

Rev. Dr. David Holyan

“Completely One”

First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, June 2, 2019

**Revelation 22:12-15, 16-17, 20-21**

*‘See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’*

*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises falsehood.*

*‘It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.’*

*The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’*

*And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’*

*And let everyone who is thirsty come.*

*Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.*

*The one who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’*

*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.*

**John 17:20-26**

*‘I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.’*

*‘Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.’*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take whatever it is we have within us, our worries and our joys. I pray that you would take our songs and our prayers, the scripture reading, as well as the words that you placed on my heart this morning to share. By the power of your spirit, touch, bless, and transform all of this into your living word. And let that word have its way within us. Let it comfort us and feed us. Let it guide us and challenge us. Most of all, let it call us out of ourselves. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

So I want to just congratulate all of you for coming and let you know how lucky you are because I had several emails this morning at about 4:00 AM, that said, "Can we please cancel service and have a prayer meeting for the Blues [laughter]?" I don't know how to pray for a shellacking, but I'll work on it, and maybe later we'll do that. But today is a day where we do celebrate. We celebrate a remarkable milestone in the life of the church, that a program that was started to give high school students the opportunity to travel and to serve others has continued for 50 years, and the impact that it's made on all of those that have gone on work camp or volunteered to be a mentor or a guide, the blessing is just amazing. And we get to celebrate that today, the day where we also get to celebrate the fact that we are back to one service for the summer, that we get to enjoy the picnic with what appears to be beautiful weather. Today is a great day in the life of the church.

And one of the things that, as I was thinking about this service and it coming in in the midst of the 50-year celebration, what I loved is the way that the scripture passage ties beautifully in to the turquoise shirts and what we, as a church, are lifting up and recognizing this day. The passage itself is what I would call a Rubik's cube of scripture. There's a lot of I and you and you and me and my love and your love and their love and oneness made known, and you're like, "What is Jesus doing?" And as I have

advised before and will continue to advise, we must treat this passage with care and read it very slowly. In fact, it feels almost like you need to take the tweezers and the X-ACTO knife and cut parts of the passage out and line them up in order to let the full impact register with each of us. Commentators are correct in pointing out that this passage names three fundamental bedrocks of what it means to be loved and cared for by Jesus Christ, what it means to call yourself a Christian, and how it is we are to be in this world. They name belief, oneness, and love as the three things that Jesus is holding up in this prayer that he offers just before he goes on to offer himself for us and for our sins. Belief, oneness, and love. One commentator noted that if you accept the message of Christ in this way you will find that assurance that is unshakeable. And no matter what you face you will know that you are never alone, that you're always cared for. And in God's eyes, you become the beloved. I can't argue with that assessment of this passage. So that you may be one as we are one that they may become completely one., so that your name is made known. And I make it known so that love with which you've loved me may be in them and I in them. I mean it's all there. But it's almost like pretzeled language. Belief, oneness, and love.

But as I sat with this all week and thinking about the celebrations that we enter into today, I feel like there's something missing. That this three-pronged approach, while it's nice and it's obviously trinitarian, there needs to be one more leg on this stool if you will. And it comes from the power of work camp. I can remember several years ago having a conversation with some parents who sent their son on work camp for the first time. He was young. He was shy. He was awkward. He was quiet. He was quirky. He was his own person. They came and on Saturday put him into the van and off he went. 2 weeks of work camp they pick him up. He sits in the car on the way home. And as the father recounted to me, "I looked in the mirror and asked who is this kid?" Because work camp changed his life. And it changed who he was.

The opportunity to go away for two weeks to do work that is not focused on yourself. To be with others in friendship and in prayer in an environment that is safe so you can ask questions and explore and discover who you are. And most importantly you can have the blessing of the power of serving others. And when I think about the power of serving others, the critical role that has in our life of faith, and the fact that at the most formative stage in young people's lives we give them, is this opportunity to go and serve others. In some clear sense, we are taking the cross of Jesus Christ and stamping right in their souls. This is what it means to be a Christian. Yes, you believe. Yes, we're together. Yes, it's all washed and surrounded and grounded in love. But most importantly it is that we serve those in need. I've been on workcamp once and I didn't spend the whole two weeks. I went to West Virginia to see what workcamp was all about. And I remember that we drove to the work site which was across the railroad tracks, down the gravel road, down the dirt road to a house that I would not believe any human would ever choose to live in. And I watched the students, like ants working on a hill, just swarm this place and transform it into something that someone would want to live in again. It had been flooded by the nearby river and by the time the students were done it was a remarkable transformation. A mobile home that actually looked like a home again. But what was more amazing to me was the transformation that occurred in the students. The quiet ones who come back and have a clear sense of voice and leadership. The ones who are totally immeshed in their own world, who come back and realize that there's a lot of things going on out there and that they can make a difference. Some even open up to the reality that the Holy Spirit works through them to make a change in this world. And as we make change in the world, we realize we, too, have been changed. Why else would everyone in turquoise shirts be here today? Because in a very concrete way, through the service to others, they know that God was working through them and continues to do so day in and day out.

And for any skeptics who are around - and there might be a few - I just want to point out one thing as evidence that the Spirit continues to be at work through us, in our ministry together. I had no idea what was in the bulletin this week. I didn't know what things would be added in for you to look at. I knew the announcements would be there because they're there every Sunday. I didn't read them ahead of time. I wasn't sure if the hand-bell thing would still go in there or it was taken out, etc. But as I was convinced that the most important aspect of this passage was that fourth leg, the impact of serving others, I was stunned to see how the Holy Spirit worked with me, unbeknownst to me. Because if you look on the front of the Pentecost offering, there's a quote, and it says, "The Holy Spirit took me and changed me in ways that I wasn't expecting." In a sense, we celebrate workcamp and 50 years of remarkable ministry. But I think, more importantly, what we celebrate today is how the Holy Spirit has taken each of us and changed us in ways that were unexpected. I'm convinced that when we serve others we become better Christians. That the blessing we offer is the blessing that we get in return. And I am thankful that this day, on this wonderful Sunday, we celebrate all of you who are willing to serve others. Not just those in turquoise shirts, but all of us.

Thank you for what you do for the ministry of Jesus Christ. Thank you for what you give to ensure that the ministry of Jesus Christ flourishes. Your time, your money, your insights, your talents. But most importantly, thank you for being willing to serve others. It is the light that shines in the darkness. It is the lamp on the lampstand. It is the salt. Amen.