

An Exegetical Study of John 17:20-26

David N. Rutschow

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Introduction

Great things have been said about the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel. Joh. Ylvisaker describes Martin Luther's feelings about the chapter this way: "However simple and unadorned, it is nevertheless impossible to fathom its profound significance, its wealth, and its compass"; and Ylvisaker goes on to say: "Spener... would never preach on the text, because he confessed that he did not understand it, and that its true significance, in his opinion, exceeded the measure of faith and discernment which the Lord generally confers upon His own during their pilgrimage on earth" (*The Gospels*, p. 687).

Those are daunting words for one assigned to lead a study of a portion of this chapter and to also make homiletical suggestions from it. Yet, like all of Scripture, the words of this chapter were written for our learning and encouragement. The verses assigned for this paper are also intended to serve as a text for our preaching, because they are appointed as the Gospel lesson for Easter 7 in Year C of the ILCW readings. Let us proceed, then, confident of the Holy Spirit's enlightenment and guidance.

Context

Little needs to be said about that in this gathering. Jesus is in conversation with his heavenly Father. It is Maundy Thursday night. It is after the foot washing, institution of Holy Communion, and Jesus' closing words of warning and assurance. He was literally on his way out the door of the Upper Room, headed to the Garden of Gethsemane to meet his captors. Because they went along with him, the disciples no doubt heard every word of Jesus' prayer.

It is often referred to as his high priestly prayer. He began by praying for himself (vs. 1-5) and then for the disciples, that they might be strong in the world and remain pure from it (vs. 6-19). Jesus' thoughts and prayer then take another turn.

Verses 20, 21

20 Οὐ περὶ τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ, 21 ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὧσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὧσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

Translation:

"However, not only concerning these do I make request, but also concerning those believing in me through their word, that all of them may be one- just as you, Father (are one) in me and I (am one) in you- and that they may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me."

Exegetical notes:

erotao= ask(a question), inquire, request as an equal

dia tou logou= genitive of means

hina clauses= 1) Object(what Jesus was requesting)

2) Appositional (to first *hina* clause)

3) Purpose

aposteilas= aorist, 2nd singular of *apostello*

Jesus' mind was always very much on the people before and around him, but he makes it clear here that he was also thinking of people beyond his mobile classroom. He had stated that before (10:16: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also."). And if the disciples, soon to become apostles, were wondering what would happen when they left the classroom and went out to teach in Jesus' place, they had their answer here. People who heard them would believe in Jesus with them. In fact, Jesus says here that people would continue (present participle) to believe in him through their teaching.

What a marvelous scenario: Sinners believing in Jesus! There is nothing greater or more beautiful in this life, because people who believe in Jesus have the grace of God's full forgiveness here in time and everlasting life and salvation in heaven. Keep that picture in mind as we proceed!

It would all take place, Jesus said, "through" or "by means of" the apostles' word. Now we know it would not really be their word. It would be Jesus' word, because before he ascended he would tell the disciples to preach and teach everything he had preached and taught. The apostles' word would also be God the Father's Word, because that is what Jesus preached and taught ("I gave them the words you gave me," verse 8).

"Through their word" (genitive of means) tells us the Word of Jesus and the Father would be the power, the force that would bring about believing. That Word is what caused "these" (the disciples) to believe in Jesus, and that same Word, spoken by the disciples would bring other people to believe in Jesus with them.

How many people, Jesus didn't say, but it would be more than a handful- yes, more than a hundred- because Jesus refers to those believers as "all"- in other words, a large, indefinite number. But now check out the Greek and see what follows "all".

It's *hen*, the cardinal number for "one." Do you see the contrast of the two words placed side by side? "All(many)" are immediately narrowed down to "one". Jesus has now introduced the subject of unity, and the kind of unity Jesus has in mind for believers was one of the questions the Program Committee of our conference wanted this paper to address.

These verses give us a well-rounded answer, beginning with the gender of the Greek word for "one." It is neuter, which tells us Jesus was thinking of believers all being one thing- a unit, one body. In his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine says the *hen* signifies "union and concord" (p. 137).

