



Series: I'm In

Sermon #3: God's people are my people

Text: John 17.20-23

Intro

In the rear of 16th street Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama there is a beautiful stain glass window called the Welsh Window. It was made by a Welshman named John Petts and it depicts Jesus with his arms outstretched it looks like the crucifixion scene but as you look closer what you see is the right hand is pushing away and the left hand is extended out towards you. Petts said the right hand is pushing away hatred and the left hand is offering forgiveness and reconciliation to God. (Show image).

Petts created the window to replace a window that was destroyed when a bomb, placed by the KKK, went off on Sunday morning September 15, 1963. That morning 4 young girls...Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carole Denise McNair were in the basement of the church putting on their choir robes...getting ready to sing during the pastor's sermon titled "A love that forgives." at 10:22am an anonymous caller called the church and said simply "3 minutes." Less than one minute later the bomb detonated in the basement killing these four young girls. Their bodies were found, badly mutilated, clinging to one another. It was a disgusting act of terrorism that broke a community already deeply fractured by racism. Many say it was also the moment that many in America woke up to the injustices that were happening in the world around them.

John Petts contacted the pastor of the church just two days later saying he wanted to replace the window. He solicited funds for it from his countrymen and there is a small engraving on the window that reads "Given by the people of wales." Petts said the inspiration was Matthew 25.40

'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' -- Matthew 25:40

See just 5 months earlier Dr. King had been arrested in Birmingham for nonviolent protests against discrimination practices happening in the city. While in prison he wrote a letter. It became very well known as the letter from a Birmingham jail. I read it every year. He wrote it to church leaders in Birmingham who had chosen, and had led their churches to choose, comfort over courage. He said he just assumed since he believed the same gospel they did that they would not stand for the injustice being inflicted on the African American community. His greatest disappointment was that his brothers in Christ had abandoned him in this hour of great need. He grieved that they were, in his words, sitting quietly on the sidelines. See Dr. King's work was informed by a theology that said we are ONE in Christ and must be unified in our pursuit in the mission of God. And this letter, and the bombing 5 months later, brought many church eyes to see what scripture had been telling them. Because of Christ, African American Christians and Anglo American Christians were now a family. God's people were THEIR people. Brothers and Sisters. And the problem was that the most segregated hour in America was the broken family of Christ.

We are in part 3 of our sermon series titled "I'm in." And what we are saying is that God is moving. He is working in our world and he invites us into what he is doing. But too many of us find ourselves sitting on the sidelines. Maybe on purpose or maybe because they don't know any better, but too many are sitting and watching when God is calling them to be actively engaged. I told you, part of this series IS calling you into ministry here with Mercy Church for sure. I believe in this church and I believe we should serve one another. But, its about something much deeper in your heart than church programming.

It's a commitment to God to leverage our lives for his purposes and his glory. It's a commitment to one another that says I'm in with you! Come what may. Your pain is my pain & your joy is my joy. **God's people are my people.** It's a new year and a new decade and we want to take this moment to, together, say we will not sit on the sidelines anymore. God has called us to leverage our voices and our lives for his purposes, not our own. And that only happens when we commit ourselves fully to God.

He has created us in such a way that when we make our lives about his glory, we find true fulfillment. No career, no relationship, no amount of wealth, no amount of awards or vacations can come close to what life IN God's presence, with God's people, On God's mission is like. And when a bunch of Christians lock arms together in his mission, there is nothing better on this earth to be a part of.

Today we are in John 17. Where Jesus prays for God's people. The unity Dr. King was calling for was the unity he saw Jesus prayed for in John 17. I want to show you this prayer. It is a holy mountaintop in scripture. It is simple and profound. So, I'll read it to you and then we'll look at the 4 parts of this prayer we need to know if we are going to put our YES on the table. This is the culmination of an extended prayer called the high priestly prayer. I'm telling you even reading it is to be transported into the sacred. Listen to Christ's prayer to the father

20 "I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. 21 May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. 22 I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me. -- John 17:20-23

This prayer has a progression, a build up. He says "so that" a couple of times as he continues to petition God the Father. In order for one thing to happen, something else must happen first. And I need you to see that progression. Because by the end of it Jesus has painted the picture of how God is going to move in the world. It is not an understatement to say that everything God is doing today is an answer to this prayer. The move of God that you and I get to be a part of...this is it. I'm going to show you four movements that the prayer progresses through and what it means for God to answer this prayer IN AND THROUGH us today.

