

Christ's One Church

John 17:20-26

9/20/15

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Thank you, Wayne, and thank you, Columbia Presbyterian Church, for welcoming my family and me to your worship this morning. It's an honor to be with you. I do want to bring you greetings not merely from Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington D.C., but also from our board of the larger Theological Seminary of which there are seven campuses, and our chancellor, Doctor Lincoln Duncan, who some of you may know. He asked me personally to send his greetings to this gathering. We love partnering with churches in the Washington D.C. area, and so I want you to know—just in case you weren't aware—your church is well-known not only around Columbia but around the Washington and Baltimore areas as a church that preaches the gospel and that holds forth the gift of grace that we have in Jesus Christ. Your reputation proceeds you, and so it's an honor for me to come here and worship with you this morning, and I thank you for welcoming us here.

Our Scripture, from the Gospel of John, can be found in chapter 17. Gospel of John 17:20-26.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

This is the reading of God's Word. Please join me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we come to you throwing ourselves at your mercy. We recognize that your Word, while it's present with us, we don't have to climb a mountain to find it. It's given to us right here. It still requires your Spirit to attend to it. So we pray, Lord, that as we consider the teachings that you have given us through the apostle John, that our hearts would be regenerate. that we would have a desire to pursue you and your Word, that our minds would be able to conceive of you and your Word, and that our tongues would be able to respond with worship, that our hands would be able to respond with activity that gives voice and illustration to your Word in the world. Please, Spirit, come. Work in us and through us unto transformation for the sake of the gospel, we pray. And in the name of Jesus, amen.

So, I have, actually, two titles, as Wayne mentioned. I'm president and professor of Old Testament. Now, when I'm in mixed community or mixed conversation, I often lead with the president side. Because if you touch on the Old Testament side, even amongst believers, there's sometimes sort of a sense of obscurity. People's eyes can sometimes glaze over when I say that my Ph.D. is in Semitic and Egyptian language and literature. One of my friends—actually a mutual friend with Wayne Koch—is also a professor of Old Testament named Doctor Richard Pratt, and he actually introduces himself sometimes humorously as a professor of irrelevance. I'm reminded of the UNLV basketball player who's running off the court after a particularly poor performance, and the coach comes up to him and says, “Son, are you ignorant or apathetic?” to which the player says, “Coach? I don't know, and I don't care.” Think about it. See, that one sometimes hits after a couple minutes.

That's how a lot of people think about the Old Testament. What's the point? You know? We have the gospel of Jesus Christ, so why are you going back to this old way? And the illustration that I often give for our students is one of a blueprint and a building, and I think it helps. It helps me think about how the Old Testament relates to the new. Imagine if you're an architect. I imagine some of you probably are architects. When you're commissioned to go build a building, you always start with the blueprint. You draft the structure of the building. Where are the weight-bearing walls, and where are the cables going to be laid, and how will the foundation be placed so that it can hold up this structure?

The blueprint tells you how the building works. But then, when you build the building, you actually get to see it out there in the world in all of its glory. So if you come to an architect and say, "What are you working on?" and he's at the blueprint stage, he'll show you the blueprint. That's the building. That's his project. But once the building is built and someone says, "Show me your work," the architect will take you, then, to his building, because he wants to show you what it looks like in all of its grandeur and its glory. What's interesting is, once the building is built, you don't get rid of the blueprint. Right? You want to know what walls you can knock out and which ones you can't, which ones are load-bearing walls, and you have to look at the blueprint. That's the part that shows you how the building works. If you want to know where the inner staircases are and the elevators, oftentimes you have to look at the blueprint.

I'd say the Old Testament relates to the New Testament in much the same way. Jesus's work, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and his being seated at the place of the most highest prestige at the right hand of the Father is the building. It's the manifestation of God's work of redemption. And yet, if we want to understand how that works, we still have to go back to the blueprint. Think about it. We call Jesus the Christ, but you actually don't know what "Christ" means if you just read the New Testament. You have to go back to the Old Testament to see who is this Messiah, which is translated "Christ" in the Greek. Who is this Anointed One who's the Son of David? We don't know that unless we go back to the Old Testament. Likewise, we say Jesus is the High Priest, and the author of Hebrews tells us a little bit about that means. But if we really want to know how Jesus is a High Priest, we have to go back to the blueprint. I'd even argue that if we want to know what redemption is, we have to go back to the story of Exodus so that we can see what redemption looks like. If we want to know what Christian discipline is, we have to go back to the Old Testament and see how God disciplined those he had called to follow him.