Jesus had introduced that thought back in verse 11. After saying he was leaving the world but the disciples would be remaining in the world and would experience trouble at the hands of the world, Jesus prayed that "they may be one"- a unit or body against the world.

A unit to what extent? The words of St. Paul might come to mind: "There is one body, and one Spirit..., one hope..., one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:4-6). Those words describe the Holy Christian Church (the communion of saints!). But a communion to what degree? Jesus answers the question about extent or degree of unity between believers with the words: *Kathos* (to the degree that, just as) the Father is one in Jesus and Jesus is one in the Father.

That Greek word is a tip-off. It tells us a comparison or parallel is coming up. We discovered that in verse 18. There Jesus said he was sending the disciples into the world just as the Father had sent him into the world. Here the comparison is believers being united with each other just as the Father and the Son are in (united with) one another and believers also being in the Father and the Son.

Like other things mentioned in these verses, Jesus had spoken previously about the unity between the Father and him (10:30,38; 14:11,20,23). Those and other passages tell us the unity is one of nature, will and purpose. They see, interpret, understand, and approach things exactly the same. It is unity in everything. The unity is perfect. It is 24/7.

"Impossible," people will say. "Believers united with each other that way? Not on this side of the grave!" We understand those sentiments because what people say is true: "All the churches just can't seem to get together"; but Jesus' words to his Father are plain: "I request that all of them be one (as we are, Father) and that they be one in us."

We will wait until later to comment on believers being one in the Father and the Son. At this point, suffice it to say that Scripture teaches believers are in an intimate union with Jesus and his Father. We have the words of Paul that we are all sons of God through faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:26). Think, too, of Jesus' words that people who help or neglect the needs of believers are helping or neglecting Jesus (Mt. 25, especially verses 40 and 45). There is also our Lord's question to Christian-persecuting Saul: "Why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4)

We need to look more at the phrase "that they all may be one." The word is "be" in the sense of currently and ongoing. The word is not "become." If Jesus had wanted to say that, the word would have been *genotai*.

Believers are one. Note the comments made a few paragraphs ago about the Holy Christian Church. Go back to the opening verses of this chapter, where Jesus spoke of the disciples being "out of the world" (that unit, body or group separate from the world) and also being the Father's (vs. 6). Jesus' concern here is that believers might continue to be united. His request is that they would be united in the way already described: as he and the Father are one in and with each other.

Strictly speaking, that is not going to happen on this sin-stained and sin-strained earth, and Jesus knew that. He knew that his unity with the Father is one of a kind, because he knew he and the Father are God but believers are not. So, strictly speaking, sinful mortals cannot duplicate the unity of the divine persons.

The Greek word *kathos* also tells us that. While it can be translated "just as, even as" and even "to the degree that", others agree with R. C. H. Lenski who says *kathos* "expresses analogy, and not identity" (*The Interpretation of John*, p. 1155).

Lenski and Prof. John P. Meyer describe the unity of the Father and the Son as "interpenetration." Commenting on these verses, Professor Meyer wrote: "Jesus compares the unity he requests for us to the oneness existing between himself and his Father. That is not merely a moral unity of understanding and will, an agreement in judging matters and determining the course of action to be followed; no, it is an essential oneness of mutual interpenetration. The Father and the Son are *hen*; they are one Being, *homoousioi*. The oneness of the Father and the Son is unique. It is found only once in the world. It cannot be duplicated. The oneness Jesus requests for the church is not the equivalent of the oneness with him and the Father; it is not an exact copy, but it is to be patterned after it. Thus the unity of the church is not merely one of common interest, a community of opinion and striving. The members of the church, as they are by faith united with the head, who is Christ, are by the same faith united with one another in Christ's mystical body, the church" (*Essays on Church Fellowship*, p. 106).

In other words, the unity of the Father and the Son is a model. The unity of believers with each other that Jesus requests is to resemble the unity of the Father and the Son. In view of the total unity of the latter, it can already be said at this point in our study that the Lord of the Church wants unity among believers to be unity in much, not little- on more, not less. He wants unity that is tight, not loose.