Move 1: Christ is praying for the multicultural, multigenerational church

20 “I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word

I’ve got to show you who “these” and “those” are. And this is the move in the prayer you may not see at first glance because its easy to move to WHAT he is praying for and gloss over WHO he is praying for. Christ is praying for his disciples present with him. That’s “these.” But also for those. For the people who would believe and become a part of the church. And I want back out and show you WHO God desires to be among “those” that he prays for. So we are going to do about a 5-7 minute detour into who God says the people of God are. Now this could be a sermon series and maybe one day it will be. Because we are about to do a zoomed out survey of scripture to help us understand this prayer.

See people were God’s crowning jewel in creation. When he created everything he said it was good but after he created man and woman he said “it is very good.” He created them in his image and created them to walk with him. And remember, he created TWO PEOPLE. Who were very different from one another. Man & Woman. Who were made to live in beautiful unity under God’s reign in the joy of his provision and presence. Instead they rebelled against him. That happens in Genesis 3.

- By Genesis 11, people are working together to rebel against God by building a tower to the heavens in

order to make a name for themselves. So God confuses their language and scatters them across the earth.

Because people are made to be unified in their submission to God not in their rebellion against him.

- But the next thing God does, Genesis 12, is call Abram. Abram I’m going to make a great nation out of you. God zeroes in on making a people through Abram and says all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed through you. This is your purpose now Abram. The diverse peoples of the earth are to be brought back under the banner of the Lord. This is what the purpose of God’s people becomes in the old testament.
- **Rahab** – prostitute and a non ethnic-Jew who God brings into the fold at Jericho.
- **Ruth** – a Moabite. A non ethnic-Jew who becomes grafted in to the people of God
- **Nineveh** – a whole city of rebels that make Tortuga look like Myers park... God calls his prophet JONAH to go and preach so they may worship him.
- **Psalm 67** – Let the nations be glad and sing for joy. Let the nations come in & worship.
- **Matthew 28 - 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations Matthew 28:19-20** When Jesus commissions the disciples he says Go into ALL NATIONS. Panta-ta-ethne. Every people group. That’s because God is the one God for all peoples. And the movement of God is an ALL PEOPLES movement. Every person is made in the image of God so every person is a target of the love of God.
- **Acts 2** – Pentecost. What happens? Jews from across the world hear the gospel IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.

It's a reversal of the tower of babel. People who speak different languages are now being brought together under the name of Christ. **Acts 10** – God makes it clear to Peter that non-jews...gentiles...must be told the gospel and brought into the church. As brothers and sisters. As family. And the word pictures start getting really really intimate in the new testament from here. We aren't just a community or just friends. We are ONE family...and ONE BODY. These different people groups are brought in TIGHT together with one another.

- **Ephesians 2.13** – Paul says to the church in Ephesus struggling with cultural hostility: Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. **13 But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. -- Ephesians 2:13-14**
- **1 Peter 2.9-10** – The passage that Mercy Church was named after. Peter is saying the church is a new chosen RACE. **9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. -- 1 Peter 2:9-10**
- **Titus 2** – Older men are to teach younger men & older women are to teach younger women. **Following Christ wasn't to be something you do when you are really excited in your teens and 20s. It's to be a way of life**

that you consistently grow into and that's by experiencing family life with these people. So that when you come from a broken home you experience fatherhood & motherhood as God designed you for. So that you can change your family destiny and the sins of your parents aren't visited on your children because you have fathers and mothers in the faith.

- James 1 - Widows & Orphans are to be prioritized and cared for in this family. Valued here even as society forgets them.
- And all of this creates the people of God. The people who reflect as best they can the ONE DAY when we are all in heaven together. We aren't there yet. But Revelation 7.9-10 says this is WHO the church is:
 - **9 After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb! -- Revelation 7:9-10**

From beginning to end, the scriptures are showing that our God is the God of all people. That redeemed people of God are a multicultural multigenerational family who SINGS all the way from its toes with full hearts that salvation belongs to **OUR** GOD. He isn't just MY God, in fact he isn't primarily MY God. he is **OUR** God. Which means if I belong to him and others belong to him than **all** of his people, are my people.