You see, without the blueprint, it's really hard to understand—though we may appreciate—the building. When you get into the gospel John's writer—and actually his other writings as well. He didn't just write his gospel. He wrote three letters in the New Testament, as well as the Revelation, the apocalypse that he was given. As a matter of fact, if you're looking to kind of mix up your quiet time life, I would encourage you to just think about studying maybe through the Johannine, as it's called, John's literature. Start with the gospel, read the three letters, read the Book of Revelation, because it really is a cohesive, coherent body of literature.

And John loves to take that Old Testament blueprint and kind of draw it up into the teaching about Jesus, the church, and the future, for that matter. He operates with the blueprint in front of him as he's telling us about the building. And so I want to get to that in a minute, just how he does this, because it's really quite interesting, and I think we see it in the passage we read this morning. But before we do that, we do need to understand just briefly what John is writing about. I think if you read the gospel and if you read his letters and if you read Revelation, you'll start to realize that John does have a couple of themes that he keeps coming back to, over and over again. And they're different themes than Matthew or Mark or even Luke or Paul highlight. They're not at odds, but it's clear that John has kind of an agenda in the way that he's writing about Jesus. And most scholars who study John—they kind of do some sleuthing. You look kind of down into John's books and into his gospel, and you say, "Okay, so what is his agenda? Who is he writing to or writing about?" And a few things become clear.

It seems that the church to whom John is writing is wrestling with some kind of heresy. There are false teachers in the church who are teaching something false about Jesus, and John is coming along, and

he's saying not only is it false—it's a serious falseness. It's darkness, he calls it in his letter of 1 John. He says, "They're walking in darkness." It's not just a mistake. It's not just a minor error. It's a serious, grievous error. And as we read between the lines in John's gospel and his writings, it becomes clear what that teaching is. It seems that these false teachers were teaching two things that were highly problematic.

The first one is this. It seemed that they were teaching that Jesus probably wasn't really fully a man. They were saying something like this. He was a great Rabbi. He was a great teacher. He may have even been kind of an angelic demigod type character, but he probably wasn't really God, and he probably wasn't really a man either. He was probably more something kind of spiritual. After all, men's bodies are made of skin and bones. They sag and they smell. They grow old and they die. Surely, Jesus was too great for that. So they were arguing that Jesus probably wasn't really totally man.

But then on the flipside, they also argued the other side. He also probably wasn't totally God, either, in the sense of being the Creator God. As a matter of fact, it's the kind of argument you'll run into if you ever talk to a Muslim. They'll often say Jesus is great, but do we really want to say he was God? I mean, do we really want to say he was Allah? And these people were saying, you know, God is great, he created the heavens and the earth, he had infinite knowledge and power and presence, and yet you're going to say that this man Jesus was somehow one with that God? And John says, and ought to say as well, absolutely. Absolutely. He is very God, and he is very man. He is whole God, and he is whole man.

And so John, when he's writing, seems to keep hitting these points over and over again. He's really God, and he's really man. And he uses the Old Testament to kind of make that point. He sometimes does it through direct quotations, saying, "This was to fulfill what you read in the Old Testament," and then he'll give you the Old Testament quote. But actually, more importantly—and sometimes more subtly—he uses not straight quotes, but he actually uses what one professor, Richard Heyes, calls "echoes." He uses these kind of oblique references to the Old Testament. He borrows on Old Testament language and brings it in and applies it to Jesus in a way that, if you're attuned to your Old Testament blueprint, you'll hear that he's drawing out the teaching of the Old Testament prophets and Moses, and he's applying it to Jesus in a very unique way.

I'll give you an example that everyone knows—the beginning of John, John 1:1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If you're a Gentile reading this, having never read the Torah, having never read the Old Testament, then that would sound interesting, and you're probably thinking about Greek philosophy and Heraclites and the ideas of logos and other things. But if you're a Hebrew, if you're acquainted with the teachings of the Old Testament, you instantly hear echoes of Genesis 1. Right? "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He's appropriating Genesis 1 and saying, "That's true, but let me unpack for you what that means in light of Jesus. Jesus was also there, and he wasn't just a part of it—he was one with the Creator God." But then he goes on and makes the next point: and then the Word took on flesh and dwelt amongst us. He's very God, but he's also very man.

