

For Us

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[0 : 00] If you are not a regular here at St. Columbus, my name is Neil, Neil McMillan, and I'm one of the ministers that kind of works out of St. Columbus and associated with this church.

So St. Columbus is a church that's got a vision for the whole of Edinburgh, and in a way of pursuing that vision, St. Columbus is starting new churches in different parts of the city, so I started a church in Morningside with others a couple of years ago. And Tom, who's been leading tonight, started a church out just south of the city, it's called the Esk Valley church.

So that's part of the vision of St. Columbus is that we want to be a city centre church that has a vision for the whole of the city, and for that reason we love to start new churches in communities where that can be a good way of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. And I want us to take a few moments then just to look at this passage, and we're going to link three ideas together this evening from the passage. We're linking them together because Jesus does it.

And the ideas are community, love, and glory. So community, love, and glory are the three ideas.

And I'm going to read the passage again. It's a short passage at the end of John 17, if you've got one of the church Bibles page 903. So John 17 at verse 20, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one, I and them and you and me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me. Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world. Oh righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you and these know you that you have sent me. I made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them. Amen. So three ideas, community, love, and glory. I don't know if anybody's ever offered to pray with you, if you're not a Christian or you're not particularly religious you would maybe find that a bit of a cringe or a little bit embarrassing, but there probably will come a time in your life when you can't think of anything nicer than that somebody will just want to come and pray with you. I was, had surgery a few years ago and had a lot of time off work afterwards and I had a friend and once a week he would just come around for 15 minutes and pray with me and I just appreciated that so much. Somebody had taken the time coming round, sitting down beside me asking how I am and praying. And one of the really nice little bits, sort of nuggets in this passage of scripture is that in it Jesus is praying for me and for you. So he's asking his Father in heaven for something, he's asking that the Father in heaven will give unity to those who will come to believe in Jesus through the message and the teaching of the disciples. So Jesus prays for you, fantastic, a great thing to know tonight. Jesus Christ prays for you. And what Jesus is praying for you is that you will have an amazing sense of community. He's praying that we will be one and that that community will be so profound that it will mirror the community that exists between

[4 : 14] God the Father and God the Son. So that's quite an extraordinary community that Jesus is praying that we will form or be. So Jesus' prayer is for the church to be a place of true community, a community that is so wonderful that it will persuade skeptics and doubters of the truth of Christianity. That's what Jesus says, isn't it? In verse 21 he's saying, I'm praying that they will all be one just Father as you are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the same prayer is repeated in verse 23. I in them, you and me, that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you have sent me.

So he's saying there's a community that's possible and that that community is so powerful that it persuades people of the truth of the Christian message. So we are supposed and intended to be

the most remarkable community of people ever. Now we know we live in a deeply fragmented world.

I woke up this morning, I checked my news feed, there'd been a bombing in New York City. We've had a summer of atrocities in Paris or Nice, sorry, and we've had the slaughter in Syria.

We've had all the bitterness and arguments of Brexit. We live in a fragmented world of yes voters and no voters. We live in a world where relationships break down, people get divorced, families fall apart. We live with people who we don't even really sometimes know how to speak to them.

We live in a world where people are obsessed with identity politics about what makes them unique and different. And in a world where there's so much fragmentation and fracturing of human relationships, Jesus is saying the church should be completely other. We should be different.

[6 : 34] We are to be one. The normal divisions don't apply in the life of the church. Instead there's an extraordinary togetherness. Instead of I being the dominant voice, we becomes the language of the Christian believer. Community is where we find our identity.

And this community, as we've said, will have such a profound influence that even the biggest skeptic will lay down their doubts and become interested in Jesus. Because Jesus is concerned in this passage, not just for those of us who are believers, but for those who are not. He's concerned about those who don't know who he is, who don't know him. So this community is an inward-looking community. It's an outward-looking community. He prays for the world. And he's praying for the world because the world is in the eyes of Jesus, or in the way that Jesus is referring to it here is, the world are all those people who organize their lives apart from God. He has no authority for them. They have no real interest in knowing God in a personal way.

But Jesus wants them to know, and Jesus is saying that the church's community will be a credible witness to them of the truth of the gospel. So you come along to church, you see each other, you hang out, you spend time together. That has to happen in a way that will make our skeptical friends say, okay, you're beginning to convince me.

