

# Are We on Jesus' Team

Scripture: John 17:20-26 (text:20-23)

Core Values #1: UNITY

Modesto CRC

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## I. INTRODUCTION

While we recognize that all preaching and teaching is about our spiritual life, we have been trying to be very intentional this year about deepening our relationship with God – both as individuals and as a church. This morning I want to begin a series of sermons that I hope will cause us wrestle with God's Word regarding his church, especially our church. Our concern is to hear God's Word together. Let's think together about **what the core values of the church are** – **what is bottom-line important, God's values for his church?** Of course this is as much about how every one of us live our lives as it is about our relationships with each other as we relate to God.

**Core values** are about the foundational biblical understanding concerning **who we are** as church, what our bottom line goals are to be, and how we are to **work together**. This morning's question is, **ARE WE ON JESUS TEAM? WHAT ARE OUR CORE VALUES? What is centrally important? What are the priorities that need to guide our actions, our decisions and relationships? As people who are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, what values guide us?**

All of our core values are built on a central, basic principle that we all agree to. Under all our differences of background, history, religious experience, traditions, likes and dislikes, personal preferences and perceived needs, we believe that the **Bible is the Word of God, our guide for faith and life.** We agreed to this when we made profession of our faith and acknowledged our oneness with Christ's Church. **This is our foundational unity in the reality that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior,** which is the central theme of the Bible. Therefore, when we address our core values we look under all the wonderful diversity and individuality of God's people to the foundational question: **WHAT DOES THE LORD SAY? Our concern is not first of all what I want, what I think I need or like.** We do know that the Lord wants what is best for us.

**The core value I would like to look at with you today is UNITY-- our oneness in Jesus Christ.** In the title I used the word **TEAM** because **I think all of you know what happens when a team, for example a sports team, is not unified, when the members are not together and do not share the same goals and values.** Imagine a

football team on which the players could not agree on what play to run. What would happen on a baseball team if all the players decided to play infield? Think of a hockey team whose players would never pass to each other – only try to score by themselves. What would happen on any of these teams if a couple players decided to play by different rules than everyone else? I suspect at one time or another most of us have experienced something like that on a committee, in a business meeting, maybe in our family, or on a church council when people had different priorities, goals, and values. Did anything get done? Those become endless meetings majoring in frustration. Then we really need to back up and ask, what are we doing here? What is our purpose? What are our core values? We have been talking about being a “staff team” and then that there needs to be a sense of team between staff and council as we serve and lead the church together. To be successful a team has to be unified, in agreement about **core values. Are we on Jesus’ team?**

## II. HOW IMPORTANT IS UNITY?

How important is unity? Imagine for a moment that someone you love and respect is on his or her deathbed. Shortly before they die, when time is short and words are few, this person shares with you what they believe is most important. **Would you remember those words? Would those words burn themselves into your consciousness?** Jesus, on the night before he died, on his way to the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing he faced the trials, the suffering and the agonizing death of Calvary, prayed with his disciples. He prayed for them and about them. This is a deeply moving moment as he shares with his Father in their hearing what is **most important**. Then he goes on to pray for us – for us today! He thought of us just before he died. ***“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message...”*** This is being on the edge of our seats time. He looks into the future and sees us. What is so important that it is to be said to God now – when his time is short and there can only be a few words left? ***“I pray that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”*** This is what the Lord wants for us – pleading for it on his way to the crucifixion on Calvary – **unity, oneness, being on the same team**. Given the timing of these words, the sheer emotional impact, you would think that this would be burned into the mind and heart of every Christian. **Is it?** Does that motivate us

much? In your experience, has this really been a core value of Christ's church? Do people say they need to keep the unity for Jesus' sake?

