

1 June 2025  
Easter 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“One, by Word and Glory and Name and Love”

Text: John 17:20-26; Revelation 22:1-20; Acts 1:12-26

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Alleluia! Christ is ascended!** [He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!] **Alleluia.**

But before Jesus ascended, before He went to the cross, before He did just about *anything*, Jesus prayed. It's hard to turn *any* page of *any* of the Gospels without hearing about Jesus praying. And that's what we heard from John's Gospel today - Jesus praying. It is part of what is called His “high priestly prayer,” because He is acting as a priest here - He is interceding for us. Which means He is standing between us and the Father, to bring us and our needs to the Father.

We, as the priesthood of the baptized, do this. We intercede for others. We bring them and their needs to the Father. We do that here in Church every Sunday as we pray the Prayer of the Church for *all the baptized in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs*. And there is nothing better or more important that we, as the priesthood of the baptized, can do. We sometimes belittle our prayers, wishing we could do more, saying *all I can do is pray*. We need to stop talking like that! Not everyone can pray. But you can. And the fact that you can bring people and their needs before our Father in heaven, who has promised to hear your prayers as His baptized children, and to answer and fulfill them, is huge! Huge. So don't think your prayers don't matter. They most certainly do.

So while it is meet, right, and salutary to pray for others and to hear them pray for us, today we get to hear *Jesus* intercede for us. We get to hear what He desires for us, and what is most important to Him for us. And there are three things. Three things Jesus specifically prays for today, and He does so twice. Repetition for emphasis. He asks: (1.) that we be one. He asks (2.) that we be one with Him and with the Father. And He asks (3.) that the world be brought into this oneness as well, believing in Him as Saviour and knowing His love.

Now, each one of those could be a whole separate sermon! So I won't try to tackle them all in depth. But I will touch on each and hope that, like Mary, you will *treasure up all these things and ponder them in your heart* (Luke 2:19).

(1.) So **first**, Jesus prays *that we may be one*.

He *doesn't* pray that we all just get along. That's not enough. He *doesn't* pray that we all be united. That's not enough either. He prays *that we be one*. *E pluribus unum*. Out of many, one. We say that about our country, the United States, and to *an extent* it is true. Out of many states, one nation. Out of many people, one people. But it is no secret that we are not one, but divided in many ways. And it seems as if the differences between us are growing, and the divides getting more bitter. Disagreements we used to be able to talk about and resolve, not so much anymore. Now you're not just wrong, you're evil. Now you're not just wrong, you mean me harm. Now you're not just wrong, you must be eliminated - at least from my life. It's hard to live like that. And I think we see that in our world today. People are in that, and don't want that, but don't know the way out, how to overcome it.

But today we hear how, and the answer is no surprise: **Jesus**. And this oneness He prays for is not just *e pluribus unum* oneness for us - He asks that *we may be perfectly one*. *Tetelestai* one. (That's the word there translated as *perfectly*.) *Tetelestai* is the final word Jesus spoke from the cross. It means, *it is finished*. So Jesus is praying for the oneness that comes only through His death and resurrection. That comes only through His finished work for us on the cross. That comes through the word of the Gospel and the word joined to the water of Holy Baptism. For we are truly one not when we are one on the outside, externally; but when we are one on the inside, internally.

This is where the modern day ecumenical movement among churches has failed. Many churches thought that by joining together *externally* that would lead to their oneness *internally*. But it didn't. It couldn't. Because that's backwards. First comes the *internal* - oneness in the infallible Word of God, the one and only truth for all time, and the right faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we have that - this word and truth that Jesus gave to His disciples and which they then proclaimed to the world - then we are one. Truly one. **Perfectly one**. *Tetelestai* one. For we are one in Jesus.

(2.) The **second** thing Jesus prays for is that we be not only one with each other, **but one with Him, and in Him, with the Father**.

The first oneness comes through the Word that Jesus gave, the apostles proclaimed, and the Church confesses; this second, Jesus says, comes from *the glory*. **I have given to them the glory**, Jesus says, **so that . . .** Now, our English translation didn't express it so clearly as that because it uses a different word order. But that's what it says. **I have given them the glory . . .** *But what does that mean? What does it mean*

that Jesus has given us *the* glory?

Well, in the Old Testament, **the glory** - not just glory in general or other kinds of glory - but **the glory** meant **the gracious presence of God**. *The glory* that appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush. *The glory* that led the people of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. *The glory* that filled the tabernacle and temple with a cloud. God with His people to bless and keep them. To forgive them and sanctify them. The glory of God that is not just everywhere (which you could say is true in a way), but is more specific - that is **there**. In a place. Located. To be found. The glory of God FOR YOU.