Jesus' request for unity among believers does not mean individuality is a bad thing. To some extent it is a good thing. Paul in his letters to Rome and Corinth tells us believers are like a human body- different members with different functions, each doing their own things with and for one another. That is a good thing. It is also a God-given thing that serves the body and the body's mission well.

So does unity. The third *hina* clause brings that out as Jesus expresses the reason or purpose for his unity request: "So that the world may believe that you sent me."

This is in stark contrast to what we often hear from many quarters of the religious world today: "Insistence on tight unity is killing the church." Very recently I heard people say that things like close Communion "keep the church from growing. They make our congregations closed islands." Yet Jesus prayed for unity so the world would believe (come to the conviction) that he was sent (commissioned) by the Father!

Mention has already been made of the fact that close and total unity is not common in the world. That has always been the case and, sad to say, always will be. But inject the kind of unity into the world that Jesus was requesting here, and what happens? It is noticed. It gets people thinking- even brings about a change of thinking.

We know that from Bible history. The unity of confession and compassion of the early New Testament church drew the attention of many outsiders. Many of them, who thought little of Jesus or had not thought about him at all, began to think the Leader of the “way” those people claimed they were on was really somebody!

Martin Luther commented on the flip side, which is disunity, saying that soon after the time of the apostles, “This heresy arose here, and that heresy arose there. The church was so miserably divided that no one knew where the Christians were...” The great reformer could see the same things happening in the 16th century: “The Gospel was going forward so splendidly that it was a pleasure to behold, but then Muenzer soon came into the picture. Thereupon the pope said: ‘Well, under us everything was one head and beautifully quiet; now everything is split apart...’” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 3, p. 1406).

Another time Luther wrote: “There were so many who originally supported us and joined the cause of the Gospel against the pope that it might have seemed for a while that we were going to have the whole world on our side. Just when everything seemed to be in full swing, our own people went ahead to cause us more anguish than all the princes, kings, and emperors could have done... Our enemies...now cry out against us: ‘There you can see what their teaching is, because they are not unified among themselves. The Holy Spirit cannot be with them...’” (op. cit., p. 1412).

That is still true today. No one is much or long interested in a group or unit that is not unified, that does not appear to have its act together.

Individual actions speak loudly. Group actions speak louder still. Complete unity and harmony among Christians is an action that speaks volumes to a disjointed, contentious world. Commenting on these verses, Ylvisaker wrote: “(Jesus) does not allude merely to the inner unity of faith, hope and love; for this unity is not visible to the world, but also to the outward bond of union as an expression of fellowship in the same mind and in the same judgement (1 Cor. 1:10)” (op. cit., p. 689-690). Lenski adds: “The idea is not that the whole world will finally believe, nor that the power which works faith in men is the oneness of the church... The power that creates faith lies wholly in the Word. Yet it makes a great difference how the church acts in bringing the Word to men” (op. cit., p. 1158, 1159).

One question still needs to be addressed in these verses, and it is a big question: What did Jesus see as the basis or criteria for unity among believers? Again, the answer is very clear.

Back in verse eight Jesus said he had given the disciples the words of God and the disciples had accepted those words. In verse six he told his Father the disciples “have obeyed your Word,” and in verse eight Jesus says they accepted and obeyed in the face of the world hating them, because they were not of the world.

The reason they were not of the world was their acceptance of and obedience to the Word of the Father. We have already noted they would be joined by other believers, and that those believers would become believers through the words (utterances) of the apostles, which would be all the words of Jesus and of his Father.

In verse 17 Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify the disciples. Our Savior also specified the means that would accomplish that: the truth of God’s Word.

Here in verse 21 Jesus connects believers being one with being in him and the Father. The latter is what brings about the former. Being one with other believers occurs after we are one with Jesus and his Father. Then we have a common faith, hope, baptism and Lord with others who have been brought to faith in Jesus. When we are “in Christ Jesus”, connected to him by faith, we are a new creation. We are no more children of wrath but sons of God, which means we are in the Father.

The connection is faith, and the bonding agent is the Word, because without the Word there is no faith. So the basis for the unity Jesus wants believers to have is the thing that brought them together with him and one another in the first place: His Word; and not some of it, but all of it. The less of God’s Word that is kept in the picture, the less likely that we will have the kind of unity Jesus desires.

