

The Church Is Like A Table

John 17:19-26

The church is a very special community. When we think of the relationship between members of the congregation we realize that most have never met each other beforehand and have very little in common. Nevertheless, people living various lives gather together in the name of Jesus Christ to worship Him and associate with each other. As a result, we open our minds and hearts to one another and become a blessed family similar to brothers and sisters. It is not easy to share this kind of pure love in this world. The church is a place where you believe, feel and confess in the name of Jesus Christ and His love. The church is not a place just for friendship and the sharing of things of this world. The church is a place where people who hold the name of Jesus Christ in common become a family in the Lord. Even though we meet new people for the first time in church it feels like we are old friends; we meet our family that have come together after a long journey. This is because the name and love of Jesus Christ joins us as one.

This is also the reason that Jesus came to the earth. Actually, we were one but we then scattered because of our sins. However, it is Jesus who came to earth to make us one again. We became one by restoring the relationship between us and God through Jesus Christ. He made us one – Jew and Gentile, East and West, North and South. He also made us one in the name of Jesus Christ despite differences of gender, age and possessions. I hope that we believe that His great will has made us one and that we continually keep that in our thoughts.

Today's text is a part of a prayer that Jesus offered to God. In the night that he was betrayed, Jesus had the last supper with His disciples. After a farewell speech to His disciples, He prayed that He would leave His disciples in God's care. The prayer is found in Chapter 17 of the Gospel of John. Before He was returned to His father, Jesus prayed for His disciples who will remain in this world. He also prayed as a mediator between God and man for everyone who was to become a Christian. He made His disciples one in Him just as God and the Son are one. He prayed sincerely for everyone who was to become a Christian and made each of us one in God's love. Therefore, this prayer was for the church which was to be built in this world through the disciples and continued on into the future. Jesus' earnest will for the church is to please God by becoming one in His name. The night before He offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross to God, Jesus prayed for His disciples at the last supper. As a result, the Word of God was extended to the early Jerusalem church through the disciples. Those fruits are still being harvested today though the church's history is over 2,000 years.

There is a hymn that was sung by an English Christian. The song is written by Fred Kann and the verse begins with "The church is like a table." This hymn compares the church to a table. The church is like a table but the table is not a rectangle, instead it is round. There are no sides, no corners, no first, no last, and no length. People in this table are bonded in one's love. What a beautiful verse it is! There is no my side and your side; there is no high and low. That means the round table is a symbol of a true church. The church should be seen as this: respecting each other as we sit at the round table, feeling we are one within the confines of the table, and bonded tight in our love.

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Sometimes when we are invited to a dinner, we hesitate because we do not know where we are supposed to sit at the big table. That is because they follow a protocol for seating. If someone does not share with us the seating chart and tell us where we're supposed to sit, we can make a mistake by not sitting in the proper place. If an older or more important person came and we were sitting where they were supposed to sit, we will be thoroughly embarrassed. I think of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table when we hesitate because we do not know where we are supposed to sit. He made his table round so that none of the knights could boast that they had a higher position at the table than the others. I think that this is a good idea and that we should set up a round table in every meeting room. The church is also a round table without high and low positions. The first loves and understands the last. The last respects the first. It is through this love that we become one in the Lord. We are one body serving Jesus Christ without there being a 'my side' and 'your side.' We are one family serving God as our father.

Have you ever had the feeling that I am nothing in this church? In the pastor's eyes, every single congregation member is very precious and important. Every single person, not only those here in the congregation today, but also those in the congregation that are from out of town. From the newest baby to the oldest person – all are very precious and important. I am very proud of those who have believed in Jesus Christ for a very long time, have a good attitude in their church life, and work hard for their ministry. When I look at someone who not quite long ago began believing in Jesus Christ, but yet knows joy in the Lord, I am very proud of them as well. So when I see newcomers or those who are already a member and attended church for a long time and serve sincerely, it reminds me of how precious they all are. God is proud of each of us and too sees us the same way, lovely and precious. We who are bonded as one in the love of Christ are family with God and the church is a table full of the sharing love of family.

However, do you think that there are only good Christians in the church? Honestly speaking, I feel sorrow for some because of where they are in their Christian life. I am very concerned about their Christian life. I pray for them with compassion hoping that they will try a little harder to become a good Christian. The foundation for prayer like this comes from loving thoughts for them. I believe that a pastor's thoughts as we take care of our congregation are similar to parents'. This is without regard to the pastor's age as all pastors bring up and take care of their congregation with these parental thoughts. Every single member is precious and important, just as is every single child to a parent. If the pastor thinks that all the people in the church are very important, then do you think that God feels the same way? Yes, absolutely. Because God loves you and me, He freely gave us His only begotten Son. I hope that you receive His love with pure thoughts. All of you are very valuable and precious.

There is another reason that the church is like a table. When we are invited to a large dinner there are well-prepared tables with name cards at each of the settings. The name cards were placed in order of importance so that we can only sit where our name was placed. 'They' are sitting in front of 'us' who are sitting back there and 'so-and-so' is eating, drinking, and talking with "them." Additionally, only those with invitations are admitted to go inside to the dinner. However, the church is a table in an open house for everyone. The church does not preclude anyone from coming to its table. It is open to all to come, eat and drink, and be together. There is no distinguishing 'them' and 'us'; for only 'we' exist at the table in this open house. That is

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because we are one family, one body in Christ. So we call each other 'our family', 'our church', and 'our church friend.'

When Jesus prayed to God for the church He said, "They are one just like I and the Father are one." He hoped that we and the Father would be one. The church that Jesus built is a table of an open house for everyone. Jesus is inviting us to this rich table. Isaiah 55:1 says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." This verse shows how God invited the Israelites who had separated themselves from God back to a life with Him. God sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to earth so that we can be invited back to a life with Him. Jesus said in the book of John 7:37-38, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Jesus himself provided us with His own life as food and water forever.

When you thoroughly look at the gospels, you can easily find that Jesus often talked with people while they were eating and drinking. He visited Cana in Galilee and He turned water into wine. He took the five loaves and the two fish, fed the 5,000, and they all ate and were satisfied. He had gone to be the guest of a Zacchaeus in Jericho and ate and drank and told them about the Kingdom of God. He went to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom he had raised from the dead and ate food provided by Martha and spread the Word of God to the disciples. In the same night that he was betrayed, Jesus ate his food with His disciples during pass over, preached his last sermon, and encouraged and prayed for them. Through these examples we see that Jesus invited everyone to the prepared table saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." He has also spoken to every visitor about the Kingdom of God. Jesus is looking for those who close their mind to him. Revelation 3:20 tells us that He waits for them saying, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." If someone opens their mind, Jesus will come in and eat with them. He wants to be one with them. We are not 'different' anymore but one and we participate in the heavenly party.

The church is a table in an open house and symbolizes an invitation welcoming everyone to eat and drink and to return to a life with God. I hope that our church is just like that table in an open house. I hope that our church can accept everybody and share our joys, sadness, and sufferings together. I hope that our church is the place that provides food and water abundantly to every visitor who comes here, and there are no longer high and low positions. I hope that we pray and work hard to make a round table through the love of Jesus.