

John 17: 13-28 Text *John* 17: 23

(From Peterson's *The Message*) The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they'll be as unified and together as we are -- I in them and you in me. Then they'll be mature in this oneness. And give the godless world evidence that you've sent me and loved them in the same way you've loved me.

MATURE IN ONENESS

Introduction: The book of *John* lifts the heavy weight of theology in the Gospels. If one were so inclined, one could permanently lose oneself in the theological speculations raised by John. Unlike textbooks, John's theology has an immediacy and freshness to it that says: "Get up off your knees and go DO something!" "Stop arguing about the number of angels that can fit on a pinhead and let your Christ qualities shine in the world." *John* is all about moving from human immaturity to full fledged adulthood. A kind of maturity not marked by age, but by the quality of one's faith. Jesus is quoted as calling us to be "mature in oneness." Let us spend a few minutes looking at Christian adulthood – the meaning of maturity in oneness.

Acknowledging our oneness with Christ is the first mark of Christian maturity. It is with a sense of wonderment that we realize that God is within us – is an integral part of our being! We don't have to die to enter the Kingdom of God, that Kingdom exists within us – all we have to do is to let it be revealed. Among other things, our oneness with Christ is what makes humankind so precious. We see the divine in people often ignored when people are dehumanized by their jobs, their country or even by their religion. Whenever I hear people referred to as work units or human resources I want to cry out "no, these are God-infused people; how dare you consider them to be adjuncts to machines or sources of noise in otherwise good algorithms." I do realize that there are limits to this view in practice. Telling a police officer, the next time you are stopped for speeding, "do you realize that you are talking to a person who is part God" will probably get you a trip to a mental health facility for evaluation." One does need to be judicious when claiming that God is within us – particularly if one is behaving in a very ungodly way! But the beauty of being one with God is not just as it affects our own behavior, but that it also allows us to see the godliness in other people. Now, THAT is maturity!

John 17:15 has Jesus in prayer for his believers saying: "I'm not asking that you take them out of the world, but that you guard them from the Evil One. They are no more defined by the world than I am defined by the world." So, the second part of being mature in oneness is in **acknowledging that we are in this world, but are not defined by the world**. Jesus does not require us to abandon the world, quite the contrary, believers are to engage with the world. Just as Jesus ate with tax collectors and other sinners, so we are to walk in this world doing our best to be a Christian friend to all. Jesus also enjoyed the world He found himself in. We need to remember that his first miracle was turning water into fine wine. That is what makes the life of Jesus such an inspiring model for us all. He fully participated in the life of the world, but the world did not define him – the traditions of his religion did not confine his actions. He was larger than the customs and traditions that defined the society of the day.

Jesus startles us by saying that believers are no more defined by this world than he! What? We are Episcopalians who venerate tradition and custom – how dare Jesus tell us that we are not to be defined by our traditions; we who take pride in being known as the frozen chosen are expected to be as radical as Jesus? Well, maybe not quite. But what a powerful reminder that it is Jesus we follow, not

the *Book of Common Prayer*. I am a liberal in theology and doctrine, but a staunch conservative in all matters liturgical! I rejoice in the woman priest and believe in the beauty of all church music as long as it is composed by Bach, Beethoven or Brahms. We are all full of contradictions, but Jesus would seemingly rather have us defined by our contradictions than by slavish adherence to tradition and the worldly demands of custom.

While remaining firmly in the world, Jesus asks God to protect us from the Evil One. In the modern interpretation the Evil One would be godless values. As Jesus says: "Make them holy – consecrated—with the truth." We are never to tolerate lies. To tolerate lies is to cast doubt on the holiness of believers, because our very oneness with Christ is bound to our consecration to the truth.

Now comes the most important part of the nature of oneness and the most difficult: **Inclusive love**. Jesus closes the prayer with "so that your love for me, might be in them, exactly as I am in them." Here is the very essence of oneness: The love of God. Here, also, is the very essence of Christian maturity: Inclusive love. This is such a difficult part of maturity because we like to be selective in handing our love out to people. Intrinsic human worth is a wonderful concept until we have to apply it to people we do not like. Yet, if we acknowledge the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that is the oneness of Jesus and ourselves, we really have no moral choice but to extend our love, which is the reflection of God's love for us, to all other people. Not only are individual Christians bound to this moral choice, but the institutions Christians support are morally obligated to that same inclusive love.

Conclusion: I have a tee shirt that says "I'm tired of being an adult, you will find me in my blanket fort coloring." There are times when we do the Christian equivalent. When it just seems to be too great a burden: This being an adult Christian, mature in our oneness with Christ. When hatred seems to overwhelm our institutions and love is hard to come by. But that is exactly when we need to think of Jesus prayer to God, "Father, I want those you gave me to be with me, right where I am." Amen.