oneness have mangled our world—our relationships, our communities, even our capacity to see reality.

We must be careful when we evoke oneness—we cannot utter this word in the context of people gathered in Christ’s name without naming how dangerous and deadly it has been and continues to be—the logic of domination is a violent enterprise.

The shooting in Uvalde, TX is the latest example of the brutality of the logic of domination. The mechanization, marketing and normalization of killing—this capacity to subdue and infiltrate with violence has been the mainstay of colonization. And the logic of domination and violence are defining components of the DNA of the United States of America—Europeans brought the violence they learned in their cultures to this land.

And it’s the logic of violence and domination that our children learn over and over again. And oneness is a weapon to enforce conformity. Just think of the Pledge of Allegiance/one nation under God—kids are asked to repeat everyday. What God is it that the pledge invokes? Enforced conformity is not love.

This sermon is not a history lesson—it’s an archeological exploration of the way oneness became a tool of oppression, subjugation and death in order to concentrate power and wealth.

It is sorcery, trickery—a slight of hand: a counterfeit oneness is used to prevent us from seeing true oneness, thus making us active participants in living in opposition to the very oneness that makes us who we are as living beings.

This sermon is an invitation to a sacred revolt against the tyranny of being told we are one by the powers and principalities who want to be sure we never know the real truth of our oneness.

We can only stop being tools in this deadly project if we begin to live out of the oneness that is real, that is life, that is love.

Oneness is something we cannot NOT be—we are deeply connected to each other. Our oneness is in our blood and bones.

This primal oneness—that comes from our created nature—is ravaged every day by the ways we harm each other, by the ways we are not safe together, by the ways we are untrustworthy, by the ways we deny that we are all deeply traumatized by violence.

We cannot break this spell without finding a way to be healed from the impacts of counterfeit oneness, and to find our way back to our true created oneness that Jesus prayed for us to know all those centuries ago.

We must disentangle oneness from whiteness! And we must unravel the ways whiteness teaches us to deny the reality of our true oneness.

And so today, the rest of this sermon will be a collective practice, a ritual of repair.

I invite Amy Kim Kyremes-Parks, Marta Alcala-Williams, Kaola Smallwood, and John Huie to come forward.

And I invite you, the gathered community of GCPC, here in the sanctuary and online—to be witnesses. To hold this space with us as we seek to be together with a reparative intention.

(MMS tells a bit about what happened a few weeks ago with the prayer and the process that has played out since then.)

We are seeking collective repair not just for the five of us, but for our whole community, and not just for a particular incident, but for harm that is generational and epi-genetic—and that violates the full humanity of all living beings every day.

- **Generate Norms:** Briefly generate norms for our circle and for the witnesses (Not a time to use the chat during the dialogue). This is not the only conversation, this one of many and it's ongoing. We are experimenting and exploring together what a collective reparative practice could be, what it could feel like and look like.

- **Question One:** Is there anything you would like to share about the impact this situation has had on you?
- **Questions Two:** Is there anything you would like to share about harm in this situation?
- **Question Three:** All three of you said you did not need any personal repair from John. What does repair feel like and look like for you in this collective practice?
- **Question Four:** How can GCPC learn and grow from this?
- **Question Five:** Right now, for you, is oneness something that carries any promise or truth?

(MMS may or may not finish with something about love being the origin of our oneness as the dialogue culminates; then Libby will lead us in the song “I Need You To Survive.”)

Thank be to God.