Let's be honest with each other. **This may be one of the most difficult expectations that Jesus has of us.** However, we cannot escape the importance of it, especially in its context. This prayer follows the **first Communion**. Was that a beautiful scene of unity? It began with a **discussion about his betrayal** by one of the disciples, right afterward Luke tells us the disciples got into an **argument about who was the greatest**, and shortly after that they would all **run away** – leaving Peter to overtly deny him. Sounds like something we would not want our children to see. Only after his resurrection were they unified, experiencing oneness at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

**How important is all of this to us?** How many denominations are there? How many church splits continue to happen? In North America there are thousands of denominations with more being formed every day. I think I see conflict and conflicting values all around, especially as our society becomes more and more consumer oriented with churches becoming a spiritual supermarket offering the products that entertain us and capture our likes and dislikes. How do we put this together? Our Lord is on his knees pleading with the Father about our unity, and we proudly do “stand offs” with each other: if you don't agree with me I'm leaving (of course it is always about some important “hot button” issue I have decided is important because of my feelings or fears). How often are we willing to go to third parties because we are not getting our way, maybe even poisoning the well for people's relationship with church leaders. If you do something I don't like I will cut myself off from you. // ***“Father, may they be one as we are one, just as you are in me and I am in you.”***

### III. WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR UNITY?

Let's look closely at Jesus' words. ***What is the basis of this unity? What creates this oneness among people, this body-life?*** Here we get at the core of the problem. Jesus said, ***“May they be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”*** In these three short verses he repeats this 3 times. We talk about the persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but God is One! There is absolute unity and love between the Father, Son and Spirit. **The Christian is unified with God in Christ.** “IN CHRIST” is the most common phrase in the New Testament. Jesus prays, ***“May***

*they also be in us....” and then later, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought into complete unity....”* **What we immediately see here is that our unity is based on our spiritual connection with God in Christ.** (Repeat) It is in the miracle that happens when we believe, that in our spiritual centers we are united with Christ. **God comes to live in us.** We cannot create the unity. It is the result of our being connected to God. When I understand that my **core identity** is that I am forgiven, accepted by God, and adopted as his son or daughter, that I am in God’s family; and then I understand **you** are in God’s family too: you are God’s daughter, God’s son. What does that make us? **God, and the miracle of God using our faith to adopt us, to unite us to Christ, is the foundation of our unity.** **THIS IS THE GLORY OF CHRIST REVEALED! WE ARE CONNECTED TO GOD, AND WE ARE TOGETHER IN CHRIST.** This is the gospel.

I think we haven’t understood. On what do we typically base our unity with people? Is it not on our **SURFACE SAMENESS**? We see ourselves unified with people perhaps in the same **denominational organization**, or people of the **same ethnic background**, or the **same race**, or **people who use the same language**, or even more common – **whether we think alike on some issues we think are important** -- issues we usually couched in important theological language – as unified with people who like us are **right!** **We then have interpreted unity to mean uniformity or homogeneity.** Unity is then being similar on the outside. And we wonder why real unity does not happen.

If it is all superficial, external, then we can understand how people are just about their own preferences and insecurities and **people separate themselves along a continuum of being conservative or traditional or progressive or liberal** – feeling unity with people who agree to join them on the continuum so they can fight with all the others who disagree on “hot button issues.” (You all know them: worship style, leadership style, women in office, more recently politics, homosexuality, race, on and on.) Then the church is really no more than some sort of country club.

**What is the basis of unity that Jesus talked about? Is it not him? Is it not being in him? Is it not being in God’s family because of our being united with him?** For example: because we are in Christ, can we make room for each other. In this

congregation we have preferences for different worship styles. We expect people to appreciate and celebrate different music styles and be grateful for each others spiritual expression. I sense that so many of us here understand this. That is evidence of our foundational or core value. **Is our unity in Christ or in uniformity**, or is it in the selfishness of I want what I want. It is all about me. Am I the only one here?