So you can see, John is using these Old Testament echoes to lay hold of this identify of Jesus Christ. And he does it throughout. Another famous way that he does it in the gospel of John is in the "I Am" statements. There's these eight "I Am" statements throughout the gospel. I am the bread of life. I am the water of life. I am the good Shepherd. I am the True Vine. Now, if you just come at those with sort of a New Testament mentality, you think, "Okay, so what does that mean? He's a good shepherd. He leads his sheep well. Okay. That's good." And he's the true vine. That actually means he's true Israel. You have to go back, by the way, to the Old Testament to know that. In the Old Testament, the vine is always Israel. He says, "I am the true Israel."

But he also keeps saying over and over again this Greek phrase, *ego eimi*, I am. I am. I am. When the Pharisees confront him, he says, "Before Abraham was, I Am." And they pick up stones to kill him,

because they know he's not just making a point about his age, that he lived back in Abraham's day or something. They know that he is identifying with who? He's identifying with God, who told Moses, "I Am. That's my name. I Am that which I Am." So when Jesus claims to be I Am, John is laying hold of those echoes of the Old Testament in saying, he's claiming to be Adonai, Yahweh, the great Lord of the Old Testament, a God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So when we come to this passage today, John 17, I think that we're running into another big echo. And the echo is the verse that we began with for the service, Deuteronomy 6:4-9. It's calls, as Wayne told us, the *shema*. After the first word—the word is "here" in English, but in Hebrew it's *shema*. Here in Israel. *Sh'ma Yis'ra'el Adonai Eloheinu*. The Lord is our God. *Adonai echad*. The Lord is one. And John seems to be laying hold of that great creed of the Old Testament. So what I'd like to do just for a few moments is unpack that creed, and then show how John is appropriating it and updating it to account for the revelation of Jesus himself. Actually, it's not John doing it—it's Jesus doing it.

So let's look at the *shema* just briefly. The logic is pretty straightforward. It says this: "Here, O Israel. The Lord is our God." Now, how is he our God? We don't own the Lord. Moses would never say that. We can't manipulate him. He's not a vending machine deity who we can give the proper sacrifice to and know that he'll respond with what we want and what we need. So, how is he our God? Well, Moses is drawing attention to the idea of covenant—that this heavenly God, this cosmic God, has entered into a relationship with us through his own good pleasure. He initiated it. It's unilateral in that way. We couldn't force him to do it. That's what they were trying to do with the Tower of Babel, by the way. They were trying to force God into a relationship, and he said, "No. I initiate the relationship." So Moses is saying the Lord is our God in the sense that we our bound to him and this wonderful relationship of covenant. He has bound himself to us so that we might pray to him and be confident that he'll listen, because he's our God.

But then it goes on to say this. The Lord is not merely our God. "The Lord is one." When you've read your Old Testament enough, you start to run into interesting things, like the fact that there are local temples often in the towns where people go, and they're kind of small, local shrines. Some towns are even named after the god of their town. Baal Peor is a name that shows up in the Old Testament, because it's this idea that there's a baal god—he's the god of the raincloud—and he's the baal god of the town of Peor. So if you go to Peor, you're going to worship the baal of Peor. You're not going to worship the baal of Hebron or Eshkalan or some other town, because you're in Peor, so that's the god you worship there. And yet the Yahweh of the Mosaic Covenant is not a local deity. He's not a god who just lives in Jerusalem or just lives in Hebron or Dan or in the northern kingdom. He's a cosmic God who is one and whole. So Moses says he's our God, but he's also one. You don't go to Jericho and offer a sacrifice to Yahweh, and if he says no there, then you go to Jerusalem and try the Yahweh of Jerusalem—because there's only one Yahweh, and he's whole, and he loves his wholeness. He loves his simplicity. He loves the fact that he's non-contingent on place or on time, but that he's eternally one. And as a result, there are implications for us, Israelites.

