

John 17:20-26

7th Sunday of Easter

May 27, 2001

Memorial Day. A parade, a band playing, flags waving, speeches. Picnics, family gatherings, shopping circulars, sales. Yard work, no garbage collection, probably some rain, the Indians playing the Yankees.

Memorial Day. And most of us may never get around to thinking about soldiers and sailors who have given their lives in the cause of freedom.

My guess is that even as some of them were giving their lives, they themselves were not thinking of freedom. Saving a friend, saving their own necks, trying to take a hill, a village, a field, following orders, trying to live for another day, their hearts and their minds were focused on many things. Some were volunteers, some were draftees, some were in for a few years, some in for a career. But together their service and sacrifice has meant freedom for us.

On Memorial Day no matter what their motives, no matter what the circumstances of their serving, they are all gathered as those who have given themselves for freedom.

Jesus prayer that we have before us today gathers us into the larger plans and purposes of God. Just as soldiers may not be thinking of the cause of freedom in the heat of battle, so you and I as we live out our lives day to day may not be giving much thought to what God is trying to accomplish for the world. Paying the bills, keeping the children safe and well fed and out of harm's way is what is on our mind. Helping those we love, supporting the church and the ministries we think important. Making worship more meaningful, helping out when a neighbor is sick, or a friend's mother is dying – we are not trying to be heroic – just doing our duty they way a sailor does his duty. But Jesus' prayer gives us a glimpse of the larger vision.

“I ask not only on behalf of these (the disciples who were with Jesus at the table in the upper room) 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, that they may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

That they may all be one.

Sometimes it is clear that we are all one. Most often it happens in worship. All the voices joined as one in confessing our faith in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Sometimes. And sometimes that very same moment of confessing is a moment that makes clear how little we are one as one voice is trying to speed us all up and another dragging behind.

Sometimes a church is united in ministry. Some have hammers in their hands building a house for Habitat, some give the money for the nails to build that house, some serve lunch for the workers, some pray for the family that will live in the house, some will gather at the service of dedication and blessing for the house and the family. Sometimes a church is united in ministry.

Sometimes the church is not. This one thinks the money should not be spent on strangers until we have cared for the building that is our responsibility. Another is unhappy with being asked to supply food one more time – another is facing a time of sorrow and no one seems to care. We may even become like soldiers who lose sight of the larger purpose and commit atrocities within the battle for freedom.

Jesus' prayer is that we would be one. Jesus' prayer is that you and I would be in God the way Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Jesus. One goal – to love.

Jesus prayed, "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.

The love of the Father for the Son in you and in me, in our thoughts and our words and in our deeds, in our decisions and hopes and sacrifices.

The big idea is easy but how does it translate into whether or not to replace the carpet in the sanctuary? How does it translate into what we say about one another over Sunday noon lunch? How is the love of God evident when you are feeling forgotten by your sisters and brothers in Christ in your time of need?

Yet our love for God comes down to these places just as the soldier's battle for freedom comes down to a soldier cleaning a rifle, a nurse dressing a wound, a secretary typing a memo.

Jesus prayed, “The glory you have given me I have given them so that they may be one as we are one.”

Jesus has given you the glory that he received from the Father. That glory is his love poured out for you on the cross. Jesus held nothing back but gave all of himself, all of his love to you. Jesus gives all of himself, all of his love to you this day at the table. His own Body, his own blood given and shed for you. His love is his glory, now his love is given to you.

To us. That we may be one.

I don't think that Memorial Day was begun for the sake of the soldiers and sailors who were dead. They are not changed by the parades and the flowers but we may be. As we remember them we may realize that the battle for freedom is ours to fight even this day.

The same is true of Jesus' prayer. He did not pray it for his sake but that we who listen in on his prayer might remember what our lives are about. God's love is at the very center – not money, not pretty things, not a successful program but God's love. You are chosen by Christ to receive God's love and to be God's love and to become one in God's love. Remember, always remember.