

[JOHN 17:20-26](#)

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MAY THEY ALL BE ONE: SINGING IN HARMONY

We human beings can really get FIRED UP about our DIFFERENCES, can't we? OH, we can tolerate SOME diversity, but EVERY single ONE of us has a BOILING point. Every single ONE of us has a POINT where what WE perceive as other people's CRAZY ideas REALLY start to GET to us, whether it's CLOTHING or HAIRSTYLES, POLITICS or RELIGION, CHILDREARING or just basic VALUES! It could be ANYTHING, but, we ALL have a point at which we begin to BOIL! And AT that point, we just wish that EVERYONE could somehow be JUST like US! It's like the GUY I overheard the ONE day, who was talking about how FRUSTRATED he gets with the way EVERYBODY these days seem to be claiming their RIGHTS! He said: *You KNOW: you got your BLACKS! You got your WOMEN! You got your HISPANICS! You got your ARABS! You got your RETARDED people! You got your WELFARE people! You got your CRIMINALS! You got your GAYS! You EVEN got your AIDS patients! It seems like EVERYBODY these days is just SCREAMING for their RIGHTS! And I just wish there was a little bit of HARMONY in this country like there USED to be.*

Well, he chose an interesting WORD, didn't he, that word, HARMONY? And what IS harmony? Well, Wally ARMBRUSTER, in his delightful little book, *A Bag of Noodles*, has THIS to say about HARMONY. He says: *If EVERYBODY is singing the same NOTE, THAT ain't harmony! THAT, baby, is MONOTONY! HARMONY happens when people sing DIFFERENT notes...and even some which SOUND (at first) like DISCORD suddenly sound GREAT... ONCE your ear gets USED to the idea!*

Well, I believe that HARMONY is the subject of our SCRIPTURE Lesson today. HERE, Jesus is praying for UNITY amongst His disciples. He prays: *that they ALL may be ONE.* However, the unity that JESUS is talking about here is NOT a unity where everyone is exactly the SAME, even though it's very tempting to THINK that way. No! JESUS is talking about a unity, which is BEST-expressed by the word HARMONY! And we KNOW that because THIS is the SAME Jesus who reserves some of His HARSHEST criticism for mindless UNIFORMITY and unthinking CONFORMITY. This is the SAME Jesus who REJOICES in the faith of a SYRIAN woman and a Roman SOLDIER, and who has a man from AFRICA carry His CROSS. AND, this is the SAME Jesus who CHOSE, as His DISCIPLES, a tax collector for the Roman government AND a ZEALOT, a man who said, *the only GOOD Roman is a DEAD Roman, and ANYONE who COOPERATES with them as well.* So, you SEE: for JESUS, unity does NOT mean UNIFORMITY! Instead, it means HARMONY. It means the UNITING of different NOTES into a common TUNE! What UNIFIED His disciples, as DIFFERENT as they were, was their common LOVE for Jesus Christ. And THAT allowed them to sing in HARMONY, a BEAUTIFUL tune.

The problem IS that, DOWN through the AGES, Christians have taken this PRAYER in our Scripture Lesson and understood it to mean that ALL will be ONE ONLY when the HEATHEN and the HERETIC see the LIGHT, so to speak, and ABANDON their erroneous WAYS! And THAT'S why, during the 19th Century -- and in SOME denominations, still TODAY -- MISSIONARIES were sent out ALL across the GLOBE in an attempt to CONVERT the (quote) HEATHENS. And, convert them to WHAT? Well, convert them to our WESTERN and EUROPEAN style of Christianity, of course; because, as THEY saw it, ALL will be ONE ONLY when EVERYONE in the world practices our Western and European style of Christianity, only when EVERYBODY is just like US.

Well, friends: THAT was a PERVERSION of the Gospel! And, the AUTROCITIES that have been done in places like Africa and India, Latin America and even our OWN country, in the name of Jesus Christ, MUST have kept Jesus CONTINUALLY in TEARS for the past several hundred years. And SOME of these brothers and sisters in Christ from other lands are only just NOW beginning to RECOVER from the cultural UNITY that has been IMPOSED upon them by Christian MISSIONARIES through the centuries! They are only just NOW beginning to FIND and SING their OWN harmonious NOTES in the church's UNIVERSAL choir. And OH, what BEAUTIFUL notes they ARE! In fact, MANY of the most EXCITING innovations in the church TODAY, ESPECIALLY in the areas of liturgy and worship, are happening in Africa, India and Latin America. And believe me: WE could learn a great DEAL from them! SO, when Jesus prayed for UNITY, He was NOT praying for UNIFORMITY! HE was praying for HARMONY! He KNEW that we're all DIFFERENT, and HE wanted us to CELEBRATE our differences, and BLEND our voices TOGETHER in a common TUNE, a tune that celebrates Gods' GREAT love for ALL of creation, and ESPECIALLY those who are different.