My colleague at RTS Orlando, John Frame, defines theology this way. He says, "Theology is the teaching of Scripture applied into situations in life." And for Moses, that definition of theology is true, because you can't talk about God being our God on one hand and then God being one God on the other hand, and not have implications for our lives. So Moses then says, "So you, therefore, ought to respond in like manner." Because you are his people through covenant, you ought to be whole and one and simple in your love for him. So love the Lord your God with all of your heart—that's your inner self. With all of your soul—or yourself. All of your body—all that is you. So there's kind of inner self, then outer self, and then all of your strength. And your strength would be that work that you do out in the world around you. Your gateposts. Your doors. When you're on the way, doing commerce on the road. The love of Yahweh, who is one, ought to be singular in your life, spreading out from your heart to your outermost places.

So, do you see the logic of the *shema*? Because of who God is, we are supposed to respond in kind, and that in-kindness means that we are to be one as he is one. So notice how Jesus uses Deuteronomy 6 to frame this prayer in John 17. Just to give you a little background, Jesus has just prayed that his disciples—the ones who are at the table with him—will be consecrated for their work. And that’s why this is often called the high priestly prayer—because Jesus is doing more than just asking of the Father. He’s actually interceding on behalf of his disciples and, ultimately, us. He’s playing a priestly role in between God and God’s people. Now, as an aside, you wouldn’t know that this was a priestly prayer. It doesn’t say “priestly” anywhere in it. You wouldn’t know that unless you read the blueprint, the Old Testament. Right? Just to kind of go back on that. I need to keep job security going. I mean, I am a professor of Old Testament, after all.

So, notice how Jesus is—in his high priestly prayer—coming out of this culmination that we just read this morning, verse 20-26. He’s just consecrated his disciples to go out. And he knows—they don’t know, but he knows—that he’s consecrating them for their deaths. Just as he is about to go to the cross, as he sends them out as apostles, many of them will die. He’s consecrating their bodies for the grave, which is what it means to pick up your cross and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

But then he lays hold of the *shema*, and he ends his prayer in this very interesting way. You see, here Jesus gives voice to the relationship between the member of the Godhead, particularly the Father and the Son. This is not merely a prayer of a human to a deity, but rather, it’s a prayer between divine persons. Jesus explicitly says the *shema* is still true. You, Father, and I, are one. *Adonai echad*, the Lord is one, is still true, even in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. And he says on the grounds of that profound intimacy between the Father and the Son, “I am asking these things on behalf of my people—the people you have given me, Father.”

So, you see, this is a highly Trinitarian prayer. We just prayed the Nicene Creed, and it’s in the Nicene Creed that you see the doctrine of the Trinity laid out so clearly. And it’s based on passages like this one, where Jesus is saying God is still one, but that includes the Father and the Son and, ultimately, the Spirit. So let’s take a little bit of a look at how Jesus uses the *shema*.

While some of Jesus’s previous claims to deity—the “I Am” statements, for instance, or “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”—they’re even still a bit ambiguous. Here, there’s no ambiguity at all. Jesus says, “You and I are one.” This is the same thing he says, by the way, in John 14, which Randy preached from just a couple weeks ago, I believe. So this was a common statement of Jesus, that he and the Father were actually unified in their divinity.

However, he’s not just making a statement about his oneness with the Father in kind of a new way, but rather, he’s taking the language of the *shema* and he’s updating it to account for himself. We see instances like this elsewhere in the New Testament. As a matter of fact, Paul takes Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the *shema*, and he updates it to account for Jesus as well, in 1 Corinthians 8:5-6. He says this:

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

You see, the truth of God’s oneness is not an abstract ideological point, but it has direct bearing now on his people. Just like the *shema* said God’s oneness should require a response from us, so is Jesus in the high priestly prayer saying, “My oneness with the Father should require a response from my people.” Notice, again, Christ is interceding between God and his people.

But if we don’t stop to consider the blueprint, we don’t stop to consider the *shema*, we may miss how Jesus is using it. We may actually miss kind of how world-historical this thing that Jesus is saying is. Now, think about the *shema* for a moment. It says the Lord is our God and he’s one, therefore we should

respond with wholeness in our love and in our heart and in ourself and in the world around us. And yet the *shema* doesn't say how that is. It doesn't explain how God's oneness can somehow evoke in us oneness for ourselves. As a matter of fact, all Moses offers is a sacrifice for when we fail. However, Jesus, in appropriating the *shema*, is not only updating it to account for himself, but he's explaining how it works. He says, "I am the connection between the two. I am the one who is one with the Father, and I am the one who is one with my people, that they may be one in us, Father, as you and I are one in one another." You see, for Christ, the plurality that finds unity in the Trinity—you understand that? The plurality of persons that finds unity in the substance of God is analogical to the wellspring out of which flows the unity of God's church. As we are a plurality of persons, Christ is saying you are also in a way to be one in my body.

