

Center for Christian Music Studies
Baylor University School of Music
Inaugural Board of Advisors Meeting
Opening Worship Service
Truett Theological Seminary
22FEB07

That They May Be One
John 17: 11, 20-23

Listen to these simple prayers and think with me about what they have in common: “Not my will, but thine be done.” “Why hast thou forsaken me?” “Forgive them, they know not what they do.” Obviously, what they have in common is the fact that they are prayers prayed by Jesus, himself.

There is another prayer of Jesus, with which we are less familiar. It is a profoundly simple prayer, prayed just moments before he was betrayed by Judas. Jesus’ simple prayer was “that they would be one.” He was talking about us.

Let me explain. Jesus had been in intense discussions with the disciples. He knew that his time on earth was growing short, that he would soon be returning to the Father. Things that Jesus had before only shown his disciples by example, he was now telling them, straight up.

“People will hate you,” he said, “because they hate me.” “People will kill you,” he said, “and will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.” (John, chapters 15-16). Jesus used this rather one-sided discussion to tell the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit. He also told them something of what the work of the Holy Spirit would be. (John 16:5-15). Jesus had been giving his final instructions to his followers.

After this meeting with his disciples, Jesus went into a time of prayer.

[Read or recite John 17: 11, 20-23]

We, gathered here in this room, represent Christian Music’s great diversity. Sadly, we also represent its great division. Some would say we represent a great disparity, but I disagree with that. If disparity *were* the case, our wide range of musical involvement and interest would have kept us out of this room. Every one of you in this room had someone else wanting you for this hour. Instead, an *important possibility* has attracted us *to* this place at this time. That *important possibility* is that we might just be able to answer Jesus’ prayer, or, perhaps better said, we might just be able to set things in motion toward that answer.

That *important possibility* has a theme song, a theme song with a simple lyric. The simple lyric

is “Jesus is Lord.” We are gathered here because somewhere deep within us and deep within our God-given diversity we agree that *that* text is more important than any tune to which any one of us might sing it or ring it or compose it or teach it or publish it or play it. “Jesus is Lord.” Gathering around that simple but profound statement is the first step toward answering the simple prayer, “that they may be one.”

“Holy Father, protect in your name those you have given me.” (v.11). Jesus was speaking of his disciples, then and now. Jesus was *praying* for us and he was *teaching* us. He was praying for us because we are his disciples and he was teaching us because...let us not be modest, *we* have disciples...disciples of a sort. Peter was a disciple and he had disciples. Apollos, a leader in the young church, had those who followed him, instead of Peter or Paul. Paul had his followers. “Holy Father, protect in your name, those you have given me.”

Who has God given to you? If you would feel more comfortable, I’ll rephrase the question. Who is influenced by your music, by your involvement in music, whatever that involvement may be? Who has God given you? Jesus wasn’t praying just for those dozen or so men around him. We were influenced by disciples and we *are* disciples. More than that we are to be about the business of *discipling*, and Jesus is looking down that long line of disciples, praying “that they may be one.”

Even a casual overview reveals camps of contemporary and traditional, clergy and laity, academia and “industry,” liturgical and free, educated and home-spun, professionals and amateurs. These camps may no longer be shooting at each other, but the absence of warfare does not equal oneness and it is for our oneness that Jesus prayed.

As Christ-followers who participate in brining music to worship, a means of influence has been placed in our hands and a mantle of leadership has been placed on our shoulders.

In a very real sense, we have gathered here, today, as one because we have *found* each other. What you knew in your heart resonated with what we hear at Baylor knew in our heart. Did you hear the word? “Resonated.” God did not send Jesus to earth to teach us one *note*. God sent his son to teach us one *text*, one *lyric*... “Jesus is Lord,” and we spend lifetimes *exploring* what that means and *setting our reports* to the music that best communicates what we are learning.

God created the heavens and the earth complete with two overtone series. Yes, two. The earth one in which a note sounded sets off a DNA chain of resonating notes is but one of the overtone series in which we live and move and find our being. I believe this acoustical overtone series was created, in part, so that those who arrange the notes according to their culture might be one with all the others. The heaven one is that overtone series in which even our groanings are set into motion, being lifted up and interpreted on

their way to the throne of God as prayer of the deepest sort. The Gospel Hymn writer Eliza Hewitt put it this way, “Jesus, listening, can hear the songs I cannot sing.” I believe this spiritual overtone series was created, in part, so that those who arrange their liturgies according to their traditions may be one with all the others. Jesus is praying that we will resonate in one accord, even as he and the Father and the Spirit resonate as the Three in One. We are to come to unity in the overtones that lift our ears and our hearts upward, drawn by a gravity from above. We know that and we are to model it and teach it and sing it and preach it and coach it in our influence with those God has “given” us. We have gathered here to help each other along that way.

We know the importance of staying in a silent state of prayer after we have said all we have to say, so that we might hear the still small voice of God responding. Well, Jesus has prayed “that they may be one,” and there has certainly been a time of silence on the subject since Jesus said what he had to say. Let us now break the silence, responding in word and in deed, so “that they may be one.”

Why? The answer is in verse 21 and again in verse 23. Why? “So that,” Jesus prayed, “So that the world may know that you have sent me and loved them even as you have loved me.”

In the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Comforter, Amen.

Terry W. York

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Benediction:

And now, may God grant you the wisdom to explore what it means to say Jesus Is Lord. May God grant you the courage to set your discoveries and your questions to music. And may God grant you the *audacity* to believe that you can answer Jesus’ prayer.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Terry W. York

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