Please allow just a couple more quotes from men far more learned than I. The first is from Lenski’s commentary on John’s Gospel: “It is true, indeed, that even the smallest measure of faith joins us to God and to

the mystical body of the church. But that is only the beginning. Our apprehension of the Word is to grow, the range and the inner power of our faith in that Word likewise. As this advances and is perfected, our oneness with God and with Christ and our oneness with each other becomes more and more what Jesus wants it to be... The more we have of the Word in our hearts by faith and thus also ruling in our lives, the more perfect is our oneness... We are as much one with each other and with God and with Christ as we believe, teach, live and confess all that is contained in the Word. Every deviation in doctrine, life, and practice mars and disrupts our oneness and hinders the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer" (p. 1157).

That is supported by William Hendriksen: "Believers...should always yearn for peace, *but never for peace at the expense of the truth*" (emphasis his), for 'unity' which has been gained by means of such a sacrifice is not worthy of the name" (*Exposition of the Gospel According to John: Commentary on Chapters 7-21*, p. 365).

Mess with the Word- omit or even downplay parts of it, agree to disagree on or to not mention this teaching or that- and the faith coalition with other believers and with Jesus and the Father is weakened. It becomes a sham. It is really not unity. That is what Jesus' request in these verses clearly says.

Professor Meyer summed it up far better: "Jesus prays for the real unity of the Christians, one based on the Word of God, in order that in that way the world may be won for his kingdom. Since Jesus stressed the unity so strongly...we cannot easily overestimate its importance. And since Jesus links success in the one task which he assigned to his Church, namely bringing the world...under the saving influence of his Gospel, so closely to the unity of the church, we who desire to bring people to faith in Jesus will naturally make every effort to cultivate such unity. In this sense, our motto for our church work will be 'Unity first.' And since this unity is inseparably linked to the Word- it is produced by the Word alone, it is impossible without the Word, it begins to crumble when the Word is violated or neglected- our motto of unity first is the same as: the Word alone, *sola Scriptura*. Any unity that is not achieved through the Word, and rest not securely on the Word, is not a source of strength but of weakness; it does not make for success in our work of saving the world, but for failure" (*op. cit.*, p. 108).

A word is in order on that word "request" (*erotao*). It is the word used when the person requesting something is on "footing of equality or familiarity" with the person of whom the request is made (Vine, *op. cit.*, p. 79), as opposed to the petitioner being of lesser position. Then the word would be *aiteo*.

The Son, one in essence with the Father, makes another request.

Verse 22, 23

22 *καὶ γὰρ τὴν δόξαν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι δέδωκα αὐτοῖς, ἵνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν· 23 ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν, ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας.*

Translation:

The glory you have given me I have also given to them, so that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me- that they may be (finally) perfected/finished into one (completely one)- in order that the world may (really) know that you have sent me and have loved them just as you have loved me.

Exegetical notes:

dochsa= brightness, splendor, radiance; also honor, renown

dedoka= 1st person singular perfect of *didomi*, to give or entrust; perfect conveys idea of definitely given to Jesus, but still in his possession

hina= introduces purpose clauses

teleiomenoi= periphrastic perfect subjunctive of *teleioo*

ginoskay= 3rd person singular subjunctive of *ginosko* (to know, learn of, find out)

In the previous section we concluded that Jesus wants unity among Christians to be based on all of Scripture. These verses verify that conclusion, indicating it is not overdrawn.

Again the Greek word *kathos* testifies to that. It appears twice, again telling us to be looking for comparisons or close parallels; only here they are intensified by the verbs that follow them.

The first verb comes from the same Greek word that appears in Jesus' sixth word on the cross: "It is finished." We know that utterance literally means, "been brought to the goal, completely wrapped up, everything covered." That is how Jesus wants unity among his believers to be: not partial, but complete, full circle; which translates into unity that is full, covering everything.