The truth is we are comfortable with people who talk like we do, think like we do, have a similar social/economic class to ours, and share our lifestyle, history and attitudes. **So the temptation is to take what makes us comfortable and make that the foundation of our unity.** **Is that OK? Is that OK with God?** Is it all right to create barriers, destroying unity based on who agrees with the way we interpret some text or concept? Is it OK to make our personal comfort or security the core value of the church? **The foundation of our unity is in God and our connection to him, not in our superficial comfort, pride or insecurity.** The Apostle Paul saw divisions because of race, ethnic background, some culturally influenced interpretation of biblical issues, and history in the Galatian church. Following the core value that Jesus taught he wrote in Galatians 3(vs. 26f)

You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

What do we see when we

look at each other? Our differences or the fact that we are one body because we are all connected to God in Christ together. In his book A Gentle Thunder Max Lucado tells this story that sort of makes the point. He says,

“Some time ago I came upon a fellow on a trip who was carrying a Bible.  
 “Are you a believer?” I asked him.  
 “Yes,” he said excitedly.  
 I’ve learned you can’t be too careful.  
 “Virgin birth?” I asked.  
 “I accept it.”  
 “Deity of Jesus?”  
 “No doubt.”  
 “Death of Christ on the cross?”  
 “He died for all people.”  
 Could it be that I was face to face with a Christian? Perhaps. Nonetheless I continued my checklist.  
 “Status of man?”  
 “Sinner in need of grace.”

“Definition of grace?”  
 “God doing for man what man cannot do.”  
 “Return of Christ?”  
 “Imminent.”  
 “Bible?”  
 “Inspired.”  
 “The church?”  
 “The body of Christ.”  
 Now I started getting excited, “Conservative or liberal?”  
 He was getting interested too. “Conservative.”  
 My heart began to beat faster.  
 “Heritage?”  
 “Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God Dispensationalist Triune Convention.”  
 That was mine!  
 “Branch?”  
 “Pre-millennial, post trib, noncharismatic, King James, one-cup communion.”  
 My eyes misted. I had only one other question.  
 “Is your pulpit wooden or fiberglass?”  
 “Fiberglass,” he responded.  
 I withdrew my hand and stiffened my neck. “Heretic!” I said and walked away.

Exaggeration sometimes makes the point. Our job is not to create unity around our obsession with how others are different from us. Rather, as Paul says in Ephesians 4, ***to maintain or preserve the unity that the Spirit gives in Christ.*** **When our unity is in God and the faith that miraculously connects us to him, then we begin to see the beauty and wonder of the diversity of people, of gifts, of perspectives in his family that we can grow with and from.** **As a church, when our core values are clear, then we are not threatened by superficial change and not broken by differences of opinion.**

#### IV. WHY IS ALL OF THIS SO IMPORTANT?

**Why did Jesus tell us that this is a core value of the church?** There is one obvious thing, so obvious he doesn't mention it here. It is in chapter 15. We are going to deal with each other very differently if the basis of our unity is in God, if what we see as our oneness is in Christ, instead of our sameness or differences. He covered that when he said, ***“If you love me, love one another.”*** In this passage he gives us two reasons why this is terribly important. First, ***“May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me....”*** It is the witness that John 3:16 is true. How important is that? What does the world see when they look at the church of Jesus

Christ today? Is this why very little ministry gets done when churches or denominations are in conflict? Does the world look at us and know the truth about who sent Jesus in the way we deal with each other even when we disagree?

The second reason this is so important: ***“so that they may know that you have loved them even as you loved me.”*** The Bible records that the early church grew so fast because their neighbors kept looking at them saying, *“Look how they love one another.”* In addition, do all of us here experience gracious acceptance and love to such a degree that we know without doubt that God loves us as he loved Jesus? Why is all of this so important?

Jesus taught that one of the **core values** of the church is unity, not because we are alike, but because we look at each other and see a person connected to God. Jesus intended for his team to share the same core values. **Are we on Jesus’ team, or are we playing by our own rules?** If by our own rules, are we then even really a church? Jesus prayed, just before he died, ***“I pray that they may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”*** When we are one – unified in Christ -- the world knows who sent Jesus, and we experience the Father’s love for us. Unity is a core value Jesus gave to his church. Is it our core value? It is the foundation on which we move forward.