

November 1, 2009

John 17:20ff

One by one. One by one we come into this world. One by one our footprints are recorded and our wrists are banded to tell us apart. One by one we're named to call us apart. One by one we start our lives. And then, sometime, one by one, we are boxed and buried, or burned and urned. And in between we can be really, really confused.

One day - "Mom; he's touching me. Mom, she's on my side." The next day - "Mom, make her play with me!" One day - "Just let me be!" The next day - "Nobody loves me. Why doesn't anyone want to be with me?" One day - arms crossed, smile gone - "Stay away from me." The next day - arms crossed, smile gone - "Why won't anyone talk with me?" One day - planted in front of the TV - "don't bother me." The next day - off the TV screen and on to the computer screen looking all over the world for someone to chat with them. One day - acting all nice to make friends, acting all nice for family. The next day - bossing and bullying those same family and friends. One day - all alone in an empty room. The next day - all alone in a crowd.

One by one, we hurt ourselves and we hurt each other. And all together, we hurt ourselves and we hurt each other. And what does God say? "What a painful, damnable mess."

Sound familiar? Thinking of myself, writing that, saying that didn't feel any good. And I can't imagine it felt good hearing it either. How messed up how damnably messed up we can be.

Let's start over. One by one, before all time he chose you. In your mom, he formed you. One by one, he baptized you, washed you, put his name on you. One by one, he gives himself to you as Savior, as Champion, as Father and Brother. One by one, he takes you to his cross - my body for you, my blood for you. One by one, he forgives you. The way we spoil and ruin togetherness with family, friends, neighbors ... the way we spoil and break togetherness with God - all forgiven. The way we hurt each other - forgiven. The way we give a bad name to church and to marriage - forgiven.

Forgiven so that our hearts can heal. Forgiven so we don't have to hide by ourselves in shame. Forgiven so our guilt doesn't get between us. Yes, one by one, he forgives you, remembers you, listens to you, watches out for you, holds you close. One by one, he calls you and keeps you as his precious, his dear, his delight.

One by one, he calls you to be more than alone. He calls you to be more than hoping and struggling to be accepted. He calls you to belong, to be together, to be with him. Not just across the miles, but side by side. And not just side by side, one by one, but side by side together as one.

One by one, together to be one, God is making his home in your heart - giving himself to you - working his power through you - working his love through you. One by one, God lives in you, but he doesn't stop there. One by one, he calls you together into his church to be loved and cared for, to be encouraged and made strong. One by one, he calls you into his church to work his love, to care for others, to build up and lift up - together as one.

Maybe I shouldn't say this, but there is a part of me that doesn't want all that togetherness. There's a part of me that tells me I'm too shy, too awkward to talk to people I don't know. A part of me that tells me there's nothing I can do right; a part of me that says I don't belong. There's a part of me that tells me I'm too tired, too busy; I have too much of my own stuff to do. That part of me could go on and on with reasons and excuses to be apart and stay apart and do my own thing. But if I let that loner part of me go on and on, what will I find? I will find myself further and further from the family of God, further and further from the ways of God, further and further from the love of God.

In our lesson today, Jesus prays that we be one, one with him and one with each other - not just one in name, but one in heart and action. He works to make me one together with him and his family in baptism; he works to make me one together with him and his family in the Lord's Supper. And he works another way. Yesterday, God worked to answer Jesus' pray, and we came together to work together as the body of Christ. Today, God is working to answer Jesus' prayer, and we came together to worship together, to grow

together, to sing and prayer together as the body of Christ. Today, after church, God will work to answer Jesus' prayer, as you greet each other and connect with each other.

God is answering Jesus' prayer among us. I hear it from you; I see it in you - that God is at work in you to be a family connecting in Christ. That said, I don't think this is any secret. We have some in our family who aren't as connected as Jesus wants us to be. Maybe they're new and don't feel like they belong. Maybe they have some friction burns and hurts - somebody said something, did something, or somebody didn't say or do something - and they're nursing their hurts. Maybe they got busy and distracted, and need to be re-connected. You know what I'm saying, right? So let's work on our Jesus-connections. Does that sound intimidating? It doesn't have to. Go through a directory and invite someone - for coffee, to church, to join you in Christ's ministry. Or take advantage of the weather - invite some people over for burgers and brats. Invite some connected people; invite some less-connected people; invite some to-be-connected people. Maybe you meet at your house; maybe you meet at the park. It doesn't have to be a big event. Look for a way to be part of God's answer to Jesus' prayer. Look for a way to share God's love, to turn one by one into one together.

So what's going through your mind now? Possibilities or impossibilities? If you're getting stuck on the impossibilities, remember who's praying here. The Jesus who called you in, the Jesus who brought you in, the Jesus who connects you in one together with God. He knows the impossibilities. He knows the cost of one together; he knows the frustrations of one together. But more than that he knows the possibilities. He knows the joy of one together. He knows the blessing of one together. That's why he's calling you - not just to be connected one together with him, but to be connecting one together, others together, in his family - a family connecting in Christ. Thank you for connecting! Amen.

So let God, the God who chose you one by one and formed you one by one and washed you and calls you ... let that God connect you. And if you don't think you need connecting, let that God connect you with someone who does. After church, on your way out, stop and talk with someone you don't know. Downstairs before Bible Class, grab a friend and find someone you don't know and help them feel connected. And next weekend when we have Cleaning Day, and next month when we decorate our Christmas tree, or when you see some project in the bulletin - instead of thinking "that's for somebody else" or "I don't want to go alone" - call somebody up and let God connect you.

Last week we passed out some blue surveys. You saw some ways we're good at connecting; you saw some places we can improve. Where do you think we could do a better job connecting as God's people? Pass your ideas along. You can use the note paper in your pew racks. But here's a tougher question - what would you like to do to help us connect better? Write that down and pass it along. If you're not sure, ask. And join us after church. We have some connecting plans and projects we're working on and we want to include you. Then let us know how you'd like to be part of our connecting.

One by one God has chosen you and called you to be connected with him and connecting in his church. And one by one and together you've been answering that call. We thank you and we thank God for you. Amen.

Let's ask God for a connecting Spirit -

Heavenly Father, you have called and gathered and connected us into your family and church. Heal our hurts and remove our pride that keep us from connecting. Carve time out of our busy-ness and help us to see the work you have for us. Help us to be a family connecting in Christ to work your work and share your love. May our world see in us how great it is to be connected to you. Amen.