Now, this sort of oneness, this unity, is not meant to be cold or merely notional. Given my position at the seminary, I get to participate in a lot of ecumenical events. I get asked to participate, and oftentimes I go. And I think generally it's a good idea for the church to be seeking unity. I think that's a good thing. However, more often than not, those meetings often become something like a sanctified coffee clatch. Right? Out of which we release a statement afterwards about our choice of sweeteners and that kind of thing, and show our unity in gathering together. And those aren't the most useful kind of ecumenical gatherings.

In John 17, we see that this unity that God is calling us to is not just notional. It's not just sitting in a room together, but it's to be marked by warm and abiding love. We're called to loving communion with one another. We should always be drawn toward unity of one another. There ought to be a strange attraction that you feel towards other followers of Jesus Christ. And that attraction is based on three—I would say—three very profound reasons.

The first one is this—the lordship of Christ. We who gather here today all claim that our Lord, our highest authority, is Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the true Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. We are united in this deep loyalty that Jesus says must be undivided. When we think about the divisions amongst us, we ought to always consider, is this a division that raises to the level of breaking communion with another who is loyal to King Jesus? You see, the lordship of Jesus Christ is an incredible force. It's an incredible power for Christian unity. We show this unity to our Lord by seeking one another out, by pursuing community, by developing intimate relationship with one another so that we can be there when the suffering happens, so that we can walk with one another through the suffering and through the failure and through the restoration, so that we can be there when we go into our individual lives and we open those doors in our heart behind which are such great pain and such great suffering and wounding, and we can stand there next to each other, and we can hold up—as the author of Hebrews says—the drooping hands. We can support the weak knees.

The apostle Paul says this, and he writes from prison to the church in Ephesus, "I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner that is worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit of Christ and the bond of peace." As Paul is chained up in a prison, that's what he's thinking about. He's thinking about how they can be one in their humility and their patience and their gentleness.

So we're bound together in this idea, this loyalty, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But we're not just bound together by that. We're also bound together, as Paul just mentioned in his letter, by the Spirit of Christ. So the lordship of Christ binds us, but the Spirit of Christ also binds us. You see, this is a fact of the Christian faith, that if you are in Christ, if you can give a faithful and true confession of faith and partake of this table that we're about to partake of, then you already have the Spirit of the living Christ within you. And that is a very existential, experiential connection that you have with everybody else in this room. As a matter of fact, we are of similar species as those who are regenerate by the Spirit. We share the same spiritual DNA of the body of Christ. And when we gather together in worship and in

prayer, we're giving expression to that connection, to that solidarity that we have as those who are bearers, those who are temples of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul again writes in his letter to the Ephesians, "There is one body, and there is one Spirit." Notice that. Hear that. Hear that clarity. There's no caveat. There's one body, and there's one Spirit. "Just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

I would say that one of the most clear expressions to our unity in the Spirit is what we're about to do this morning. Through the power of baptism, we enter into this family or we sign and seal the entrance into this family, this one covenant body. But it's through the Lord's table that we rejuvenate and we regularly renew ourselves unto the Lord, but also unto one another. We join at one table. This is not a man's table. This God's table, and we come before it as one.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a great German pastor and theologian, talks about, I think very clearly, what is the third way in which we're bound together. We're bound together by Jesus' lordship. We're bound together by his Spirit. And then thirdly, we're bound together by the eternity that he has secured for us—the eternity that he has secured for us, his people. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing to a divided church, a church that faced opposition as the Third Reich was rising and the German church was having to decide, are we going to go with the Third Reich or are we going to oppose it? He wrote about the unity of God's people, and he said this:

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through Jesus Christ. What does this mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.