Mercy, the story of scripture is the story of God calling out a people from every people group and binding them together through the blood of Jesus and keeping them together through his holy spirit. Cool thing is we don't have to **achieve** multiculturalism as a church... Because Christ has already achieved it! He's made up his mind that the church will be ONE PEOPLE from every tribe and tongue and nation. So he has bought back, through his blood, a people from every people. And the church has the opportunity to experience the fullness of all God has to offer us. His people can be your people. Sandra Maria Van Opstal wrote a book about how this reality can bless a church worship gathering. It's gonna take a second to read but its awesome. She said

"In the end the beloved community, which consists of people from every nation, tribe, people and language, worships God. This breathtaking family will be present in all of its beauty. The kings and the nations will bring their glorious gifts into the city of God. There will be sounds, smells, movement and colors that point to the creative nature of God and his people. There won't be a corner of heaven for the quiet worshipers and another for the dancers. **Since we on this side of history have seen the season finale, our call is to live as a foretaste of that reality.** We are to celebrate and desire all the God-given gifts that communities bring in worship. Revelation reminds us that when all is restored and God's shalom reigns, the gifts of the nations will be visible and present."¹

¹ -Sandra Maria Van Opstal, *The Next Worship*

Mercy, I want everything God has for us. Somebody asked me this week why I care about this. And my answer was...first God cares. So I care. But secondly: why would I not want to receive all of the blessings God has for Mercy Church? Why would I want to push back against the GIFT of ALL of God's people being my people? Why would I not want to learn from God's people who've experienced suffering in a way I haven't and be formed by their perseverance in love? Why would I not want to learn community from God's people who come from cultures where dinners last 8 hours and people get real with one another? Why would I not want grandparent age believers in our church who can be the Titus 2 Guides through life God calls them to be and who God says I NEED? Why would I not want to learn from God's people who've experienced persecution for their faith? The theologians, the songs, the sermons, the disciplines of faith formed among Christians in such cultures are God's gift to me if I will just **receive his people as my people.**

The more we reflect the multicultural multigenerational vision of heaven the more we get to experience the beauty and majesty of heaven together. The God who created you beautifully brown created me beautifully pasty white. That's who THESE are that he's praying for.

Move 2: Christ prays for the multicultural multigenerational church to abide in him

Ok these three progressions in his prayer are woven together so beautifully because they really do all happen together. But

I'm going to try and highlight them in the order that reflects the lesson on spiritual growth that Jesus taught his disciples in the 4 chapters leading up to this.

May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. 22 I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me,

May they also be in us. For the first two weeks of this series we really pressed this home hard. Because Jesus did. And you need to go back and listen if u missed it. I'd say especially to last week. Because before you can say "I'm IN" to God's movement in the world...You gotta say "I'm In" God himself. That was Jesus' first instruction and now he's praying for God to grant it. To explain what it means to be "In" Christ, He gave an illustration in John 15 that he is the vine and we are the branches. Branches are supposed to produce fruit. You and I are supposed to produce good works through obeying Christ that will cause others to see who God is. BUT, the only way the branch can produce fruit is if it receives nutrients from the vine. The vine is the life source of the branch. So Jesus says REMAIN in me. Apart from me you can do nothing.

So our real call this series. And truthfully it's the call of Mercy Church. So listen up. God is calling you to a whole new kind of obedience. An obedience that flows out of a love for him and what he's done for you. The way you get right with God is not to clean yourself up. This is big. Maybe you grew up in a

religious tradition, maybe not. But just about everyone checking out church gets the first part of the gospel right. That's that we are all sinners. Nobody is perfect. We mess up. It's the second part we get wrong. We think the answer is clean ourselves up. And maybe church will INSPIRE me to work on me. But that's not the gospel. The gospel says you are a branch. Branches can't grow themselves. They need the vine. You need to RECEIVE God's love for you. You can't do anything to earn it. Branches don't appeal to the vine. They just receive.

So my call to you today is to receive. You are a sinner. But you can't clean yourself up. The only way to be healed from your sin is to receive Christ's death on the cross as payment for your sin. God says your sins are paid for in Christ. It's a humbling thing to receive that. But you can't receive anything from God until you receive that. But listen what comes with that is the very presence of God with you.

And what he has given us...is his GLORY! And the essence of Jesus' vision for the church. It's not a primarily a community that heals people though that's an important part, It's not primarily a community that imparts knowledge though that's an important part, it's not primarily a community that evangelizes though that's an important part. The church is a community that invites people to touch the glory of God, to be changed by it, and to bear it to the world.²

My prayer over our worship gatherings is John the Baptist's prayer. He must increase, I must decrease. For a people

² Adapted from Gary Burge, *John*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 477.

constantly distracted, I'm praying in these moments God would lift the eyes of your hearts to see him and his glory and be changed by it.

Move 3: Christ prays for the multicultural multigenerational church to abide in him so that they will be unified.

IF we abide in Christ, THEN we will have the power to walk in the unity Christ has created for us. Remember, Unity is not something we achieve. He has ALREADY torn down the dividing wall of hostility. Before unity is an activity of the church it is an identity of the church. It's who we are.