You know: it seems so CLEAR to ME. And Jesus SHOWED us all this AGAIN as He APPEARED to different people following His RESURRECTION. Remember how He was not even RECOGNIZED by those who had been His CLOSEST companions? Mary Magdalene, for example, MISTOOK Him for a GARDENER! The 2 DISCIPLES on the road to EMMAUS thought Him to be just a fellow TRAVELER. The disciples by the Sea of Galilee didn't KNOW Him at first. And, when they finally RECOGNIZED that it was Jesus, it was by His ACTIONS, NOT by His APPEARANCE! And I believe that THAT'S how Jesus wants US, His disciples TODAY, to be RECOGNIZED as well: NOT by the way we WORSHIP, and NOT by the DOCTRINES we profess, but by the way we ACT, the way we LOVE our fellow human beings! Jesus CALLS us, you see, to view ALL people as our brothers and sisters, whether we LOOK alike, or whether we TALK alike, or whether we WORSHIP alike, BECAUSE our UNITY in Christ is UNITY based NOT on uniformity, but on LOVE.

Well friends, I am DELIGHTED to tell you that THAT'S what THIS church is all ABOUT! WE, in fact, CELEBRATE that everyone's BELIEF system here in NOT exactly the SAME, and that WE are free to EXPRESS our differences, and even our DOUBTS, without FEAR of being ostracized or rejected. AND, we CELEBRATE that WE are a church family that includes ALL ages, ALL walks of life, and EVERY neighborhood in town! And we REJOICE that IN our church family, and LEADING our church family, are both HETEROSEXUAL people and HOMOSEXUAL people! We have people with ADDICTION problems. We have people with various kinds of mental ILLNESS. We have people of various COLORS (though not ENOUGH)! We have all SORTS of different convictions about the POLITICAL issues of the day. Yes, we have all KINDS of DIFFERENCES among us! Moreover, we ALL have different GIFTS, TALENTS and ABILITIES, as well as different NEEDS and HOPES and DREAMS. Yes, we have MANY differences here. And we can ACCOMODATE these DIFFERENCES because our UNITY is based on LOVE: the love of our Lord for US and OUR love for our LORD.

No, it's NOT uniformity that we seek, but HARMONY, believing that HARMONY is what Jesus is PRAYING for in our Scripture Lesson today, as He PRAYS for His disciples. And WHEN we BLEND together our MANY talents and gifts, backgrounds and capabilities, and BIND them with the love of CHRIST, then WE can sing a LOVE SONG together that will RING OUT throughout this TOWN, this NATION and this WORLD, telling the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ, which is a GOOD NEWS that promises that we ARE loved with God's EVERLASTING love, and SAVED with God's SAVING love! And THAT'S what WE are ALL about as the CHURCH of Jesus Christ, SHARING that GOOD NEWS and being INSTRUMENTS of God's LOVE by ALL that we SAY and DO!

Friends, this world will NEVER be saved by GOVERNMENTS and POLITICIANS! It will NEVER be saved by TELEVISION, the MEDIA, or big BUSINESS! It will NEVER be saved by

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY and COMPUTERS! And it will NEVER be saved by MONEY! No! There is just ONE thing that has the power to SAVE this world from its path toward SELF-DESTRUCTION! And THAT is the love of God! And, WHENEVER and WHEREVER the church is FAITHFUL and being what CHRIST calls it to BE, it IS an INSTRUMENT of that DIVINE love! It's like a FUNNEL, through which GOD can POUR out God's LOVE over the lives of people EVERYWHERE, one-by-one-by-one! Yes, THAT is what will SAVE the world! As Jesus SAID: *I have come INTO the world, NOT to JUDGE it, but to SAVE it!* And ONE way He's DOING that saving work is IN and through US.

And SO, it's a GOOD thing we're not all ALIKE, because in order to ACCOMPLISH this bold and challenging mission, we NEED all of our different gifts, talents and capabilities! AND, we need them WORKING TOGETHER, in a HARMONIOUS union, so that TOGETHER, WE can BECOME the ANSWER to the prayer of Jesus in our Scripture Lesson today. Thanks be to God. Amen.