The second verb in these verses is generally just translated "know". However, it has the idea of taking in knowledge, appreciating and approving of it, and coming to real/complete understanding. In verse 22 Jesus said he wants the world to believe the Father sent him. Here Jesus says he wants the world to really know, to really understand that the Father sent him and that the Father loves the world just as he loves his son Jesus.

How do you really know and understand something? How does anyone really know and understand something? Not by having just a few facts and a little information, but by having all the facts and full information. How is the world really going to know Jesus is heaven-sent and that God really loves the world? As Jesus sees it here, the world will know from the unity that believers have and express.

If that unity is on just a few things, the world will not know. It won't really, fully know Jesus was sent by God and God truly loves the world. In point of fact, the world can't really know, because it won't be getting the real- the full, complete- picture.

A third witness offering testimony here is the Greek word translated "glory." Originally that word meant opinion or estimate, which developed into honor resulting from a good opinion (cp. the English word "renown"). In the New Testament the word is often used for "the nature and acts of God, what he essentially is and does..." (Vine, *op. cit.*, p. 153).

Jesus says the Father gave him glory. That gift could not have been given to the divine nature of Jesus, because his divine nature was and is true God from eternity. The glory of God was given to Jesus' human nature. The perfect tense means the gift was given at a definite time in the past, but the recipient was/is still in receipt of it.

The point in time when the human nature of Jesus received divine glory was the Incarnation. At that point and from that time on, the nature and acts of God- what God essentially is and does- were bestowed on Jesus' human nature, which is why Paul was inspired to write that in the man Jesus of Nazareth "all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

To use the words of that same apostle, that is a mystery. It is an amazing, wonderful thing, but there is another mystery here. Jesus told the Father: "The glory you gave me I have given to believers."

Our human nature is dumbfounded by that statement. It wonders when Jesus gives believers the glory the Father gave him, because we don't feel very glorious. The answer does not appear in these verses, but it is certainly found in a number of other passages.

Early on in his gospel John wrote: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). Peter talked about seeing it, too, but in his second letter he stated plainly that he had received that glory: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (1:3,4).

The words from Peter speak of believers as a group or unit separated from the world, and those verses touch on the time when believers received divine glory. Paul spells it out more clearly: "Those (God) predestined, he also called; those he called he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). Believers come into possession of divine glory when they are called to faith, and the process continues: "We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

If the Holy Spirit is involved, we also know the means being employed: the Word of God; and if our Lord wants the glory to be ever-increasing in all of us believers here on earth, then unity on all of God's Word is essential.

These verses close much like the previous two, expressing the purpose Jesus has in mind for this kind of unity among believers. His kind of unity draws people away from the world and all its ways. It draws them into godly, Christ-like love, humility, and patient hope. It draws them to speak everything God's Word says about Jesus and his mission. It draws believers out and away as a unit, very visible to the world, which in turn plainly and loudly tells the world there is someone whose influence, power and love are really great and something and much more than human.

We agree with Lenski: "The realization of this purpose, the actual completion of oneness, is attained in every age in all those believers who unite in accepting the Word as they should. Those who in any way deviate from the word hinder the consummation of the oneness and prevent the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer as far as they are concerned" (*op. cit.*, p. 1163)

The four verses covered to this point answer the questions assigned to the essayist: What kind of unity does Jesus desire and on what is this unity based? However, in the next three verses Jesus takes the matter of glory to its conclusion, and we will be well served by hearing him out.

Verse 24

24 Πάτερ, ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, θέλω ἵνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ κάκεινοι ὦσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ, ἵνα θεωρῶσιν τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἐμήν, ἣν δέδωκάς μοι ὅτι ἠγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

Translation:

Father, what you have given me, I desire that where I am those also may be with me, in order that they may gaze upon the glory that is mine, which you have given to me, because you have loved me before the foundation of the world.

Exegetical notes:

thelo= to wish, desire, want something; to resolve, will

dedokas= 2nd person singular perfect (past act with continuing, present effect)

hina= introduces objective statement (what Jesus desires)

theorosin= 3rd person plural subjunctive of *theoreo* (to be a spectator at, to carefully peruse with the eye (present tense implies ongoing action))

Note two word changes in this verse. Jesus changes from the verb *erotao* to *thelo*, the change being from requesting to expressing a desire. It is the same word used by Paul when he says that God our Savior wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Knowing how deeply God wants that and how dearly he paid to establish the saving truth of the Gospel, we can safely conclude that the desire expressed in this verse by Jesus is a very strong one.

