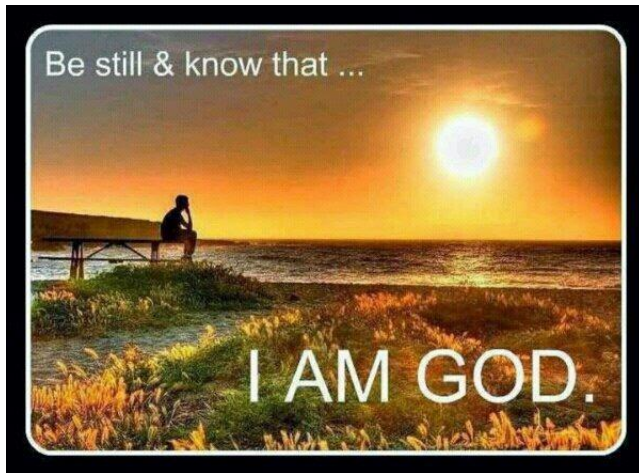


**"Know God"**  
**May 29, 2022**  
John 17:20-26



**St. John United Church of Christ**  
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL 397-6323  
Rev. Rosemary Captain

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

On this Memorial Day weekend, we remember all those men and women who gave the ultimate sacrifice to protect our liberty and democracy. Let no one ever take that away from us.

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

We have been invited to know God  
**Let us enter the knowledge of God**

We have been invited to bear God's justice  
**Let us enter the justice of God**

We have been invited to enter God's truth  
**Let us enter the truth of God**

We have been invited to enter God's unity  
**Let us enter the unity of God**

**\*INVOCATION:**

Holy Healing One, Righteous Restorer—  
We come as standard-bearers of your love, offering our disconnected lives in return for your unity. May we know you in this place, not as lone individuals but as faithful fragments seeking to be made whole again. Amen.

**\*RESPONSIVE CONFESSION:**

Creating God, in selfishness and insecurity,  
We have traded your healing for our hatred,  
**Your calling for our comfort,**  
**Your truth for our traditions,**  
**Your covenant for our conventions,**  
Your faithfulness for our fragmentation,  
Your care and our convenience,

Your solidarity for our self-righteousness,  
Your promise for our praise.

**Forgive us, we pray.**

**Speak to us again of your love,**

**That we may know you,**

**And by knowing you,**

**We may once again be made whole.**

Silence for personal confession

**\*RESPONSIVE ASSURANCE**

Beloved of God, hear the good news.

God's love never fails us.

Even in our division and despair,

God desires to be made known.

**We are forgiven. We are welcome. We are one.**

**Amen.**

**\*GLORIA PATRI:**

**Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit,  
Three- in-One; as it was in the beginning, is now,  
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.**

**SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:16-34**

**Paul and Silas in prison**

<sup>16</sup> One day, when we were on the way to the place for prayer, we met a slave woman. She had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She made a lot of money for her owners through fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She

began following Paul and us, shouting, "These people are servants of the Most High God! They are proclaiming a way of salvation to you!" <sup>18</sup> She did this for many days.

This annoyed Paul so much that he finally turned and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to leave her!" It left her at that very moment.

<sup>19</sup> Her owners realized that their hope for making money was gone. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the officials in the city center. <sup>20</sup> When her owners approached the legal authorities, they said, "These people are causing an uproar in our city. They are Jews <sup>21</sup> who promote customs that we Romans can't accept or practice." <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod. <sup>23</sup> When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care. <sup>24</sup> When he received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks.

<sup>25</sup> Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison's

foundations. The doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted loudly, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!"

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He led them outside and asked, "Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?"

<sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your entire household." <sup>32</sup> They spoke the Lord's word to him and everyone else in his house. <sup>33</sup> Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. <sup>34</sup> He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God.

**\*GOSPEL READING: John 17:20-26**

These are the ancient Words of God  
given to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

With thoughts from Rev. Meda Stamper, a Pastor in the UK  
**MESSAGE: "Know God" (This message may be long, yet I think it summarizes the whole of why are here, why we are Christians, why we worship and praise Jesus. This message may be repetitive, but what better way to have a message for others right on the tips of our tongues, then to hear God's message over and over so it can be repeated and never forgotten.) rc**

The liturgical season of Easter draws to a close after today. Next week is Pentecost (wear your red). We end today with Jesus' final words to his friends before his arrest. In John 13-17 Jesus has been comforting, instructing, and preparing "his own" (as his friends are called in 13:1) for what is to come and for what they are to become in the world.

Now, in the text for today, he prays for them. In these concluding verses of the prayer that makes up John 17, Jesus says that the purpose of all he has asked for in the preceding verses is this: that all disciples of all time may be one in the specific sense in which Jesus and the Father are one, the mutual indwelling of love that has defined that relationship not only in the life of Jesus but also in the oneness of God and the creative Word from before the foundation of the world. Jesus prays for his own, the

ones present and those who will believe in him through them (which means we can read it as a prayer for us), to be drawn into the love of the Father and Son-Word-Jesus.

