

We've Got Work to Do!

John 17:20–26 (NIV84) ²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. ²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

In Christ Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, dear fellow redeemed,

Meet Pastor-elect Andrew Nemmers. Actually, he may look familiar to you. He's worshiped with us many times through the years. He's the grandson of Mount Olive member, Don Knuth. Andrew is pictured here on assignment day at the seminary last week. He's about to find out where he will be serving God and his people. You can almost sense his anticipation. Then, his name is read: “Andrew Nemmers, New mission start, Houston, Texas, South Central District.” You see his astonishment which quickly gives way to joy – he has a place to serve in God's kingdom. His family and friends are thrilled. And, then, reality sets in. You can see it in his eyes. He's thinking: “I've got work to do.”

I never get tired of seeing assignment day through the eyes of young men like Andrew. There's something exhilarating, something so refreshing about it all – a great reminder of our Savior's Great Commission: “Go – make disciples of all nations...” But of course, you don't need to witness assignment day at the seminary for a refresher on the Great Commission. Our one great purpose in life is always there for us to see when we look at life through Easter lenses. So that's what Jesus does for us today. He brings the reason for our existence here into sharper focus as he prays for us and the part we play in God's plan. He shows us, “We've Got Work to Do!” 1) in God's name; 2) with God's Word; 3) to God's glory!

Jesus' words come to us today in the form of a prayer that he offers on the night before his crucifixion. He prays with confidence, knowing that his saving mission will be a success. He foresees his victorious resurrection and his glorious ascension. And that's just the beginning. He also anticipates the spread of his life-giving gospel. It's with in mind that he prays for his first followers who will carry that Good News through and from Judea to ends of the earth. But as the Savior is quick to point out: **“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:20-21).**

Isn't that the most powerful prayer you've ever heard? Look at what it has accomplished. With these very words Jesus has prayed the gospel not only to the ends of the earth, but he's prayed it through the long, long corridors of time. He's prayed and preserved his gospel through thousands

of years. Why? So that it could enter our ears and make its home in our hearts. Jesus is praying for you and me—that we would hear and believe his apostles' message.

There's a reason Jesus prays, as he does, for our unity, for our oneness, if you will. He knows that sin is the super separator, the deadly divider. Look what happened to our first parents, Adam and Eve. God made them to be perfectly united to him and each other. But when they sinned, the two ran from God. Their sin made God an enemy to hide from. But, of course, God found and confronted them. What did they do then? Did the rebels stand united? They couldn't. Sin never unites. It always divides. Husband and wife turned against each other. Unity gave way to division, even as God's gift of life gave way to sin's curse of death.

And so, the curse continues. It touches every life without fail, including ours. You and I were born under sin's deadly curse, separated from God and from each other. You know it's true. Look at what sin does to our relationships. When we sin against a family member or each other, we stop communicating, we don't spend time together, maybe we won't even look at each other. It's no different when it comes to God. When we get caught up in sin, we don't pray or worship, we don't spend time with God in his Word. Instead we try to run and hide from him. Left to our self-destructive ways, sin would forever separate us from God – he in heaven; we hell.

So in his great love for us, love unearned and undeserved, Jesus prays to his Father on our behalf, asking him to do what we won't, what we can't do because of our sin. He asks his Father to reunite us to himself. Jesus prays for us and, then, he lays down his life so as to become the answer to his own prayer. In Christ, by his death in hell as our Mediator and Substitute, God has forever done away with all the sin that separated all sinners from their Creator. Christ died to take away the sin of the world and then rose to show his followers that all who trust in him will live, as he does, eternally. Christ died and then rose to ensure that this life-giving news would reach us, so that its powerful message would fill our hearts with faith and, through this gift, join us to Jesus forever. Jesus has worked to this very day to make and keep us his people. But his work doesn't end with us, not at all. His prayer continues: **“May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:21,23).**

Jesus has not only given us a place in his family, he's given us a share in the family business. This is the only reason we are still here on earth. We've got work to do in God's name. I say it that way to remind us that the work isn't ours. It is our Savior God who has done and is doing everything. By joining us to himself through faith in his Son, God enables us to see the sinners around us in a new light. Our natural, sinful instinct is to write off the unbelieving world as a lost cause – not worth our time and effort. Those sinners out there do such vile and shameful things. And not only do they want us to tolerate their sin, they want us to approve and even celebrate it. They make a mockery of us and our way of life. “They deserve to be punished!” say we. But that's not what God wants. He loves the lost. Are we not living proof of this? How are we any different than the sinners we would so quickly condemn? The only difference is this: In pure grace God has already found us, already rescued us; and now he means to find and rescue others through us. He plans to draw others to himself through the unity he's given us, unity the world craves, but cannot produce because of its sin. Look at the unbelievers around you, the ones you work with, the members of your extended family, the students in your class. Take a good look. See them as God sees them, as he sees you – not as an enemy to hate, but as prisoner of war, a captive of Satan to

be set free. Remember, every person you know and meet is a precious soul to God, bought and paid for with the blood of Son.

Here's something else to keep in mind: all those individuals who do not believe in Jesus are all like dead men walking, destined to perish when their lives on earth are over. So what should we do for those souls, who are loved by God but who are so far from him? The Apostle Paul has our answer in Romans 15:14, "**I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.**" Paul's telling us that the work before us is work done only with the Word of God. As Christians, we know everything we need to know to help the lost. What a relief! We don't need advanced degrees in theology. We don't need courses in public speaking or debate. Because helping the lost doesn't involve winning religious arguments. No, we faithfully carry out our role in God's work by speaking the simple truth of God's Word, truth that we've known from our youth – the truth that God so loves this world of sinners that he sent his only Son to pay for our sin in our place so that everyone who believes in Jesus as Savior, will live in God's peace forever. This good news is the only message in all the world that save sinners. And here's why we are so competent to proclaim it. Because it is the gospel itself that works in sinners the very faith it calls for them to have. The gospel is "**...the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes**" (Romans 1:16). You see - through his Word, God does all the work. This is what our Savior promises in his prayer: "**I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them**" (John 17:26). As we share the Word of God, Jesus will be the one speaking to sin-dead hearts. He will be the one destroying doubts and overcoming unbelief. He will be the performing the same miracle he worked in us at the moment we first believed.

It's all Jesus. We have nothing to fear when it comes to sharing him with others. You heard his prayer. Jesus knows what he wants to do. He knows how he's going to work through us and he knows who he's going to reach. We are simply his mouth pieces, strategically placed by God in the lives of the people Jesus loves. The work before us is not a burden – certainly not to Jesus and not to us either. It's not something we have to do. It's something we get to do out of deepest thanks for the one who rescued us.

Each of us is grateful. From the young pastor-elect – to the oldest member of our congregation and all of us in between, we all live and serve to the praise and glory of the one who gave himself for us. When we speak God's name, when we tell of his love for sinners, God is glorified. But as Jesus explains, his greatest glory is yet to come: "**Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world**" (John 17:24). Isn't that amazing. The one enthroned in heaven, the one who is attended by angels and who rules over all things, says that his greatest glory will come when he has every last one of us, every last believer, with him in heaven, safe and sound forever. This is what Jesus wants more than anything else. This is what he prays for. So to this glorious end, may God bless us and countless others through our work with his Word – always for Jesus' sake. Amen.