You see, this is the point I would like to drive home. Christian community is not something that we're trying to make happen. It is a fact, just like the Trinity is a fact. We are one people of God. Jesus is not trying to make himself one with the Father. He is one with the Father. Likewise, because the Son has asked of the Father that we be one, we can trust that we also are unified. Our only job now is repent and live unto that end—unto the end of who we really, truly are. It's not an ideal, but it's a fact already attained.

One of the unique aspects of my job is that I get to go out and teach pastors in a variety—different parts of the world. And one of the more exciting places is in Turkey, where we gather pastors from North Africa and the Middle East—all of whom, interesting, are converts from Islam into Christianity. So they can't go to the local seminaries in their regions. And because of that, because of their *persona non grata* status, we take them out over to Turkey where they're relatively free and there's a relatively secure environment, and we give them a seminary training. And I've been doing that now for about ten or eleven years, and I can tell you, it changes the way you think about the Christian life. When I sing "Amazing Grace" and I get to that last stanza where it says, "When we've been there ten thousand years / Bright shining as the sun," I think about the fact that I'll probably be standing next to an Algerian when I sing that, when I'm looking into the ten thousandth year of Christ's glory and knowing that we've only just begun. There'll probably be a person from the People's Republic of China worshipping next to me. There's probably going to be someone from Algeria. There'll probably be someone from sub-Saharan Africa worshipping next to me. And I'll be more one with them than I am with most of the people who live in my neighborhood in McLean, Virginia.

The last time—a couple years ago, rather, when I was there in Turkey, I had the opportunity to preach—which is often the case—at a local church. And we were on the bus driving into town to preach

there. And as we're driving in—and it's me and about fifteen North African guys, and we're talking in about ten different languages happening in the bus—one of the leaders turns to be and says, "Oh, by the way, we need to tell you, last week when we were here for church there was a little riot." And I'm sitting in the bus. I'm the only obvious white guy in the bus, already kind of a point of interest. And as I'm about to go preach on Mark 2:1-12, a guy says, "Oh, yeah, there was a riot last time we had a church service." And I said, "Okay." So I kind of took it in, kind of kept my face.

Now, we arrived at the church, and right out in front of the church there was a group of youths who were not members of the church. And they're not talking. They're just smoking cigarettes and just kind of looking at us. And they're standing around a car that is incredibly beat up. I mean, it does not have much of a future in this life, this car that they're standing around. And I'm looking at the car, and I'm looking at them, and I'm kind of walking in smiling, and we're going into the church. And as is the case in many churches in this part of the world, even though the room is probably a quarter of the size of this room, we have a microphone, and the volume is jacked up to eleven. It's blowing out the windows. Everybody in the neighborhood can hear me preaching, can hear us singing. And behind me as I'm preaching is a big glass window. And out on the street in front of the glass window is this car. And the youths are gone. And I'm thinking, "This is my last sermon." I'm waiting for that glass to come ripping through at the speed of sound and tear through the whole congregation. And honestly, for the first half of the sermon, I'm just trying to get the words out and preach my sermon.

But something happened in the middle of that sermon, as I'm preaching to this gathering of about forty—by the way, most of them are Iraqi, Syrian refugees in this church, and there's men and there's women and there's children who have just fled for their lives and have gathered in this refugee town—and I'm preaching to them the living words of Jesus Christ, and I'm thinking, "Hear me. Hear this gospel. This might be the last time we get to talk about it." And I felt a bond and a unity with them that I honestly, probably had never felt before in a preaching situation. I'm looking at the children's face, and I'm saying, "I know you're distracted, but hear this Word this time." Let us all step into the eschaton. Let us all step into eternity together with the words of the gospel of our lips. And I got a glimpse that night of why, that night, as Jesus is about to be betrayed, as he's about to go to the cross, the thing that's on his heart, the thing that's on his mind, is the oneness of his people. Let them be one. Let them be united in me. Let's close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son. We thank you, Lord, that you did not merely give him to us, but that you gave us his words and his teaching, that you gave us the apostles whom he sent out, that we might believe, as he prayed, because of their word—because of their good report. I pray, Heavenly Father, that you would bless us now as we come before your table. Give us hearts that discern the body of Christ. Give us hearts, Lord, that come to you in repentance and joy, knowing that we cannot be condemned, though we can only be received through Jesus Christ our Lord. It's in his name we pray. Amen.