

Imagine All the People
(Sermon song to John Lennon's Imagine)

John 17: 1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

The movie *Remember the Titans* is a story about a high school football team. It's based on a true story where a high school, from Alexandria, Virginia, was the first in the area to integrate Black students and white students. I mean, how do you bring two schools who have always been separated together? So the philosophy of the football team's coach was that if they wanted to win as a team they were going to have to put their issues aside and act like a team. Of course, it took time. But after they break through the initial challenge of seeing each other's humanity, and choosing each other, they became unbeatable. To make it happen, their coach saw a fundamental truth: if they want to achieve a common goal, they must set aside their self-interest, get to know each other on a human level, and start acting like a team. Reminds me of Jesus' prayer as he prays: "Make them one, God, just as you and I are one." He's praying for us to set aside our self-interest, get to know each other on a human level, and start acting like a team.

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky

Imagine all the people
Living for to - day a-hah

Wonder: what would Jesus think about our oneness today? If Jesus took a drive around our city, or our country, or traveled the world what would he see? What if he sat in one of our schools, or

a meeting on Capital Hill, or even one of our churches. Wonder: would he see the oneness he prayed for? I have to admit that three years ago when Covid began, I had thought we might actually be able to set our petty differences aside and set some sort of common goal, and thought maybe we would function as if *we are on the same team*. A bit naïve on my part, eh? I mean, how can we be one when it seems like everything—and I mean everything—is being used to divide us? When neighbors are shooting neighbors and everyone is blaming everyone else for the world's problems? I mean, how can we come together if even our churches can't even agree on who God is or what God is about? I wonder: what would Jesus think about our oneness today?

But notice as Jesus prays, he is praying for something else as well. He prays that we know the one true God and that God's glory would be known based on what was about to happen. And while it might seem confusing with all the "glory" talk, it's rather quite simple. You see, in the Greek the word for glory is *doxa*, which is where we get our Doxology from. You know, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Except, the word *doxa* literally and more commonly means, "an opinion" or "a judgement," or even "a reputation." You see, Jesus is praying that through what he is about to endure we understand God's reputation—we understand who God *really is*. God's reputation is on the line and Jesus wants it to be perfectly clear that his disciples understand who God is. Not as an all-powerful deity whose wrath needs to be satisfied, not as an angry dictator who needs us to believe or be someone we are not. But as the God who gives and gives and gives because God actually likes us and desires all of us to flourish...all of us; as one people.

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too

Imagine all the people
Living life in peace - you-hou-hou-ou-ou

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one

And then Jesus says something profound: he doesn't only tell us who God is, but he tells us who we are as well. You see, not only is God's reputation known through Jesus' way and actions, but that Jesus's reputation is known through our way and actions as well. Through the moments we open our doors and center those in need. Through the times we make room for the hurting and offer self-giving love to the oppressed. When we get together as a team, we become the reputation holders of God's mercy and compassion and love. We become the legacy carriers of God's justice. We become the Body of Christ who dare to imagine a world living in peace.

So today, we have a Transformation Gathering. A moment to stand with those who are scared and hurting, to listen to stories, and to reignite our sanctified imaginations for what our society could be as one united people. If you can be there, please do so. Sing with us. Stand with us. Dream with us. But if you can't be there, then please...please...pray for us like Jesus does. That

we may all know the God who gives and gives and gives because God really does likes us, and desires all of us to flourish. And that, as we understand who this God of love is, we know more and more who we are together: one glorious and beautiful team. Just like Jesus and God are.

Imagine no possessions/I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger/A humanhood of friends
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

They may say we're a dreamer
But we're not the only ones
I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one

We got Black, we got white
We got soul, we got might,
We got gay, we got straight
Now's the time to relate
We got cis we got trans
to imagine a plan
Where all of us can breathe and all of us can stand

It don't matter your creed, or what you believe
because we are all human, in the flesh and who bleed
So together we come, together we say
It's time to be one, now let's try it this way! **IMAGINE ALL THE PEOPLE**

We got those who are pink, we got those who are blue
We got those in between, and yes they count too
We got doers who dream, we got dreamers who do
We got those who are old, and even some who are new!

We got folks who got riches, and some who are poor,
We got space for all types, and there's still room for more.

We came here to fight, to turn wrong into right
To bring darkness to light, to make day out of night.
Together we come, together we say
It's time to be one, now let's try it this way!