I can see there's something different going on here. Now there's two problems with that. One is, of course, that often we keep our non-Christian friends away from our church friends and our Christian friends. We compartmentalize life. So we need to bring people to meet our Christian community.

But when people come into the community, they need to see its authenticity.

They need to see that we do indeed have a profound unity, that we care about each other, that we look after each other. So the way we speak to each other, the way we provide for each other, the way that we carry one another's burdens, the way that we build one another up, all of these things have to be so different from what goes on in the rest of the world that people begin to pay attention to what we have to say. So I had a friend, or I have a friend, a woman I know, she was taken to a church in a different part of Edinburgh. And she only started hanging out with people in that church through a friendship. And she was very skeptical and quite hostile to Christianity. She eventually sat down with the minister one day and she said, you know, in my head I disagree with everything you stand for, but she says, I just can't ignore the love that people in your church have for each other. So she could see something in that church that really challenged and changed her life. And she became a Christian, not because she was persuaded by their arguments, first of all, but because she was persuaded by their life together as a community of God's people. Now, where does this unity come from? What's the source of the unity that we find here? Well, it comes from the Father and the Son. The oneness that we are to have is the same as the oneness that there is between the Father and the Son. So there's union within the Godhead.

[10 : 47] And then when we have faith in Jesus Christ, we are united by faith to God. And when I'm united by faith to God and you're united by faith to God, then you and I are united to one another.

Our common faith creates this profound bond. My life is an outflow of the life of God within me. Your life is an outflow of the life of God within you. And so our lives together are rooted in God.

Because we all belong to Him, we all belong to each other. How do we know that we belong to Him? Because we know Him as our righteous Father.

In verse 20, 25, Jesus prays, oh righteous Father, the world doesn't know you. You see, the world doesn't know him, but if you're a believer, you do know him.

And you know the Father as an adopted child. He is our Father. When Jesus taught us to pray, He taught us to pray our Father. So how do we know we belong to Him? We know because He's our Father and we've been forgiven. Now, for this community to be extraordinary and different and compelling, it needs to have an amazing forgiveness at its heart.

[12 : 32] You and I can only have a relationship with God because God is a forgiving God. And you and I can only have community with each other if we're willing to be forgiving to one another. Because relationship and community with sinful people is really difficult.

People will annoy you. People will say things that upset you. People will ignore you. People will irritate you. There's so much that goes on in the life of a community that disturbs us and people who will offend us. And so unless we're capable of forgiving each other, we can never have the community that Jesus wants us to have.

So we have to have an amazing forgiveness at the heart of our community. How can we forgive? Well, we can only forgive because we've been forgiven. So when Jesus teaches us to pray, in the Lord's prayer, He teaches us to pray, forgive our sins as we forgive those who sinned against us. As those who've experienced forgiveness, we become those who can be forgiving.

Tim Keller says about this. He says, better people are atheists.

Better people are atheists. They don't really believe in a Father who forgives. And so they don't forgive themselves. So there's to be an extraordinary unity and community in the church that's rooted in our own experience of God and His forgiveness towards us.

[14 : 23] But this unity and community requires love. Forgiveness requires love. So when we are united, when we have community together, the world will know, as Jesus says at the end of verse 23, that the Father sent the Son and has loved them, has loved the church, or loved the people of God just as He has loved Jesus. So there's a parallel drawn here between the love the Father has for His Son Jesus and the love that the Father has for us, His adopted children.

The unity that we show reveals a love that can only come from God.

People who care more about others than they do about themselves are exceptional. Because we're rigged, we're hardwired to put our own interests first. That's the way sin works in our lives. Sin says, I want to be God in my own world. I want to do things my way with my rules for my ends and my purposes. And so we have hard selfish hearts, hearts that are caught up in our own internal struggles and our own internal needs. We're absorbed with our own pain and our own ambitions and our own worries. Everything that goes on in our lives is about self.

Now that's an easy thing for us all to understand, how much sin makes us self-absorbed.

Sometimes I'm so self-absorbed that I get mad about even the most trivial thing. I don't know if you care about pasta a lot, but I do. And what I care about pasta is the way the sauce goes in the pasta. So some people, they get the sauce, they get the pasta and they mix them together. That's one way of eating pasta. It's not the right way though. The right way to eat pasta is just get your pasta in the plate and pour some sauce on top and then you can mix it in yourself as you go along.