And now, Jesus says, **I have given to them the glory** - this located, gracious, presence of God to bless and keep, to forgive and sanctify. And that is **Him**. Jesus gave them Himself. For He is the new temple; the new dwelling place of God with men, to be among us to bless and keep, to forgive and sanctify. But He is about to go to the cross and ascend to the right hand of the Father. So *there is another way* that Jesus gave them Himself. In fact, He just had, that very night, when on the night He was betrayed, He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them and said: *This is My Body*. And in the same way the cup, saying: *This is My Blood*. Here, the ones made one through **the Word** gather together as one in **the glory**, as together we eat the Body and drink the Blood of Jesus. Truly a *holy* communion. Here, the Body of Christ perfectly one, *tetelestai* one, in the Son, who is one with the Father.

(3.) And then the **third** thing Jesus prays is that **the world be brought into this oneness** as well, believing in Him as Saviour and knowing His love.

But how is *that* done? How do we know the love of God?

John wrote it in his First Epistle: *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (4:10). The sending of the Son shows us the love of the Father. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son* (John 3:16). So in Jesus, we see the love of God **incarnate**. And in Jesus *on the cross*, we see the love of God **in action**. The cross is where Jesus wants to be seen, and the cross is what Jesus wants the Church to proclaim: to proclaim a **God who doesn't demand love, but gives love, that we, too, may love**. There is no other god like that, who is love, who forgives, who serves. Only one. That we may be one with Him. That the oneness broken - no shattered! - by Adam and Eve in the Garden, be restored by Jesus. Which is, in fact, what we've been celebrating this whole Easter season.

So as Jesus was sent for this, now He is sending His apostles for this (including Matthias, who as we heard took the place of Judas). **To love as He loved**. To show

the love of the Father and the Son. And that means in both word and deed. To proclaim that love and live that love. Which means to lay down *their* life. Which they did, in many ways.

Sadly though, for many today, to love simply means to be nice. But you know what the Bible *never* says? That God is nice! He is love. He loves intensely. He loves to the end. He loves to save. But real love is so much more than nice.

**And now**, as those who believe through **the word** of the apostles and **the glory** given to us in the Supper, with Jesus' love in us and with Jesus Himself in us, we do the same. We love as He has loved us. We lay down our lives for others. Husbands and wives for one another. Fathers and mothers for their children. Pastors and congregations for one another. YOU for one another. And - hold onto your hats! - **YOU even for your enemies.**

*Wait! What?* Yes, Jesus said: *love your enemies and do good to those who hate you* (Luke 6:27). And the verb used there for love isn't just to be nice or any lesser kind of love for others - it is *agape* love. It is God's love for us, for them. It is laying down your life love. That from the Father to the Son to the Apostles to us, the world may know the love of God for them and be one with us and with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Which is the difference between all other religions and Christianity. Others lay down their lives **to kill** those who disagree with them. We are told to lay down our lives **to love** those who disagree with us. Which, how can you do unless you know that *your* life is safe and secure in Jesus, who laid down His life for you. So sure, so confident was He in His Father's love - even while forsaken on the cross! - that He did this for you. And so we can for others, with His love in us. Oh, sometimes our false gods get in the way. Our hearts get too filled with other gods . . . things, persons, dreams . . . and they get in the way of our love. But that's why Jesus prayed for us - and is still praying for us! - that by (His Word), (His glory), (His Name), and (His love), we be one with each other, perfectly one, *tetelestai* one, one in Him, and living in His love, bring others into that love.

That, in the end, as Jesus also prayed, we may ***be with Him*** and ***see the glory He had before the foundation of the world.*** The glory we've been hearing about in the readings from Revelation all this season. The kind of glory that is hard to imagine and describe. The glory that is here for us now, just hidden in clouds and water and bread and wine. But then we'll see. And all will be restored.

So we pray *for that day!* ***Come, Lord Jesus!*** Come now in Your Word. Come now in Your glory. Come now and wash us, feed us, and forgive us; bless us, keep us, and

sanctify us. And one with You, bring all others into Your Body, too, as we live Your love in word and deed. Make us one. Truly one. Perfectly one. *Tetelestai* one.

John started his Gospel like this: *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). And as it was in the beginning, it will be in the end. And in between, everything Jesus does is so that WE and all people be with the Father as well. One with Him in Christ. And because of Him, we are.

That's His prayer for us. Let it be ours as well.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.