

## **Sermon**

If you learned that you were going to die within the next 24 hours, would you pray? What would you say? What would you ask?

Maybe the Lord's Prayer?

That doesn't sound anything like this prayer which Jesus offers for the disciples, does it? This prayer recorded in John's Gospel is a prayer for unity.

It has been called the real Lord's Prayer because it's one that Jesus prayed for His disciples. It is the Lord's prayer for His companions and His Church. It was the first prayer for Christian unity.

Jesus prayed that His disciples may be "one." On the last night of his life Jesus did not pray for the health of the disciples; for the success of the disciples; even for the happiness of the disciples.

He prayed that they would get along with each other."

In other words, our Lord's prayer was for unity between His disciples and unity within His Church. So, how do we accomplish that? How do we bring about and work toward unity?

First, it has to start with us. We can't wait for anyone else to start. We have to be proactive. We have to take the first steps.

We have to stop doing and saying those things that lead to, cause and perpetuate the disunity amongst us. We have to be the first to act.

Unity has to begin with us. And it has to begin with our personal relationship with Christ. We have to be one with Christ, first.

Our lives have to be knit together with His life through faith. And it has to begin in our Church. As a congregation, our lives have to be knit together in love, through Christ.

Second, in being one with Christ, we have to pull together. Imagine the powerful force we could exert as a congregation, as a denomination and as the Church in the world, if we all “pulled together as a team.”

You see, we can't accomplish as much if we're going in ten different directions. We have to have a common goal and a common purpose.

When we have that common purpose; that common vision, that common goal, then we can do almost anything. Especially when that goal or vision is God given and God driven.

This idea of unity starts with us. We have to pull together and then we have to keep on climbing. The secret is not giving up.

Unity isn't easy. Most of us have never learned how to disagree in love. Or how to love those with whom we disagree.

We're like the poet who wrote:  
"To dwell above with saints we love,  
That will be grace and glory.  
To live below with saints we know;  
Well, that's another story!"

Unity isn't easy. But Jesus not only prayed for it, He modeled it for us.

Remember when the disciples came to Him complaining about the people who were preaching and doing signs and wonders in Jesus' name but weren't part of the crowd of disciples.

They were ready to run them out of town or call down lightning upon their heads. Jesus told the disciples not to stop them and said, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit."

Christian unity is not determined by whether we agree with each other about every interpretation of scripture or doctrine or form of church government.

Christian unity IS determined by whether we love one another, and whether we reflect the love of God in Christ for the world.

There will always be that which separates Christians from Christians and denomination from denomination.

But we can still affirm and celebrate God's love for us all and our love for one another.

In the ways of love, the ways of mutual respect; understanding and acceptance, we can be “one” in Christ.

We have to continue to work toward unity and understanding – between each other, between the races, between cultures and between denominations. We may never reach it, but by working toward it, at least we’ll be going in the right direction.

We have to work toward breaking down the racial, cultural and denominational barriers that divide us as Christians.

We’re called to let go of past hurts that have separated us from one another by turning them over to God and offering those who have hurt us forgiveness. And in seeking forgiveness from those we have hurt.

We’re called to demonstrate our unity in Christ through love. It has to start with us. We have to pull together. And we have to keep on climbing.

No matter what: Christ’s prayer and Christ’s command is still that we be one as He is one with God and that we love one another as He has loved us.