Now how do we walk in this unity? First remain in Christ. That means daily walking in the spirit of the JOY prayer I've kept in front of You.

J.O.Y. Prayer - God I desire Joy in you today. Help me see Jesus first, Others second, myself last.

Most disunity, most struggles to embrace the differences of another person or culture or generation comes from focusing on yourself. And that is our sin-instinct. But the gospel instinct is to look at another before looking at ourself.

Usually a sign of this is that we SAY we want unity but what we really want is uniformity. Where people from all cultures and generations conform to our way of doing things. That isn't unity. That's compliance.

Rashard has an uncle who is creole and a cook. He's cooks gumbo and true gumbo he says MUST have celery, onions,

and garlic. He says sometimes people will order it without onions. But he says that ain't gumbo. He says so that he can say it's gumbo, He'll put the onions in a Ziploc bag and put them in the gumbo for a bit before serving SO that he can say its gumbo. And that's how a lot of people want church. We want to be the multicultural multigenerational church, we just don't want anyone's presence to change the flavor. That isn't unity. And its offensive to the God who went to the cross to create true unity.

So let me talk to you who find yourself in the majority here at mercy – Some of you may be in the majority generationally but minority culturally. Some of you minority in both some majority in both. I've been a young white male my whole life. I'm almost out of that 'young' thing.

- Being in the majority culture or generation is not a sin. Sometimes our reaction to being identified as a part of the majority is to wonder if you are being asked to apologize for BEING white. That's absurd. The God who created some people beautifully brown created me beautifully pasty white. With brown sprinkles we call freckles. God made you. And he made others who are not like you. And SEEING others before yourself means a readiness to embrace cultures and generations, not just different skin colors and hair colors. And when it comes to some expressions in our church. NOT talking about theology here though our theology will grow stronger through unity. But I'm saying how we worship...Expect to be a little uncomfortable sometimes. But when you feel uncomfortable there are 2 things to think: ONE – Somebody else feels way

more uncomfortable than you most of the time. TWO – Maybe that discomfort is an opportunity to embrace the fullness of God that you’ve never been able to before because that culture or generation hasn’t been influencing you until now. Maybe God has something for you in that.

To you in the minority culture or generation: I recognize the first question you ask when you come into our church is “Is this a church for me?” Do I belong here, maybe do they want me here? Lemme talk to you as your pastor:

- First, a resounding yes. I hope everything I’ve shown you in scripture is telling you our desire for Mercy is to be a church for all people. But listen – You too have to receive God’s people as your people. And that means a bunch of sinners are your people. To be a minority in a church family means speaking up to me and other leaders to help us see blind spots. Instead of wondering if this is a church for you, lock arms get involved and help it step into the church God is calling us to be! You are probably the answer to the very question you are asking! But then, grant more patience than you thought you could muster as we work to change things to make them more in line with God’s glory.
- Couple of our families here are from Liberia. They invited my family and a couple of others to dinner a few months back. And as we stood in the kitchen William Ward said “This meal in our home is our way in our culture of saying we are inviting you into our family as you have invited us into Mercy’s family.” Man, that

impacted me. Remains with me. The power of the shared meal. That’s what I’m talking about. Mercy needs to be a family meal kind of church! Wards & Massaquois are helping to make that happen!

- It’s the commitment of families like the Browns, The Howards, The Williams’ to host community groups where most of their group members are the age of their kids. They are spiritual mothers and fathers to our church which is instilling a faith that will carry them through the storms of life.

Move 4: Christ prays for the multicultural multigenerational church to abide in him so that they will be unified so that the world will see & encounter it’s savior.

This is final So that. All of this unity is actually FOR something. Unity for Unity sake isn’t what God is after. He wants unity for the sake of making the name of Jesus so powerful that its like a magnet to the people of our world. The Charlotte area is tragically still segregated. Not legally of course. But there’s a reason when I moved here some people I knew told me the good and bad places to live. These people need Jesus. They need to see a brown skinned Jesus who pushes back hate and extends forgiveness to the sinner. They need to SEE HIS love practiced by a people who believe it. And they need to receive that Jesus as their only hope for salvation.

That last line in Matthew 28.20 is an indicator that unifying people groups under the name of Christ won’t be easy. In fact it will be so difficult that Jesus himself is gonna stay with us until the end of the age to make it happen. He’s not giving this

one to Gabriel or any other angel. Gabriel is a great messenger but Jesus is not subcontracting this one. HE will be with us for this. That brings us back to the communion table.

The Table – Dr. King’s Dream – It’s the communion table