Another word change seems to be on either side of *thelo*. Jesus goes from *ho* to *ekeinoi* ("what" to "those"). Jesus is still thinking about believers as a unit and then also of believers individually.

Jesus' desire is simple: with him. That's where he desires believers to be: with him in heaven. He had expressed that earlier in the evening, saying: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn. 14:3). It is the desire expressed long before by Job—namely that all of us believers be spectators, seeing the full radiance of our Lord with our own two eyes, and what a display it will be!

Glory here is Jesus' beauty as the world's Savior from sin, the adulation of saints and angels, and the honor of the Father. It is the full splendor and radiance Jesus has in heaven—like the grand finale of Fourth of July fireworks on Chicago's lakefront; only this display never gets over and no spectator has to leave.

Something else happens when the Lord's glory we shall see. The giving of glory to us ceases, because our bodies will be transformed like the glorious body of Jesus (Phil. 3:21).

"I desire to have all believers see that. It pleases me to have each believer gaze on that." That is what Jesus is saying. We desire that, too. Will the Father honor Jesus' desire? To be sure, because the Father has always loved him (and, we might add, has always loved the world, too). That is why the Father gave Jesus his glory.

There are other assurances:

Verses 25,26

25 *πάτερ δίκαιε, καὶ ὁ κόσμος σε οὐκ ἔγνω, ἐγὼ δὲ σε ἔγνω, καὶ οὗτοι ἔγνωσαν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας· 26 καὶ ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ γνωρίσω, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς.*

Translation:

Righteous Father, both (or, "two things:") the world did not acknowledge you, but I acknowledged you; and these acknowledged that you have sent me. I also made known to them your name and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I may be in them.

Exegetical notes:

egno, egnon, egnosan = all aorists of *ginosko* (to know in the sense of take in, to appreciate and acknowledge)

hina= introduces purpose clauses

egnorisa= 1st person singular aorist of *gnorizo* (to reveal, make known)

onoma= name in the sense of making someone known

Some commentators say these verses form the epilogue or doxology of Jesus' prayer. Others say that began in verse 24. The former seems more likely, because here Jesus makes no request, nor does he present a desire. Instead, he expresses confidence in his Father.

He calls the Father "righteous", which means the Father is just, without prejudice or partiality. His nature and his acts agree perfectly. What a comforting thought as we approach the throne of grace and as we think about what lies ahead in life. God will act exactly as we know him- each and every moment.

Translating the aorists in verse 25 as "know/knew" would pair and play nicely with "made/make known", as they do in the Greek (*ginosko/gnorizo*), but as noted above, there is more to the verb *ginosko* than "know." Hence the translation, "acknowledge."

The double *kai* in the same verse comes out rather awkward in English translation. Commentators do it in different ways. Hendriksen translates "though...and." Lenski goes with "both...and." The idea the Greek is trying to convey is there are two things here, two contrasting things: 1) The world did not acknowledge God, but Jesus did; and 2) the disciples acknowledged God as the one who sent Jesus.

Chapter and verse can be cited for both. The first is found in a fairly lengthy section of John 8 (cf. especially vs. 19-24 and 54,55). The disciples' acknowledging Jesus is found eight chapters later (16:30).

What is Jesus' point in mentioning this? It is perhaps an expression of his confidence in approaching his Father on behalf of the disciples (i.e., he could do that because they, like him, acknowledged the Father). It should have brought to the disciples' minds Jesus' earlier words about him acknowledging to the Father all those who acknowledge the Son before men (Mt. 10:32). They were hearing him actually do that here, and that would have been very reassuring for the disciples to hear. May these words reassure us and all who acknowledge God sending Jesus!

Jesus closes by expressing a commitment to personally continue the effort of making the name of God (the things that reveal and familiarize him) known to believers (vs. 26). He does not spell out here how he will do that, but he covered that earlier when he said people would believe through the words of the disciples.