[16 : 39] Now my wife disagrees with me on this point of nutrition and culinary skill and art. And so she loves to mix the sauce with the pasta before it goes on the plate. And sometimes I'll look at it and I feel an inward fury. Honestly, I've learned not to express it. It doesn't really help a peaceful dinner. But how dare she? Really? She's mixed my pasta with the sauce. I wanted to do that myself.

Thank you very much. I am often such a self-absorbed individual. My needs, my way, my wants, my struggles, everything's about me. And when everything's about me, then there's not a lot of love going on really.

So we need a love that makes us sensitive to others. Instead of having hard, selfish hearts, we need soft hearts that are sensitive to others so that we care more about other people than we care about ourselves. We need our hard, selfish hearts to be turned into soft, sensitive hearts. What changes the human heart from hard to soft?

Well, the thing that changes us is knowing that we are loved by God. Knowing that He loved us so much that He dies for our sins on the cross. Knowing that God loves us so much that He tells us here in this very passage that He loves us with the same love that He has for His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. We're told here that He's loved Jesus from all eternity, but now He says, the love that I've had for Him from all eternity, I have the same love for you, not a lesser love.

Isn't that incredible? It's not a lesser love He has for you. It's the same love. And when we know that we're loved in this extraordinary way with a love that is unconditional, then we can begin to love without condition. We can begin to love all the time, forgive all the time, be kind and generous, because this love is visible. It's a love that persuades people.

[19 : 23] They see the love of our community and they are persuaded by the love of our community. It can be seen, it can be measured.

It can be seen in the way we use our money and the way we use our time, our resources. It can be seen in our words and how we speak to each other and how we speak of each other.

Do people see in us an unconditional love flowing out because we are loved unconditionally? If you don't really care about other people, if you're just one of these self-absorbed people, like I am, what will change you? The only thing that will change you is to be humbled by the cross of Jesus Christ and to see that really all you are is a great sinner who's made a great mess of his life, but that you're loved by a great God in an extraordinary way. So there's unity in community.

We need community that persuades. Community that persuades is a loving community and that love flows out of our experience of the glory of God. So Jesus connects all this to the glory.

And he says in verse 22, he's praying that the glory that he has will be ours also.

[21 : 11] And then in verse 24, he goes on to pray, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you've given me before because you love me before the foundation of the world. Right, there's an idea here that's so important that everybody who's a Christian really needs to grasp it. It's this idea, refer to it at the beginning of union with Christ. Those who have faith in Jesus Christ have a bond with him, a union that is profound and extraordinary. And that union means that all the benefits and rewards of Christ's death and resurrection become ours. Okay, you are so profoundly wrapped up in Jesus, so closely united with him that all that is his through his death and resurrection becomes yours as well. Now just try and get your head around that thought a little bit, okay? All your work, all the reward, think about it this way, if all the rewards of your work you had to give them and share them with someone else. So you go to work and you're getting in the office at half eight or wherever you go and you work there and you come home at half six and then you go in the next day, in the next day, in the next day and week after week and year after year and all that you earn, all the rewards of your job, they're to be shared with others. They're not yours, they're for others.

You just want to give everything you get away, everything you get you want to give it away, give it away, give it away, share it, let others enjoy it. You don't want to keep anything for yourself, you want to let everyone else have the benefits of what you work for. Now remember, now think about it this way, think you've got the worst job ever, it's a horrible job, but you still, all the rewards, you want others to enjoy them. Well that's the way it is with Jesus, you see, all the rewards of his work are shared with the most undeserving, unpleasant people, that's us.

And he has the worst work to do, what's his work? His work is to come to carry the sin of the world, to be a man of sorrows, to be disfigured beyond recognition, to be beaten abused, abandoned, and misused, crushed for the sins of others. This is the work of Jesus and he does it so that you can have his glory. Isn't that extraordinary? He does all this so that you can have his glory, you can share in his glory. The glory that's his will be yours too. You will see his glory, we see it at the cross and the love that he shows to us. You will experience his glory, when you go to see him in heaven you'll see it unveiled and you yourself, we're told, you will be glorified.