

6 "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. **7** Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; **8** 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. **9** 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. **10** All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. **11** 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. **12** While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. **13** But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. **14** I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. **15** I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. **16** They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. **17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. **19** And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Back in the 90's there was a popular contemporary Christian song that named many aspects of Jesus' character based on every book of the Bible....There are 66 books in the bible, it's a long song...

In Genesis, He's the breath of life
In Exodus, the Passover Lamb
In Leviticus, He's our High Priest
Numbers, The fire by night

...

In Isaiah, He's Prince of Peace
Jeremiah, the weeping prophet
...In Daniel, the stranger in the fire
In Hosea, He is forever faithful
In Joel, He's the Spirits power
In Amos, the arms that carry us

...

In Malachi, He is the son of righteousness rising with healing in His wings

...

In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, He is God, Man, Messiah

In the book of Acts, He is fire from heaven

In Romans, He's the grace of God

In Corinthians, the power of love

In Galatians, He is freedom from the curse of sin

... (Songwriters: Jack Richards / Richard Mullen - He Is lyrics © Birdwing Music, Shepherd's Fold Music)

It always struck me as impressive that the lyricist could so creatively name almost 66 unique characteristics or understandings of Jesus. Here at Wilkesboro United Methodist Church we say we exist to share the good news of Jesus Christ...but how can we begin to share the fullness of Jesus with others when his truth is so vast and seemingly limitless?

Jesus offered this beautiful prayer for one purpose – that we would know how to share him with the world. “Father, I told them about you...I showed you to them in how I lived and taught...and they learned...they listened...they know all you wanted them to know. I am glorified in them...others can see me in them...and now I am about to be taken away from them...so keep them safe. Protect them so that they are one, as we are one. Protect them so that they will stay in love...in love with you, with me, with one another.”

This call to stay one is essential to our ability to glorify God...to glorify Christ. Jesus is praying for this unity with God because he understands that when he is no longer here to walk the earth, the only way he will still be seen in the world, is through his followers. We are to be witnesses to the ends of the earth for him.

I was thinking about what it means to be a witness. A witness can mean someone who sees something happening. They stand and watch. They view what transpires. A witness can also be someone who not only sees, but they take an active role in telling what they saw, or experienced. According to the dictionary, witness can also mean evidence, or proof.

This prayer of Jesus makes it clear that our role as witnesses to God's glory is not a passive role. We aren't supposed to stand and watch and marvel and move on...we are supposed to take an active role in telling what we've seen and experienced...our lives, after an encounter with Jesus should be evidence or proof of him. Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrase of this text in *The Message* says it this way...”and my life is on display in them.” There is a high degree of pressure there don't you think?

I remember when I first renewed my commitment to Jesus. I had been out of the church for some time, and while I wasn't a bad person, I certainly wasn't one who fully reflected a Christ-like character. But, like many new Christians, when I got involved in church I went all in...started listening to only Christian music, bought a new study bible,

started a Disciple Bible study course, even picked up a bumper sticker for my car... "Get a life, be a Christian."

The morning after I put that sticker on my bumper, I went to work...back in my days as a paramedic. It was one LONG 24-hour shift. I was cranky. I was fed-up. I was burnt out. I didn't have my regular partner that day but worked with a co-worker I'd known for a long time. I noticed he was quiet all day, but I figured he just read my mood and decided it was the safest route to take. I raged at my patients, was impatient with the hospital staff, cursed and complained for half the shift. Then, just as we gathered in the kitchen for supper, he looked at me and said, "I like the new bumper sticker." It took about 2.5 seconds for me to burn with shame. I knew from the way he looked at me, exactly what he meant. I can put 100 bumper stickers on my car proclaiming my faith, I can carry around a stack of bibles, and take a lifetime of classes...but if others can't see Jesus in how I live my life, then I have failed to be a witness and I have failed to be one with God and one in love.

The thing is, this isn't just true for us as individuals, it is true for us as a community. When people outside the church...people who may not yet know Jesus...look at how we live and how we love one another and our neighbors...they are seeing a presentation of Christ...a reflection of Jesus. Is it the right one? Is it the true one? Is it the reflection that glorifies Jesus?

I keep thinking about that song, He Is, and the almost 66 characteristics of Jesus there...none of us are good at reflecting even close to that...but as a church, we might come closer. We are a community in which some glorify Jesus with their compassionate mission work, some glorify through their faithful worship leading, some with their gift of hospitality, some with the gifts of healing, or feeding, or mending, or teaching. When it comes to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, it takes all of us just to come close to showing who Jesus is, and when we come close, Christ is glorified.

To be able to love as Jesus prayed for us to love is a way of glorifying God through showing respect and honor for those God loves. We share God's love by making sure that the neglected, overlooked, or ignored...those who might feel they aren't worth loving...are invited and included. To live into this prayer means we lead with hospitality and not with judgment. It means we meet the needs of those among us and around us with a spirit of welcome. We lead with gratitude not reluctant service. It means we are all about pouring out of abundance and equity. This is how we share Christ, sometimes with words but mostly through acts of love, because we know there is nothing more loving than including others in the circle of Christ-followers.

Throughout the gospels we see that people were drawn to Jesus. Great crowds came to see him. We are left to wonder, when statistics show that church membership and

attendance are declining, when fewer people are professing to be Christians, have we failed to be witnesses? Have we spent too much time proclaiming Christ with words and bumper stickers, and too little time proclaiming him with the daily chores and tiny expressions of love that make people take notice?

Maybe that is what Jesus means when he prays that his joy will be made complete in us...his joy of reaching others, of sharing the good news of God's love and salvation, his joy in loving, in caring for, in healing, feeding, and inviting others to a purposeful, meaningful life...his joy in these things becomes our joy when we live them out in the world.

If Jesus is only made visible through us, Church, what are others seeing? How vast and deep is the joy and love of Christ that our neighbors are seeing when they look at us? May our faith be more than bumper sticker theology...may we instead make Jesus' prayer a reality and in loving God and loving the world, we can be a faithful witness to God's transforming power and the joy that is found in being one in that love.