

Communion with Christ—and others (John 17:20-26)

“Being in Jesus” is John’s theological language to describe a state of communion essential for our faith.

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May 31, 2019

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What does Jesus desire for us?

I ask not only on behalf of these, 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, may they also be in us.

Just as Jesus is in the Father, he desires that we are also in him—and that we are all one with each other, with Jesus, and with God.

“Being in Jesus” is John’s theological language to describe a state of communion essential for our faith. In the Eastern church, Christians view this state of communion as salvation itself—something that can happen throughout our lives, not just when we die. It’s a state of being so intimately connected to Christ that this connection shapes everything about who we are and how we live our lives.

Many of our spiritual mothers and fathers believed this intimate connection could be accomplished through prayer and meditation. If you repeat a phrase of scripture or a prayer mantra long enough, it will eventually shape your heart and your life.

Some members of religious orders practice the Jesus Prayer all day long: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner.* They say these words until they become a part of every breath and every movement. The prayer becomes a part of their being, and they become one with the object of that prayer, Jesus Christ.

A friend of mine from seminary decided to practice saying the Jesus Prayer like the monks do. He discovered an awkward yet funny consequence. All day long he would repeat the prayer in his head—including at his job working the switchboard at our seminary. One afternoon, when he picked up the phone, instead of saying, “Good afternoon, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary,” he caught himself saying, “Good afternoon, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God.” I’m sure the person on the other end of the line was wondering what kind of connection she had just made.

For John, communion with Christ is essential because it leads us to being in communion with others. If we love God and if we are communing with God, then this will lead us to loving and communing with our brothers and sisters. If we love God and are communing with God then we will find God in one another.

A faculty member at our college turned to me (the college chaplain) for some advice. He was going through a difficult time and needed spiritual sustenance. But he wasn’t sure where to go in our community to meet his need. I was about to refer him to some churches in the area. Then I remembered something one of the incarcerated men said to me at the prison where I volunteer. “People think prison makes us hard, but it doesn’t,” he said. “It makes us brittle. We need people we can be vulnerable and real with to survive it.”

So instead, I invited my faculty friend to teach with me at the prison. “You’ll meet Jesus there,” I told him. “I promise. I find Jesus in those men all the time.” He accepted my invitation.

Jesus prays that we are in him, but also that we recognize him in one another—“so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” If we can be in Jesus and see Jesus in one another, then this will be our greatest witness to the world that Christ’s Spirit is alive and working among us.