People who believe will also acknowledge God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent and this, as John wrote elsewhere, “is life eternal” (Jn. 17:3).

It is one other thing, because Jesus says his purpose in making God known is that the love the Father has for Jesus might be theirs to whom he reveals the Father and that Jesus himself might be in them. The Father’s love being “theirs” is to be understood, not in the sense that they might love as the Father does (although that will happen: “We love because he first loved us”, 1 Jn. 4:19); rather it is to be understood as them being the object of and experiencing God’s love.

The last half of the purpose expressed by Jesus here (“that I myself might be in them”) takes us back to verse 23 (“I in them”). It also stands believers in good stead as they live in the world and when they go to stand before God. With Jesus in them and the Father in perfect unity with Jesus, the Father is and will be united with believers: “Believe me when I say I am in the Father and the Father is in me... Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me... My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn. 14:11,21, 23).

Homiletical Uses

In research for this assignment, I came across an essay in the seminary essay file entitled “A Homiletical Treatment of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer (John 17).” It was written by Pastor Robert Q. Jensen 20 years ago, but it has much in the way of homiletical helps and suggestions. I can add very little to what is in that essay.

It points out that verses 20-26 provide a good opportunity for the preacher to lead his hearers to appreciate the Word of God, because these verses make it clear that without the Word of God there would be no Church. Also to be pointed out in preaching on this lesson is that God’s Word is the basis for unity among believers and the more of God’s Word we have and hold to, the greater our unity.

Jesus’ words here can also increase our hearers’ understanding and appreciation of what we are called into and from when we are called to faith: away from the world into a unified body in unity with God and his Son.

There is good material here for instructing Jesus’ people on the matter of the different races, cultures and denominations among Christians. Here is a resource for us to help them distinguish between Christian fellowship and church fellowship.

This lesson obviously sets out a full plate on the matter of unity among Christians. From the *negativa* side, it speaks to and against several ideas: 1) that our church unity/fellowship position and practices create disunity; and 2) “lowest-common denominator” unity- or, as Pastor Jensen says: “The United Church for Open-minded, Accepting People and Christians.” On the *affirmativa* side, with this lesson we can help God’s people see that Jesus truly desires unity among believers and that he desires unity on the basis of the whole counsel of God. Finally, here is a beautiful text for showing people what a good thing unity among believers can be for us and for the world around us.

I find it interesting that this text has been assigned for the Sunday between the Ascension and Pentecost (sometimes called “waiting Sunday”). How fitting! As we get ready to act on our world-wide marching orders, accompanied by the Spirit, it is important that we have our act together- that we are one united voice all across the line and down through the ranks. It is important for those who see and hear us, but also for us, so we can support one another and keep each other from falling from the ranks of the unit, back into the world.

Another point for preaching is the matter of seeing our Lord’s glory. We often fear that is seldom on the minds of our members. For many, that spectacle is off in the distance somewhere. This text allows us to show people there is good reason for them to have it on their minds and good opportunity for them to see God’s glory already now.

A simple theme and parts for a sermon on this section might be:

“Jesus Prays for the Church”

1. For its unity
2. For its glory

The suggestion of the sermon studies book from NPH is much the same:

“Christ Prays for His Church of Believers”

1. That it may be a united church
2. That it may be a glorious church

It also offers the following:

“A Loving Savior Prays for His Own”

1. That their faith may increase
2. That their glory may be made perfect
3. That their love may remain steadfast

Another possibility:

“Dear God, Unite the Church!”

1. With your Word
2. Into one voice
3. For glory

Resource Materials

William Hendriksen’s commentary on the Gospel of John

R. C. H. Lenski’s commentary on the Gospel of John.

Joh. Ylvisaker’s *The Gospels*

Sermon Studies on the Gospels- Series C (E. H. Wendland, editor)

A Homiletical Treatment of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer- John 17 (essay by Robert Q. Jensen)

Essays on Church Fellowship (NPH, Curtis Jahn, editor)

What Luther Says (CPH, compiled by Ewald Plass)

Arndt and Gingrich’s *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*

W. E. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*