Already Jesus has promised dwelling places in the house of God and has promised that he and God will make dwelling places in us. Now Jesus speaks of and requests this oneness and refers to the mutual indwelling of himself and God, and of us with him and with God. He does this 10 times in five verses. The word translated “completely” here is a verb form meaning that we are to be made perfect in oneness.

The purpose, he says, of this perfection of oneness is not only an experience of divine love for us in our communion with God and one another. The purpose is beyond us. This being perfected in oneness is so that the uncomprehending, sometimes dangerous world may also believe and know God’s love in the sending of the Son.

The oneness of the Father and Jesus is synonymous with love in the Gospel of John. What the world is to see in our display of that oneness is the love of God miraculously made manifest. Our love for God and one another becomes then an offering in and for the world to experience the love through which all creation has come into being.

Like the love for one another in as we read in chapter 13, which is a way for other people to see that we belong to Jesus. Our oneness as branches nurtured by the vine and tended by the gardener God will give us fullness of joy and love. In addition, the oneness will bear fruit. The oneness Jesus asks for here is among those who believe in him. It is not an exclusive club, but an invitation to the world. This invitation is as open, loving, joyful, and fruitful as we can allow ourselves to be.

The Greek word translated “believe” also means “trust.” Believing in Jesus and in God is presented in the Gospel of John not as an intellectual exercise but as being in a trusting relationship of love. That love with someone who embodies God’s love for the world and who calls us friend. It is trusting him that gives us the love for our life.

To understand what this looks like, we may look at how Jesus manifests God’s love for the world in himself—in what he does, what he says, and how he is—and also listen to what he says it means for us to love him, and by extension, one another and the world. As Jesus tends, feeds, bears witness to, and breaks barriers for love, Jesus’ own are called to do the same thing.

The Gospel also explains how love is possible. This love clearly cannot depend on feelings of attraction,

desire, affection or even liking. It is a behavior-shaping attitude toward the world, which is both a gift we cannot manufacture and a choice to live into the promises of that gift that is already given. We cannot paste it onto ourselves.

Like branches of a vine, we live in something larger than ourselves, in which we are nurtured to bear fruit by the Spirit dwelling in us (about which we read in the Pentecost passage for next week). But because we are more than vines, we also become more loving by choosing to follow Jesus' model and teachings about what love is: tending, feeding, bearing witness, and breaking barriers for love—societal barriers and also barriers we set up for ourselves, including some that we may think make us rightly religious but **which** do not make us loving. There is a difference between being religious and loving.

This love we are being invited to take on, embody, is the substance of Jesus' glory. And it is what he wants us and the world to know. To know God is to have love in us and to have Jesus in us. This also takes us back to where the prayer began, glory and knowledge. To know God in 17:2-3 is eternal life, and now we find that eternal life will be an extension of the love of God stretching back before the foundation of the world. It will continue forward to us, and beyond us to the communion of the saints

and to those who may be able to experience God's love through us.

And so, the Easter season culminates where the Gospel began: with Jesus making God known so that the world may know that every soul and all creation has come from and has a place in the creative love of God.

As the hit song from the 60's goes, "To love, love, love him is to know, know, know him" but do we? Every day we should pray that we come to know God, to trust God, to be one with God, to love as we are loved by God, and have that love known to all the world. It would certainly bring peace to the world. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer

Make us one, dear Lord. We all know that there is strength in numbers and we want to be in those numbers. Help understand better your message, compassionate God, and thus we will know you more and more, trust you more and more, and love you more and more, and spread that love more and more to others, to the world. Thank you, for giving us the words to convey that message.

If ever there was a time for peace, it is now. With Ukrainians being assaulted and killed every day, with teenagers taking guns to schools and grocery stores,

and churches, just to kill they need help and peace in their hearts instead of demons. Teach us how to do that, heavenly one.

We pray for all those on our prayer list and all the many others who are lost, lonely, homeless, and feel forgotten. Teach us, dear Lord, out to spread your love to them.

Help us always to remember the words of your Son, Jesus; words of encouragements, words of assurance, words of healing, words of love, as we pray his prayer . . .

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

#### **CALL TO OFFERING:**

From the creation of the world, God has freely given. We give, not as solitary givers, but in solidarity with all creation. **Many: Thanks be to God      All: Amen**

#### **\*DEDICATION:**

May these gifts be used to build the Beloved Community through our unity, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus, our Messiah. Amen.

#### **\*BENEDICTION:**

May the joy of our Healer go with us. May we go out in the unity of God. That we may know God and make God known. Go forth in the love of God. Amen.