

“Grace Filled Unity”
Message by DD Adams
Providence UMC
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Today’s gospel lesson is from John’s gospel, chapter 17, verses 20 through 26. I’m reading from the *Common English Bible*. “I’m not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word. I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me.

I’ve given them the glory that you gave me so that they can be one just as we are one. I’m in them and you are in me so that they will be made perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me. “Father, I want those you gave me to be with me where I am. Then they can see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, even the world didn’t know you, but I’ve known you, and these believers know that you sent me. I’ve made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that your love for me will be in them, and I myself will be in them.” This is God’s word for God’s people.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Let’s pray. God of love, surround our hearts with your love as we come into your presence to receive your word and give praise to you. Amen. Peace be with you! This Sunday we’ve already celebrated two things of great importance—the baptism of a child into Christ’s universal Church, and the celebration of Mother’s Day.

The rose is referred to as a perfect flower, but interesting enough it’s a combination of unmatched beauty but it’s also covered with thorns. When you look

at the layers of petals in the flower, they're layered one upon another and have a beautiful scent. Some suggest this represents the oneness of God's love—for it is so true—that without God's love there is no oneness or unity in a family.

The other celebration we participated in was baptism. What could be more joyous for a Christian family and church to bring a child to God in baptism? Baptism is God's act and God is the baptizer. The use of water in baptism symbolizes cleansing from sin, death to the old life, and the rising to begin new life in Christ. The life-giving water is a gift and promise that God will always be with Isabelle until she makes that first time confession of faith through confirmation.

What God did this morning in Isabelle as her parents stood with her is a perfect picture of God's prevenient grace—grace that goes before the child and leads them to God before they're even aware of it. It's the love and mercy God pours down on us because God wants us to have it. The parents promise to nurture the child and guide her in her spiritual journey, but the parent's aren't the only ones who make promises! We do too!

We promise to nurture the family in their faith and to care for them. To surround them in a community of love and forgiveness. We pray for them that they would grow in their trust of God and serve others. In the sacrament of baptism, we can see a vivid picture of oneness and unity that's present with God and a congregation.

You've heard it said that only a mother's love can be compared to God's love. It's a love that promises to never leave us, and in baptism, we're restored in Christ and called sons and daughters of God. We become a member of Christ's universal church and part of a church family. We're blessed with many diverse individuals who bring something unique and special to our family.

The video we watched said not all mom's walk the same road. So true. We're God's unique design with each one of us being “fearfully and wonderfully

made.” We’re intentionally created to love God and to be in relationship with him. Our life’s circumstances are rich with different experiences. We support each other, and the oneness and unity we share is only possible because the love of God has been poured into our hearts.

In the gospel text for today Jesus is praying that we be one. In John 17:21, Jesus is praying “. . . that they will be one.” It’s a prayer for community so we would be a living witness for others to believe that Christ lives. Where else can this begin but in the family unit? This morning the Schwartsbeck family became a part of our oneness and unity. They became a part of the whole—something much larger than themselves. It came about because they believed in a God who saves and rescues from sin.

Everyone who’s been part of a family knows that differences and disagreements arise. But unity is not about agreeing all the time; it’s about a commitment to work together with God and respond to each other with the love of God. It’s that same love that’s present between the Father and the Son.

Only God can empower us to love each other and that brings God glory. Whether we’re talking about the unity of a family or a church family, Jesus’ prayer for oneness in John 17 is about love between the Father and the Son. The love in our family is founded on that same kind of love because we’re children of God.

As mom multi-tasks in today’s world, they have their hands on just about everything that goes on in a family. They know schedules, they know what’s in the fridge and what isn’t. They know what’s going on behind a closed door, and yes, they have eyes in the back of their head. But most importantly, they know love is integral to raising an emotionally healthy family. To accomplish that—God’s love must be at the center.

Believing God and receiving God’s love comes before unity and oneness—for we have no peace without the peace of Christ. *And yet*, even as we intentionally

receive God's love throughout the day, it's in our differences, our conflicts, and our disagreements that we see such a great need to continually acknowledge God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book titled *Life Together* conveys this very thought.

It's when we mess up or get in an attitude that becomes a rut. We stop praying and examining self. It's then that we realize just how very needy we are. When we pray, we reflect on our shortcomings, and this is where we see the need for God in our lives. When we love with God's love, we forgive—and what surfaces and results is unity and oneness.

Single moms, divorced moms, moms who foster children, women who have made other children their priority through organizations that care for children, moms who are estranged from their children, moms who lost their children, and on and on. God uses all kinds of women through the nurturing of children to draw us closer to him, for it's in our struggles and difficulties with each other that we grow and mature and become the Christian disciples we were created to become.

Let's take the time to make more space for God in our lives. Let's understand we all have much to offer—especially God's love. Let's pray. God of love and grace, thank you for pouring down on us your matchless love. As we nurture children and each other in the faith help us to work together to glorify you in all that we are and do. Bless each woman here, put your arms around them, and let them know how highly valued they are. Bless the family that joined our family today, and help us to nurture them as they nurture us. Amen.